THE LUCADO LIFE LESSONS STUDY BIBLE

Inspirational Applications for Living Your Faith

NEW KING JAMES VERSION

The

LUCADO LIFE LESSONS STUDY BIBLE

MAX LUCADO
GENERAL EDITOR

THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

NASHVILLE DALLAS MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO

The Lucado Life Lessons Study Bible

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The Holy Bible, New King James Version

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The Lucado Life Lessons Study Bible was produced with the assistance of Karen Hill, Executive Editor to Max Lucado, and The Livingstone Corporation (www.LivingstoneCorp.com). Project staff includes Linda Taylor, Dana Long, Bruce Barton, Dave Veerman, Neil Wilson, Tom Freking, Ashley Taylor, Andy Culbertson, Linda Washington. Interior design by Larry Taylor. Typesetting by Kathy and Tom Ristow.

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General Introduction

by Karen Hill, Executive Editor for Max Lucado

The Lucado Life Lessons Study Bible is an exhilarating experience. As you read, you'll uncover a saga of suspense and intrigue. Flip over a few pages and find poetry and romance. Turn the pages again and read tales of clashing conquerors, brave shepherds, and a captivating Carpenter. Chronicles of faith, miracles, misdeeds, and good deeds. Kings, queens, peasants—the uncommon and the commonplace. Mystery, suspense, intrigue, drama, humor, poetry, romance . . . it's all in these pages . . . stories of real people, with real problems, real joys, and a real Savior. All of that, plus some distinctive features to help you see that what happened on these pages is still happening today—that the truths of old are truths for our age.

Features

Life Lessons

To enrich your study, this Bible has some unique features . . . some helpful tools to expand your understanding. You'll notice *Life Lessons* in the margins. Each *Life Lesson* contains a *Situation, Observation, Inspiration, Application,* and *Exploration.*

The *Situation* gives a quick look into the context of the chapter: it answers the question, What's going on in this passage?

The *Observation* goes beneath the action to explain the point of the action. What truth or lesson is noticeable in the action of these people?

The *Inspiration* takes a point or lesson found in the chapter and amplifies it. Excerpted from the writings of Max Lucado, these inspirations extend the main point and give it a contemporary message that will be useful in your private devotion or for sharing with a group.

The *Application* brings the message home. "How can I use what I've learned in this chapter?" "Is there anything about my life that I should change as a result of what I've already learned by reading this?"

The *Exploration* lists other scripture related to the same theme, for further study. Reading the *Exploration* verses provides a strong sense of the Bible as a complete story, rather than just a collection of short stories and lists of rules.

Full-Page Devotional Bible Studies

Scattered throughout the text you will discover full-page devotional Bible Studies. These encouraging pages will reveal what God thinks about you. Use the index to the topical studies on page XX in the front of this Bible to locate specific topics covered on these pages.

Christ Through the Bible

The *Christ Through the Bible* articles are a helpful tool for understanding how the Bible truly is one story—the story of God's plan of salvation as fulfilled through his Son, Jesus Christ. These notes help you discover the presence and attributes of Jesus Christ throughout the Old and New Testament. For example, observe how Jesus is foreshadowed as our high priest in the book of Exodus and how His title as Lamb of God can be seen in Leviticus.

New Life in Christ

The *New Life in Christ* articles help you walk through God's plan of salvation as it unfolds through the Old Testament and is fully revealed with the birth, life, and ministry of Jesus in the New Testament. This series of short articles will also help you explore the path of discipleship, as it delves into aspects of the Christian walk. Let the questions found at the end of each article prompt you to a closer walk with Christ.

He Did This Just for You Verses

These verses reveal more about who Christ is and what he did for you. They will help you personalize God's message and draw closer to your Savior.

New Believer Studies

These short studies will help you learn more about your faith and will answer some of the hard questions that may be on your mind. The studies cover a variety of topics, such as how to know that you're saved, how to pray, how to face temptation, and much more.

Spiritual Growth Verses

These verses cover topics of spiritual growth, such as your daily walk with God, listening to him, and forgiving others.

"The Big Picture" Reading Plan

This simple 30-day reading plan will introduce you to key passages throughout the New Testament.

"Where to Turn When . . ." Index

This list leads you to relevant verses for many of life's complicated questions and situations.

Reading Program

Designed to inspire you in your daily walk, the study helps are streamlined for ease of use. The comments are quick, tightly written nuggets to give you the most information in the briefest format possible, to assist your search for understanding. How do you use *The Lucado Life Lessons Study Bible*? The *Life Lessons* coincide with the chapters they address. It is best to read the *Situation* first. Then read the scripture referenced with the *Life Lesson.* Go to the *Observation*—is this the point you understood as you read the action? Move on to the *Inspiration*. If you're in a class, read and discuss the *Inspiration*, then use the *Application* for further discussion. If you are studying alone, keep a journal of your commitment to new goals suggested by the *Application*.

A Brief Note to Parents and Teachers

This Bible is adaptable to any age group and is especially useful with mixed-age groups. For adults, the margin information can be used to initiate further study and discussion. For families or in children's classes, they can be used as self-contained devotionals. The *Life Lessons* are particularly useful in demonstrating that people of Bible times encountered similar problems to situations occurring today . . . the same hopes, fears, desires, sins, and successes.

The General Editor's Acknowledgments

On the title page of my Bible, I have copied two verses. The first is from Mark 12:37.

The common people heard Him gladly.

What a compliment! "You ought to go hear this guy speak," people must have said, "It's a treat to listen to him." When Jesus spoke, people listened. And when the people listened, they listened with joy. His message was clear. His stories were stirring, and his point was unforgettable.

What if the same were true today? What if every time Jesus' words were read, the people "listened with pleasure"? What if people perked up when the Bible was opened? What if people passed out copies of the Bible, saying, "You ought to read what this guy said. It's a treat"?

Wouldn't that be great? I know some people who are committed to seeing this happen.

Let me introduce you to Thomas Nelson Publishers. They are more than a publishing house, they are a people with a purpose. Every day they are thinking of ways to make God's Word more accessible and understandable. This Bible is the product of that desire.

This version of the NKJV is a library worth of books in one volume. A team of diligent researchers has taken the best from hundreds of books and put it right where you need it—in the margin of your Bible.

My hat is off to The Livingstone Corporation led by Bruce Barton, Dave Veerman, and Linda Taylor. Dave, I especially appreciate your help with the minor prophets. Only God knows the number of hours you poured into this project. But God does know, *he will not forget the work you did and the love you showed for him by helping his people* (Hebrews 6:10).

I salute my friends in the Bible group at Thomas Nelson: Gary Davidson, Bob Sanford, Dana Long, and the rest of the team. What a terrific group! David Moberg deserves special mention. Without your devotion and dedication, this idea would still be that, an idea in a manila folder. Thanks for making it a reality. Greg and Susan Ligon, thanks for your careful stewardship.

Speaking of making ideas reality, Steve and Cheryl Green, Karen Hill, and the UpWords team do that for me every day. And Denalyn, my wife, what can I say? The reason Solomon had seven hundred wives is because he was searching for someone like you.

One final word of gratitude before you turn the page. The release of this Bible coincides with my 25th year in Christian writing. Whether you are a first-time or long-time reader, thank you so much. I consider you my friend. How can I do that, being that we have never met? Remember I mentioned that I have a couple of verses penned on the title page of my Bible? This is the second,

I am a companion of all who fear You, and of those who keep Your precepts (Psalm 119:63).

You must be a person who fears God, or you wouldn't be reading His Word. You must be a person who obeys His teachings, or you wouldn't be studying them. I applaud your hunger for the Bible. I commend your desire to know His Word. You are my friend. And for you, my friend, I pray as you study His message.

Max Lucado

How to Study the Bible

by Max Lucado

This is a peculiar book you are holding. Words crafted in another language. Deeds done in a distant era. Events recorded in a far-off land. Counsel offered to a foreign people. This is a peculiar book.

It's surprising that anyone reads it. It's too old. Some of its writings date back five thousand years. It's too bizarre. The book speaks of incredible foods, fires, earthquakes, and people with supernatural abilities. It's too radical. The Bible calls for undying devotion to a carpenter who called himself God's Son.

Logic says this book shouldn't survive. Too old, too bizarre, too radical.

The Bible has been banned, burned, scoffed, and ridiculed. Scholars have mocked it as foolish. Kings have branded it as illegal. A thousand times over it the grave has been dug and the dirge has begun, but somehow the Bible never stays in the grave. Not only has it survived, it has thrived. It is the single most popular book in all of history. It has been the best-selling book in the world for years!

There is no way on earth to explain it. Which perhaps is the only explanation. The answer? The Bible's durability is not found on earth; it is found in heaven. For the millions who have tested its claims and claimed its promises there is but one answer—the Bible is God's book and God's voice.

As you read it, you would be wise to give some thought to two questions. What is the purpose of the Bible? And How do I study the Bible? Time spent reflecting on these two issues will greatly enhance your Bible study.

What is the purpose of the Bible?

Let the Bible itself answer that question.

From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:15).

The purpose of the Bible? Salvation. God's highest passion is to get His children home. His book, the Bible, describes His plan of salvation. The purpose of the Bible is to proclaim God's plan and passion to save His children.

That is the reason this book has endured through the centuries. It dares to tackle the toughest questions about life. Where do I go after I die? Is there a God? What do I do with my fears? The Bible offers answers to these crucial questions. It is the treasure map that leads us to God's highest treasure, eternal life.

But how do we use the Bible? Countless copies of Scripture sit unread on bookshelves and nightstands simply because people don't know how to read it. What can we do to make the Bible real in our lives?

The clearest answer is found in the words of Jesus.

"Ask," he promised, *"and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you"* (Matthew 7:7).

The first step in understanding the Bible is asking God to help us. We should read prayerfully. If anyone understands God's Word it is because of God and not the reader.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you (John 14:26).

Before reading the Bible, pray. Invite God to speak to you. Don't go to Scripture looking for your idea, go searching for His.

Not only should we read the Bible prayerfully, we should read it carefully. *Seek, and you will find,* is the pledge. The Bible is not a newspaper to be skimmed but rather a mine to be quarried. *If you seek her as silver, and search for her as* for *hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the* LORD, *and find the knowledge of God* (Proverbs 2:4, 5).

Any worthy find requires effort. The Bible is no exception. To understand the Bible you don't have to be brilliant, but you must be willing to roll up your sleeves and search.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

Here's a practical point. Study the Bible a bit at a time. Hunger is not satisfied by eating

twenty-one meals in one sitting once a week. The body needs a steady diet to remain strong. So does the soul. When God sent food to His people in the wilderness, He didn't provide loaves already made. Instead, He sent manna in the shape of *a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground* (Exodus 16:14).

God gave manna in limited portions.

God sends spiritual food the same way. He opens the heavens with just enough nutrients for today's hunger. He provides *precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little* (Isaiah 28:10).

Don't be discouraged if your reading reaps a small harvest. Some days a lesser portion is all that is needed. What is important is to search every day for that day's message. A steady diet of God's Word over a lifetime builds a healthy soul and mind.

A little girl returned from her first day at school. Her mom asked, "Did you learn anything?"

"Apparently not enough," the girl responded. "I have to go back tomorrow and the next day and the next . . ."

Such is the case with learning. And such is the case with Bible study. Understanding comes little by little over a lifetime.

There is a third step in understanding the Bible. After the asking and seeking comes the knocking. After you ask and search, then knock.

Knock, and it will be opened to you (Matthew 7:7).

To knock is to stand at God's door. To make yourself available. To climb the steps, cross the porch, stand at the doorway, and volunteer. Knocking goes beyond the realm of thinking and into the realm of acting.

To knock is to ask, What can I do? How do I obey? Where can I go?

It's one thing to know what to do. It's another to do it. But for those who do it, those who choose to obey, a special reward awaits them.

He who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues <u>in it,</u> and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does (James 1:25).

What a promise. Happiness comes to those who do what they read! It's the same with medicine. If you only read the label but ignore the pills, it won't help. It's the same with food. If you only read the recipe but never cook, you won't be fed. And it's the same with the Bible. If you only read the words but never obey, you'll never know the joy God has promised.

Ask. Search. Knock. Simple, isn't it? Why don't you give it a try? If you do, you'll see why you are holding the most remarkable book in history.

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Psalms 91:1, 2
Psalms 152:7
John 14:27
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
413, 649, 664, 593, 702, 727, 1072, 1077, 1105, 1112, 1115, 1359, 1467, 1497, 1535, 1605, 1691, 1693, 1721, 1771

SURRENDER
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
13, 24, 85, 257, 281, 327, 329, 359, 397, 553, 633, 644, 671, 850, 877, 887, 989, 1292, 1314, 1367, 1374, 1577, 1587, 1629, 1712, 1733

TALENTS
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
using 105, 1367

TEMPTATION
Read these verses for more on this topic
2 Peter 2:9
Ephesians 6:10–12
1 Corinthians 10:12, 13
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
overcoming 229, 307, 447, 531, 677, 759, 857, 1669, 1735

TESTIMONY
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
103, 880, 1619

TESTING
Read these verses for more on this topic
Proverbs 17:3
1 Thessalonians 2:4
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
345, 407, &669, 1467
necessity 1523
refining 766

THANKFULNESS
Read these verses for more on this topic
1 Chronicles 16:7
Psalms 100:4
Colossians 3:15
Colossians 4:2
Hebrews 12:28
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
being thankful 421, 735, 909
to God 295, 603, 833, 842, 909, 915

TIME
Read these verses for more on this topic
Proverbs 10:4
Ecclesiastes 3:1–11
1 Corinthians 7:29
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
being in control of 11, 519, 884
eternity 278, 838, 901, 915
managing 399, 570, 740, 790, 884, 1510
passing 465, 882, 917

TITHE
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
555

TOMORROW
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
1577, *1738

TRAINING
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
from God 234, 245, 445, 507, 672, 899, 1057, 1426, &1615, 1693
spirit to listen 1621

TRANSITIONS
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
39, 190, 541

TROUBLE
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
57, 386, 407, 415, 597, 619, 623, 646, 649, 672, 702, 727, 1077, 1421, 1664

TRUST
Read these verses for more on this topic
Psalms 56:3, 4
Jeremiah 17:7, 8
Philippians 3:3
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
God 27, 184, 303, 345, 415, 478, 482, 532, 548, 626, 659, 707, 775, 789, 850, 950, 1057, 1189, 1246, 1377, 1485, 1613, 1625

TRUTH
Read these verses for more on this topic
Psalms 19:7–9
Psalms 119:97, 98, 176
1 John 5:20
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
&31,1219, 1240, 1337, 1432, 1508, 1689,

1682, 1730, 1741
of God 239, 244, 437, 473, 510, 583, 707, 814, 817, 1744, 1765

UNITY
Read these verses for more on this topic
Psalms 133:1
John 17:23
Romans 15:5
Ephesians 4:3
1 Timothy 2:1, 8
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
church 206, 330, &384, 544, 831, 1297, 1505, 1519, 1578, *1594, 1602, 1637, 1725
family 895, 1639

USEFULNESS
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
in body of Christ 373, 544, 555, 621, 638, 1479, 1579
in ministry 68, 110, 640, 1072, 1082, 1176, 1331, 1367, 1471, 1618, 1677, 1692, 1691

VALUE
Read these verses for more on this topic
Matthew 10:31
Acts 20:24
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
of people *16, *101, 369, 487, 441, 621, 640, 605, 656, 924, 1428, 1675, 1695

VALUES
Read these verses for more on this topic
Galatians 4:9
Colossians 2:8
John 18:36
1 Corinthians 7:33
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
Biblical 342, 343, 592, 779, 1193, *1324, 1719, 1774
family 802
in relationships 762, 924, 1591
keeping 487, 510, 561, 1193, 1307, 1719
sharing 103, 350

VENGEANCE
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
24, 33, 72, 330, 700, &1596

VICTORY
Read these verses for more on this topic
Psalms 29:11
1 John 5:4, 5
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
345, &500, 603, 619, 812, 1497, 1750, 1685, 1774, 1777
of Christ 249, 288, 1498
over sin 7, 18, 97, 229, 249, 263, 1497, 1570

VIRTUE
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
896

VISION
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
in life 1649, 1656

VOCATION
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
105, 120, 168, 313

WAITING
Read these verses for more on this topic
Psalms 5:3
Psalms 27:14
Psalms 37:34
Isaiah 30:18
Romans 8:25
Jude 1:21
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
attitude to have 21, 345, 363, 660, 1339, 1467
for God 53, 91, &231, 348, 760, 1467, 1751
for strength 621, 644, 877
refinement 766

WICKEDNESS
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
82, 605

WILL OF GOD
Read these verses for more on this topic
Romans 8:28
Romans 12:2
2 Corinthians 8:5
Galatians 1:4
Philippians 2:13
1 Thessalonians 4:3
Hebrews 2:4
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
30, 265, 281, 269, 553, &582, 595, 850, 1292

WISDOM
Read these verses for more on this topic
Proverbs 15:31–33
1 Corinthians 3:18, 19
James 3:16, 17
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
from God 437, 403, 871, 896, 1584, 1693
in life 660, 802,847,852, 884, 896, 1213, 1467
marks of 570, 896, 1595
of God 678, 1582
using 896, 1213, 1467, 1595

WITNESS
Read these verses for more on this topic
Matthew 5:14–16
Acts 1:8
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
103, 309, 377, 723, 1073, 1082, 1127, 1176, 1180, 1305, 1525, 1531, 1533, 1540, 1546, 1579, 1653, 1689, 1768

WORLD
Read these verses for more on this topic
James 4:4
1 John 2:15–17
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
472, 968, 1119, 1533
conformity to 357, 468, 478, 570, 759, . 1174, 1201

WORRY
Read these verses for more on this topic
Psalms 55:22
Isaiah 26:3, 4
John 14:1
1 Peter 5:7
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
433, 482, 623, 579, 729, 797, 1485, 1577

WORSHIP
Read these verses for more on this topic
Deuteronomy 6:13, 14
Psalms 66:3, 4
John 4:23, 24
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
corporate 107, 237, 316, 534, 586, 735, 797, 817, 842, 1003, 1272, 1294
purity of *177, 592, 720, 832, 984, 1103, 1272, 1437
of God 178, 227, 387, 401, 413, 743, 779, 815, 1666

WORTH
Read these verses for more on this topic
Psalms 139:13, 14
Matthew 10:29–31
Ephesians 5:1, 2
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
in Christ 342, 369, *425, 428, 487, 510, 640, 656, 1631, 1652

YOUTH
Read these verses for more on this topic
Isaiah 40:30, 31
1 Timothy 4:12
2 Timothy 2:22
Titus 2:6
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
766, 1631

ZEAL
Read these verses for more on this topic
Isaiah 59:17
Romans 10:2
Romans 12:11
2 Corinthians 9:2
Read the following devotional notes on this topic
723, 1348, 1579, 1689

Two-Year Devotional Reading Plan

Year One

Week One

☐	Sunday	Read .Genesis Introduction and Key Verse
☐	Monday	Genesis 1:1—2:3
☐	Tuesday	Genesis 2:4—3:24
☐	Wednesday	Genesis 4:1—5:32
☐	Thursday	Genesis 6:1—8:22
☐	Friday	Genesis 9:1—10:32
☐	Saturday	Genesis 11:1–32

Week Two

☐	Sunday	Genesis 12:1–20
☐	Monday	Genesis 13:1—14:24
☐	Tuesday	Genesis 15:1—17:27
☐	Wednesday	Genesis 18:1—20:18
☐	Thursday	Genesis 21:1—23:20
☐	Friday	Genesis 24:1—25:18
☐	Saturday	Genesis 25:19–34

Week Three

☐	Sunday	Genesis 26:1–35
☐	Monday	Genesis 27:1—28:9
☐	Tuesday	Genesis 28:10—30:43
☐	Wednesday	Genesis 31:1—33:20
☐	Thursday	Genesis 34:1—36:43
☐	Friday	Genesis 37:1–36
☐	Saturday	Genesis 38:1–30

Week Four

☐	Sunday	Genesis 39:1—40:23
☐	Monday	Genesis 41:1–57
☐	Tuesday	Genesis 42:1—43:34
☐	Wednesday	Genesis 44:1—45:28
☐	Thursday	Genesis 46:1—47:27
☐	Friday	Genesis 47:28—48:22
☐	Saturday	Genesis 49:1–33

Week Five

☐	Sunday	Genesis 50:1–26
☐	Monday	Read Exodus Introduction and Key Verse
☐	Tuesday	Exodus 1:1–22
☐	Wednesday	Exodus 2:1—4:31
☐	Thursday	Exodus 5:1—6:27
☐	Friday	Exodus 6:28—8:32
☐	Saturday	Exodus 9:1—10:29

Week Six

☐	Sunday	Exodus 11:1—12:50
☐	Monday	Exodus 13:1—15:21
☐	Tuesday	Exodus 15:22—17:7
☐	Wednesday	Exodus 17:8—18:27
☐	Thursday	Exodus 19:1–25
☐	Friday	Exodus 20:1–26
☐	Saturday	Exodus 21:1—22:31

Week Seven

☐	Sunday	Exodus 23:1—24:18
☐	Monday	Exodus 25:1—27:21
☐	Tuesday	Exodus 28:1—29:46
☐	Wednesday	Exodus 30:1—31:18
☐	Thursday	Exodus 32:1—34:35
☐	Friday	Exodus 35:1—38:31
☐	Saturday	Exodus 39:1—40:38

Week Eight

☐	Sunday	Read Leviticus Introduction and Key Verse
☐	Monday	Leviticus 1:1—6:7
☐	Tuesday	Leviticus 6:8—10:20
☐	Wednesday	Leviticus 11:1—15:33
☐	Thursday	Leviticus 16:1—17:16
☐	Friday	Leviticus 18:1—20:27
☐	Saturday	Leviticus 21:1—22:33

Week Nine

☐	Sunday	Leviticus 23:1—25:55
☐	Monday	Leviticus 26:1—27:34
☐	Tuesday	Read Numbers Introduction and Key Verse
☐	Wednesday	Numbers 1:1—2:34
☐	Thursday	Numbers 3:1—5:31
☐	Friday	Numbers 6:1–27
☐	Saturday	Numbers 7:1—9:14

Week Ten

☐	Sunday	Numbers 9:15—10:10
☐	Monday	Numbers 10:11—11:35
☐	Tuesday	Numbers 12:1–16
☐	Wednesday	Numbers 13:1—14:45
☐	Thursday	Numbers 15:1–41
☐	Friday	Numbers 16:1—18:32
☐	Saturday	Numbers 19:1—21:35

Week Eleven

☐	Sunday	Numbers 22:1—25:18
☐	Monday	Numbers 26:1—27:23
☐	Tuesday	Numbers 28:1—30:16
☐	Wednesday	Numbers 31:1–54
☐	Thursday	Numbers 32:1–42
☐	Friday	Numbers 33:1—36:13
☐	Saturday	Read Deuteronomy Introduction and Key Verse

Week Twelve

☐	Sunday	Deuteronomy 1:1—3:29
☐	Monday	Deuteronomy 4:1–43
☐	Tuesday	Deuteronomy 4:44—5:33
☐	Wednesday	Deuteronomy 6:1—7:26
☐	Thursday	Deuteronomy 8:1—9:29
☐	Friday	Deuteronomy 10:1—11:32
☐	Saturday	Deuteronomy 12:1—13:18

Week Thirteen

☐	Sunday	Deuteronomy 14:1—16:20
☐	Monday	Deuteronomy 16:21—18:22
☐	Tuesday	Deuteronomy 19:1—20:20
☐	Wednesday	Deuteronomy 21:1—22:30
☐	Thursday	Deuteronomy 23:1—25:19
☐	Friday	Deuteronomy 26:1–19
☐	Saturday	Deuteronomy 27:1—28:68

Week Fourteen

- ☐ Sunday Deuteronomy 29:1—30:20
- ☐ Monday Deuteronomy 31:1–29
- ☐ Tuesday Deuteronomy 31:30—32:52
- ☐ Wednesday Deuteronomy 33:1—34:12
- ☐ Thursday Read Joshua Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Friday Joshua 1:1—2:24
- ☐ Saturday Joshua 3:1—5:12

Week Fifteen

- ☐ Sunday Joshua 5:13—6:27
- ☐ Monday Joshua 7:1–26
- ☐ Tuesday Joshua 8:1–35
- ☐ Wednesday Joshua 9:1—10:43
- ☐ Thursday Joshua 11:1—12:24
- ☐ Friday Joshua 13:1—17:18
- ☐ Saturday Joshua 18:1—19:51

Week Sixteen

- ☐ Sunday Joshua 20:1—21:45
- ☐ Monday Joshua 22:1–34
- ☐ Tuesday Joshua 23:1—24:33
- ☐ Wednesday Read Judges Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Thursday Judges 1:1—2:5
- ☐ Friday Judges 2:6—3:6
- ☐ Saturday Judges 3:7–31

Week Seventeen

- ☐ Sunday Judges 4:1—5:31
- ☐ Monday Judges 6:1—7:25
- ☐ Tuesday Judges 8:1—9:57
- ☐ Wednesday Judges 10:1—12:15
- ☐ Thursday Judges 13:1–25
- ☐ Friday Judges 14:1–20
- ☐ Saturday Judges 15:1—16:31

Week Eighteen

- ☐ Sunday Judges 17:1—18:31
- ☐ Monday Judges 19:1—21:25
- ☐ Tuesday Read Ruth Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Wednesday Ruth 1:1–22
- ☐ Thursday Ruth 2:1–23
- ☐ Friday Ruth 3:1–18
- ☐ Saturday Ruth 4:1–22

Week Nineteen

- ☐ Sunday Read 1 Samuel Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Monday 1 Samuel 1:1—2:11
- ☐ Tuesday 1 Samuel 2:12—3:21
- ☐ Wednesday 1 Samuel 4:1—5:12
- ☐ Thursday 1 Samuel 6:1—7:17
- ☐ Friday 1 Samuel 8:1–22
- ☐ Saturday 1 Samuel 9:1—10:27

Week Twenty

- ☐ Sunday 1 Samuel 11:1—12:25
- ☐ Monday 1 Samuel 13:1—15:35
- ☐ Tuesday 1 Samuel 16:1–23
- ☐ Wednesday 1 Samuel 17:1–58
- ☐ Thursday 1 Samuel 18:1—20:42
- ☐ Friday 1 Samuel 21:1—22:23
- ☐ Saturday 1 Samuel 23:1—24:22

Week Twenty-One

- ☐ Sunday 1 Samuel 25:1—26:25
- ☐ Monday 1 Samuel 27:1–12
- ☐ Tuesday 1 Samuel 28:1–25
- ☐ Wednesday 1 Samuel 29:1–11
- ☐ Thursday 1 Samuel 30:1—31:13
- ☐ Friday Read 2 Samuel Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Saturday 2 Samuel 1:1—3:5

Week Twenty-Two

- ☐ Sunday 2 Samuel 3:6—4:12
- ☐ Monday 2 Samuel 5:1—6:23
- ☐ Tuesday 2 Samuel 7:1–29
- ☐ Wednesday 2 Samuel 8:1—10:19
- ☐ Thursday 2 Samuel 11:1—12:31
- ☐ Friday 2 Samuel 13:1—14:33
- ☐ Saturday 2 Samuel 15:1—16:14

Week Twenty-Three

- ☐ Sunday 2 Samuel 16:15—19:43
- ☐ Monday 2 Samuel 20:1–26
- ☐ Tuesday 2 Samuel 21:1—23:7
- ☐ Wednesday 2 Samuel 23:8—24:25
- ☐ Thursday Read 1 Kings Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Friday 1 Kings 1:1–53
- ☐ Saturday 1 Kings 2:1–46

Week Twenty-Four

- ☐ Sunday 1 Kings 3:1—4:34
- ☐ Monday 1 Kings 5:1—6:38
- ☐ Tuesday 1 Kings 7:1—8:66
- ☐ Wednesday 1 Kings 9:1—11:43
- ☐ Thursday 1 Kings 12:1—14:31
- ☐ Friday 1 Kings 15:1—16:34
- ☐ Saturday 1 Kings 17:1–24

Week Twenty-Five

- ☐ Sunday 1 Kings 18:1–46
- ☐ Monday 1 Kings 19:1—20:43
- ☐ Tuesday 1 Kings 21:1—22:53
- ☐ Wednesday Read 2 Kings Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Thursday 2 Kings 1:1–18
- ☐ Friday 2 Kings 2:1—3:27
- ☐ Saturday 2 Kings 4:1—6:7

Week Twenty-Six

- ☐ Sunday 2 Kings 6:8—8:15
- ☐ Monday 2 Kings 8:16—9:37
- ☐ Tuesday 2 Kings 10:1–36
- ☐ Wednesday 2 Kings 11:1—12:21
- ☐ Thursday 2 Kings 13:1—14:29
- ☐ Friday 2 Kings 15:1—16:20
- ☐ Saturday 2 Kings 17:1—18:37

Week Twenty-Seven

- ☐ Sunday 2 Kings 19:1—21:26
- ☐ Monday 2 Kings 22:1—23:35
- ☐ Tuesday 2 Kings 23:36—25:30
- ☐ Wednesday Read 1 Chronicles Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Thursday 1 Chronicles 1:1—3:24
- ☐ Friday 1 Chronicles 4:1—9:1
- ☐ Saturday 1 Chronicles 9:2–44

Week Twenty-Eight

- ☐ Sunday 1 Chronicles 10:1—12:40
- ☐ Monday 1 Chronicles 13:1—14:17
- ☐ Tuesday 1 Chronicles 15:1—17:27
- ☐ Wednesday 1 Chronicles 18:1—22:1
- ☐ Thursday 1 Chronicles 22:2—24:31
- ☐ Friday 1 Chronicles 25:1—27:34
- ☐ Saturday 1 Chronicles 28:1—29:30

Week Twenty-Nine

- ☐ Sunday Read 2 Chronicles Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Monday 2 Chronicles 1:1–17
- ☐ Tuesday 2 Chronicles 2:1—5:1
- ☐ Wednesday 2 Chronicles 5:2—7:22
- ☐ Thursday 2 Chronicles 8:1—9:31
- ☐ Friday 2 Chronicles 10:1—11:17
- ☐ Saturday 2 Chronicles 11:18—15:19

Week Thirty

- ☐ Sunday 2 Chronicles 16:1—19:3
- ☐ Monday 2 Chronicles 19:4—21:3
- ☐ Tuesday 2 Chronicles 21:4—24:27
- ☐ Wednesday 2 Chronicles 25:1—26:23
- ☐ Thursday 2 Chronicles 27:1—28:27
- ☐ Friday 2 Chronicles 29:1—32:23
- ☐ Saturday 2 Chronicles 32:24—33:25

Week Thirty-One

- ☐ Sunday 2 Chronicles 34:1—36:1
- ☐ Monday 2 Chronicles 36:2–23
- ☐ Tuesday Read Ezra Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Wednesday Ezra 1:1—2:70
- ☐ Thursday Ezra 3:1—4:24
- ☐ Friday Ezra 5:1—6:22
- ☐ Saturday Ezra 7:1—8:36

Week Thirty-Two

- ☐ Sunday Ezra 9:1—10:44
- ☐ Monday Read Nehemiah Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Tuesday Nehemiah 1:1—2:10
- ☐ Wednesday Nehemiah 2:11—3:32
- ☐ Thursday Nehemiah 4:1–23
- ☐ Friday Nehemiah 5:1–19
- ☐ Saturday Nehemiah 6:1—7:73

Week Thirty-Three

- ☐ Sunday Nehemiah 8:1–18
- ☐ Monday Nehemiah 9:1—10:39
- ☐ Tuesday Nehemiah 11:1—13:31
- ☐ Wednesday Read Esther Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Thursday Esther 1:1—2:23
- ☐ Friday Esther 3:1—4:17
- ☐ Saturday Esther 5:1—6:14

Week Thirty-Four

- ☐ Sunday Esther 7:1—8:17
- ☐ Monday Esther 9:1—10:3
- ☐ Tuesday Read Job Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Wednesday Job 1:1—2:13
- ☐ Thursday Job 3:1–26
- ☐ Friday Job 4:1—7:21
- ☐ Saturday Job 8:1—10:22

Week Thirty-Five

- ☐ Sunday Job 11:1–20
- ☐ Monday Job 12:1—14:22
- ☐ Tuesday Job 15:1—17:16
- ☐ Wednesday Job 18:1—19:29
- ☐ Thursday Job 20:1—21:34
- ☐ Friday Job 22:1—24:25
- ☐ Saturday Job 25:1—26:14

Week Thirty-Six

- ☐ Sunday Job 27:1–23
- ☐ Monday Job 28:1–28
- ☐ Tuesday Job 29:1—31:40
- ☐ Wednesday Job 32:1—37:24
- ☐ Thursday Job 38:1—41:34
- ☐ Friday Job 42:1–17
- ☐ Saturday Read Psalms Introduction and Key Verse

Week Thirty-Seven

- ☐ Sunday Psalms 1:1—3:8
- ☐ Monday Psalms 4:1—6:10
- ☐ Tuesday Psalms 7:1—8:9
- ☐ Wednesday Psalms 9:1—10:18
- ☐ Thursday Psalms 11:1—13:6
- ☐ Friday Psalms 14:1—15:5
- ☐ Saturday Psalms 16:1—17:15

Week Thirty-Eight

- ☐ Sunday Psalm 18:1–50
- ☐ Monday Psalm 19:1–14
- ☐ Tuesday Psalms 20:1—22:31
- ☐ Wednesday Psalms 23:1—24:10
- ☐ Thursday Psalms 25:1—26:12
- ☐ Friday Psalms 27:1—28:9
- ☐ Saturday Psalms 29:1—30:12

Week Thirty-Nine

- ☐ Sunday Psalm 31:1–24
- ☐ Monday Psalms 32:1—33:22
- ☐ Tuesday Psalm 34:1–22
- ☐ Wednesday Psalms 35:1—36:12
- ☐ Thursday Psalm 37:1–40
- ☐ Friday Psalms 38:1—39:13
- ☐ Saturday Psalms 40:1—41:13

Week Forty

- ☐ Sunday Psalms 42:1—43:5
- ☐ Monday Psalm 44:1–26
- ☐ Tuesday Psalms 45:1—46:11
- ☐ Wednesday Psalms 47:1—49:20
- ☐ Thursday Psalms 50:1—52:9
- ☐ Friday Psalms 53:1—55:23
- ☐ Saturday Psalms 56:1—57:11

Week Forty-One

- ☐ Sunday Psalms 58:1—59:17
- ☐ Monday Psalms 60:1—62:12
- ☐ Tuesday Psalms 63:1—65:13
- ☐ Wednesday Psalms 66:1—67:7
- ☐ Thursday Psalms 68:1—69:36
- ☐ Friday Psalms 70:1—71:24
- ☐ Saturday Psalm 72:1–20

Week Forty-Two

- ☐ Sunday Psalm 73:1–28
- ☐ Monday Psalm 74:1–23
- ☐ Tuesday Psalms 75:1—76:12
- ☐ Wednesday Psalm 77:1–20
- ☐ Thursday Psalm 78:1–72
- ☐ Friday Psalms 79:1—80:19
- ☐ Saturday Psalms 81:1—82:8

Week Forty-Three

- ☐ Sunday Psalms 83:1—84:12
- ☐ Monday Psalms 85:1—86:17
- ☐ Tuesday Psalms 87:1—88:18
- ☐ Wednesday Psalm 89:1–52
- ☐ Thursday Psalms 90:1—91:16
- ☐ Friday Psalms 92:1—93:5
- ☐ Saturday Psalm 94:1–23

Week Forty-Four

- ☐ Sunday Psalms 95:1—96:13
- ☐ Monday Psalms 97:1—98:9
- ☐ Tuesday Psalms 99:1—101:8
- ☐ Wednesday Psalm 102:1–28
- ☐ Thursday Psalm 103:1–22
- ☐ Friday Psalm 104:1–35
- ☐ Saturday Psalm 105:1–45

Week Forty-Five

- ☐ Sunday Psalm 106:1–48
- ☐ Monday Psalm 107:1–43
- ☐ Tuesday Psalms 108:1—109:31
- ☐ Wednesday Psalms 110:1—112:10
- ☐ Thursday Psalms 113:1—115:18
- ☐ Friday Psalms 116:1—117:2
- ☐ Saturday Psalm 118:1–29

Week Forty-Six

- ☐ Sunday Psalm 119:1–176
- ☐ Monday Psalms 120:1—123:4
- ☐ Tuesday Psalms 124:1—127:5
- ☐ Wednesday Psalms 128:1—131:3
- ☐ Thursday Psalms 132:1—134:3
- ☐ Friday Psalm 135:1–21
- ☐ Saturday Psalm 136:1–26

Week Forty-Seven

- ☐ Sunday Psalms 137:1—138:8
- ☐ Monday Psalm 139:1–24
- ☐ Tuesday Psalms 140:1—144:15
- ☐ Wednesday Psalms 145:1—150:6
- ☐ Thursday Read Proverbs Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Friday Proverbs 1:1–33
- ☐ Saturday Proverbs 2:1–22

Week Forty-Eight

- ☐ Sunday Proverbs 3:1–35
- ☐ Monday Proverbs 4:1–27
- ☐ Tuesday Proverbs 5:1—6:35
- ☐ Wednesday Proverbs 7:1–27
- ☐ Thursday Proverbs 8:1–36
- ☐ Friday Proverbs 9:1–18
- ☐ Saturday Proverbs 10:1–32

Week Forty-Nine

- ☐ Sunday Proverbs 11:1–31
- ☐ Monday Proverbs 12:1—13:25
- ☐ Tuesday Proverbs 14:1–35
- ☐ Wednesday Proverbs 15:1–33
- ☐ Thursday Proverbs 16:1–33
- ☐ Friday Proverbs 17:1–28
- ☐ Saturday Proverbs 18:1–24

Week Fifty

- ☐ Sunday Proverbs 19:1–29
- ☐ Monday Proverbs 20:1–30
- ☐ Tuesday Proverbs 21:1–31
- ☐ Wednesday Proverbs 22:1–29
- ☐ Thursday Proverbs 23:1–35
- ☐ Friday Proverbs 24:1–34
- ☐ Saturday Proverbs 25:1–28

Week Fifty-One

- ☐ Sunday Proverbs 26:1–28
- ☐ Monday Proverbs 27:1–27
- ☐ Tuesday Proverbs 28:1–28
- ☐ Wednesday Proverbs 29:1–27
- ☐ Thursday Proverbs 30:1–33
- ☐ Friday Proverbs 31:1–31
- ☐ Saturday Read Ecclesiastes Introduction and Key Verse

Week Fifty-Two

- ☐ Sunday Ecclesiastes 1:1—2:26
- ☐ Monday Ecclesiastes 3:1—5:17
- ☐ Tuesday Ecclesiastes 5:18—8:17
- ☐ Wednesday Ecclesiastes 9:1—12:14
- ☐ Thursday Read Song of Solomon Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Friday Song of Solomon 1:1—2:7
- ☐ Saturday Song of Solomon 2:8—3:4

Year Two

Week One

- ☐ Sunday Song of Solomon 3:5—5:1
- ☐ Monday Song of Solomon 5:2—6:3
- ☐ Tuesday Song of Solomon 6:4—7:9
- ☐ Wednesday Song of Solomon 7:10—8:4
- ☐ Thursday Song of Solomon 8:5–14
- ☐ Friday Read Isaiah Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Saturday Isaiah 1:1–31

Week Two

- ☐ Sunday Isaiah 2:1—4:6
- ☐ Monday Isaiah 5:1–30
- ☐ Tuesday Isaiah 6:1—7:25
- ☐ Wednesday Isaiah 8:1—10:34
- ☐ Thursday Isaiah 11:1—12:6
- ☐ Friday Isaiah 13:1—21:17
- ☐ Saturday Isaiah 22:1—23:18

Week Three

- ☐ Sunday Isaiah 24:1—27:13
- ☐ Monday Isaiah 28:1—31:9
- ☐ Tuesday Isaiah 32:1—35:10
- ☐ Wednesday Isaiah 36:1—39:8
- ☐ Thursday Isaiah 40:1—41:29
- ☐ Friday Isaiah 42:1—43:28

☐ Saturday Isaiah 44:1—46:13

Week Four

☐ Sunday Isaiah 47:1—48:22
☐ Monday Isaiah 49:1—52:12
☐ Tuesday Isaiah 52:13—53:12
☐ Wednesday Isaiah 54:1—55:13
☐ Thursday Isaiah 56:1—57:21
☐ Friday Isaiah 58:1—59:21
☐ Saturday Isaiah 60:1—61:11

Week Five

☐ Sunday Isaiah 62:1—64:12
☐ Monday Isaiah 65:1—66:24
☐ Tuesday Read Jeremiah Introduction and Key Verse
☐ Wednesday Jeremiah 1:1–19
☐ Thursday Jeremiah 2:1—6:30
☐ Friday Jeremiah 7:1—10:25
☐ Saturday Jeremiah 11:1–23

Week Six

☐ Sunday Jeremiah 12:1—13:27
☐ Monday Jeremiah 14:1—17:27
☐ Tuesday Jeremiah 18:1—20:18
☐ Wednesday Jeremiah 21:1—23:40
☐ Thursday Jeremiah 24:1—26:24
☐ Friday Jeremiah 27:1—29:32
☐ Saturday Jeremiah 30:1—33:26

Week Seven

☐ Sunday Jeremiah 34:1—35:19
☐ Monday Jeremiah 36:1–32
☐ Tuesday Jeremiah 37:1–21
☐ Wednesday Jeremiah 38:1–28
☐ Thursday Jeremiah 39:1–18
☐ Friday Jeremiah 40:1—45:5
☐ Saturday Jeremiah 46:1—49:39

Week Eight

☐ Sunday Jeremiah 50:1—51:64
☐ Monday Jeremiah 52:1–34
☐ Tuesday Read Lamentations Introduction and Key Verse
☐ Wednesday Lamentations 1:1–22
☐ Thursday Lamentations 2:1–22
☐ Friday Lamentations 3:1–66
☐ Saturday Lamentations 4:1—5:22

Week Nine

☐ Sunday Read Ezekiel Introduction and Key Verse
☐ Monday Ezekiel 1:1—3:27
☐ Tuesday Ezekiel 4:1—7:27
☐ Wednesday Ezekiel 8:1—11:25
☐ Thursday Ezekiel 12:1–28
☐ Friday Ezekiel 13:1—14:23
☐ Saturday Ezekiel 15:1—20:44

Week Ten

☐ Sunday Ezekiel 20:45—24:27
☐ Monday Ezekiel 25:1—32:32
☐ Tuesday Ezekiel 33:1—36:38
☐ Wednesday Ezekiel 37:1—39:29
☐ Thursday Ezekiel 40:1—42:20
☐ Friday Ezekiel 43:1—48:35
☐ Saturday Read Daniel Introduction and Key Verse

Week Eleven

☐ Sunday Daniel 1:1–21
☐ Monday Daniel 2:1–49
☐ Tuesday Daniel 3:1–30
☐ Wednesday Daniel 4:1–37
☐ Thursday Daniel 5:1–31
☐ Friday Daniel 6:1–28
☐ Saturday Daniel 7:1–28

Week Twelve

☐ Sunday Daniel 8:1–27
☐ Monday Daniel 9:1–27
☐ Tuesday Daniel 10:1—12:13
☐ Wednesday Read Hosea Introduction and Key Verse
☐ Thursday Hosea 1:1—3:5
☐ Friday Hosea 4:1—5:15
☐ Saturday Hosea 6:1—10:15

Week Thirteen

☐ Sunday Hosea 11:1—14:9
☐ Monday Read Joel Introduction and Key Verse
☐ Tuesday Joel 1:1—3:21
☐ Wednesday Read Amos Introduction and Key Verse
☐ Thursday Amos 1:1—2:16
☐ Friday Amos 3:1—6:14
☐ Saturday Amos 7:1—9:15

Week Fourteen

☐ Sunday Read Obadiah Introduction and Key Verse
☐ Monday Obadiah 1–21
☐ Tuesday Read Jonah Introduction and Key Verse
☐ Wednesday Jonah 1:1—2:10
☐ Thursday Jonah 3:1—4:11
☐ Friday Read Micah Introduction and Key Verse
☐ Saturday Micah 1:1—2:13

Week Fifteen

☐ Sunday Micah 3:1—5:15
☐ Monday Micah 6:1—7:20
☐ Tuesday Read Nahum Introduction and Key Verse
☐ Wednesday Nahum 1:1—3:19
☐ Thursday Read Habakkuk Introduction and Key Verse
☐ Friday Habakkuk 1:1—3:19
☐ Saturday Read Zephaniah Introduction and Key Verse

Week Sixteen

☐ Sunday Zephaniah 1:1—3:20
☐ Monday Read Haggai Introduction and Key Verse
☐ Tuesday Haggai 1:1—2:23
☐ Wednesday Read Zechariah Introduction and Key Verse
☐ Thursday Zechariah 1:1—6:8

- ☐ Friday Zechariah 6:9—8:23
- ☐ Saturday Zechariah 9:1—14:21

Week Seventeen

- ☐ Sunday Read Malachi Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Monday Malachi 1:1—4:6
- ☐ Tuesday Read Matthew Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Wednesday Matthew 1:1—2:23
- ☐ Thursday Matthew 3:1–17
- ☐ Friday Matthew 4:1–25
- ☐ Saturday Matthew 5:1–48

Week Eighteen

- ☐ Sunday Matthew 6:1–34
- ☐ Monday Matthew 7:1–29
- ☐ Tuesday Matthew 8:1–34
- ☐ Wednesday Matthew 9:1–38
- ☐ Thursday Matthew 10:1—11:19
- ☐ Friday Matthew 11:20—12:50
- ☐ Saturday Matthew 13:1–58

Week Nineteen

- ☐ Sunday Matthew 14:1–36
- ☐ Monday Matthew 15:1–39
- ☐ Tuesday Matthew 16:1–28
- ☐ Wednesday Matthew 17:1—18:14
- ☐ Thursday Matthew 18:15—19:30
- ☐ Friday Matthew 20:1–34
- ☐ Saturday Matthew 21:1–46

Week Twenty

- ☐ Sunday Matthew 22:1–46
- ☐ Monday Matthew 23:1–39
- ☐ Tuesday Matthew 24:1–51
- ☐ Wednesday Matthew 25:1–46
- ☐ Thursday Matthew 26:1–75
- ☐ Friday Matthew 27:1–66
- ☐ Saturday Matthew 28:1–20

Week Twenty-One

- ☐ Sunday Read Mark Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Monday Mark 1:1–45
- ☐ Tuesday Mark 2:1–28
- ☐ Wednesday Mark 3:1–35
- ☐ Thursday Mark 4:1–41
- ☐ Friday Mark 5:1–43
- ☐ Saturday Mark 6:1—7:23

Week Twenty-Two

- ☐ Sunday Mark 7:24—8:38
- ☐ Monday Mark 9:1–50
- ☐ Tuesday Mark 10:1–52
- ☐ Wednesday Mark 11:1–33
- ☐ Thursday Mark 12:1–44
- ☐ Friday Mark 13:1–37
- ☐ Saturday Mark 14:1–72

Week Twenty-Three

- ☐ Sunday Mark 15:1–47
- ☐ Monday Mark 16:1–20
- ☐ Tuesday Read Luke Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Wednesday Luke 1:1–80
- ☐ Thursday Luke 2:1–52
- ☐ Friday Luke 3:1–38
- ☐ Saturday Luke 4:1–44

Week Twenty-Four

- ☐ Sunday Luke 5:1–39
- ☐ Monday Luke 6:1–49
- ☐ Tuesday Luke 7:1–50
- ☐ Wednesday Luke 8:1—9:17
- ☐ Thursday Luke 9:18—10:42
- ☐ Friday Luke 11:1–54
- ☐ Saturday Luke 12:1–59

Week Twenty-Five

- ☐ Sunday Luke 13:1–35
- ☐ Monday Luke 14:1–35
- ☐ Tuesday Luke 15:1–32
- ☐ Wednesday Luke 16:1–31
- ☐ Thursday Luke 17:1–37
- ☐ Friday Luke 18:1–43
- ☐ Saturday Luke 19:1–48

Week Twenty-Six

- ☐ Sunday Luke 20:1–47
- ☐ Monday Luke 21:1–38
- ☐ Tuesday Luke 22:1–71
- ☐ Wednesday Luke 23:1–56
- ☐ Thursday Luke 24:1–53
- ☐ Friday Read John Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Saturday John 1:1–51

Week Twenty-Seven

- ☐ Sunday John 2:1–25
- ☐ Monday John 3:1–36
- ☐ Tuesday John 4:1–54
- ☐ Wednesday John 5:1–47
- ☐ Thursday John 6:1–71
- ☐ Friday John 7:1–53
- ☐ Saturday John 8:1–59

Week Twenty-Eight

- ☐ Sunday John 9:1–41
- ☐ Monday John 10:1–42
- ☐ Tuesday John 11:1–57
- ☐ Wednesday John 12:1–50
- ☐ Thursday John 13:1–38
- ☐ Friday John 14:1–31
- ☐ Saturday John 15:1—16:4a

Week Twenty-Nine

- ☐ Sunday John 16:4b–33
- ☐ Monday John 17:1–26
- ☐ Tuesday John 18:1–27
- ☐ Wednesday John 18:28—19:42
- ☐ Thursday John 20:1–31
- ☐ Friday John 21:1–25
- ☐ Saturday Read Acts Introduction and Key Verse

Week Thirty

- ☐ Sunday Acts 1:1—2:47
- ☐ Monday Acts 3:1—4:37
- ☐ Tuesday Acts 5:1–42
- ☐ Wednesday Acts 6:1–15
- ☐ Thursday Acts 7:1—8:1a

☐ Friday Acts 8:1b–40
☐ Saturday Acts 9:1–43

Week Thirty-One

☐ Sunday Acts 10:1—11:30
☐ Monday Acts 12:1–25
☐ Tuesday Acts 13:1–52
☐ Wednesday Acts 14:1–28
☐ Thursday Acts 15:1–41
☐ Friday Acts 16:1–40
☐ Saturday Acts 17:1–34

Week Thirty-Two

☐ Sunday Acts 18:1–28
☐ Monday Acts 19:1–41
☐ Tuesday Acts 20:1–38
☐ Wednesday Acts 21:1–40
☐ Thursday Acts 22:1–29
☐ Friday Acts 22:30—23:35
☐ Saturday Acts 24:1–27

Week Thirty-Three

☐ Sunday Acts 25:1–27
☐ Monday Acts 26:1–32
☐ Tuesday Acts 27:1–44
☐ Wednesday Acts 28:1–31
☐ Thursday Read Romans Introduction and Key Verse
☐ Friday Romans 1:1–32
☐ Saturday Romans 2:1—3:8

Week Thirty-Four

☐ Sunday Romans 3:9–31
☐ Monday Romans 4:1–25
☐ Tuesday Romans 5:1–21
☐ Wednesday Romans 6:1–23
☐ Thursday Romans 7:1–25
☐ Friday Romans 8:1–39
☐ Saturday Romans 9:1–33

Week Thirty-Five

☐ Sunday Romans 10:1–21
☐ Monday Romans 11:1–36
☐ Tuesday Romans 12:1–21
☐ Wednesday Romans 13:1–14
☐ Thursday Romans 14:1—15:13
☐ Friday Romans 15:14–33
☐ Saturday Romans 16:1–27

Week Thirty-Six

☐ Sunday Read 1 Corinthians Introduction and Key Verse
☐ Monday 1 Corinthians 1:1–31
☐ Tuesday 1 Corinthians 2:1–16
☐ Wednesday 1 Corinthians 3:1–23
☐ Thursday 1 Corinthians 4:1–21
☐ Friday 1 Corinthians 5:1—6:20
☐ Saturday 1 Corinthians 7:1–40

Week Thirty-Seven

☐ Sunday 1 Corinthians 8:1—9:27
☐ Monday 1 Corinthians 10:1—11:1
☐ Tuesday 1 Corinthians 11:2–34
☐ Wednesday 1 Corinthians 12:1–31a
☐ Thursday 1 Corinthians 12:31b—13:13
☐ Friday 1 Corinthians 14:1–40
☐ Saturday 1 Corinthians 15:1–58

Week Thirty-Eight

☐ Sunday 1 Corinthians 16:1–24
☐ Monday Read 2 Corinthians Introduction and Key Verse
☐ Tuesday 2 Corinthians 1:1—2:4
☐ Wednesday 2 Corinthians 2:5–17
☐ Thursday 2 Corinthians 3:1–18
☐ Friday 2 Corinthians 4:1–15
☐ Saturday 2 Corinthians 4:16—6:13

Week Thirty-Nine

☐ Sunday 2 Corinthians 6:14—7:16
☐ Monday 2 Corinthians 8:1—9:15
☐ Tuesday 2 Corinthians 10:1—11:15
☐ Wednesday 2 Corinthians 11:16—12:21
☐ Thursday 2 Corinthians 13:1–14
☐ Friday Read Galatians Introduction and Key Verse
☐ Saturday Galatians 1:1–24

Week Forty

☐ Sunday Galatians 2:1–21
☐ Monday Galatians 3:1—4:7
☐ Tuesday Galatians 4:8–31
☐ Wednesday Galatians 5:1–26
☐ Thursday Galatians 6:1–18
☐ Friday Read Ephesians Introduction and Key Verse
☐ Saturday Ephesians 1:1–23

Week Forty-One

☐ Sunday Ephesians 2:1–22
☐ Monday Ephesians 3:1–21
☐ Tuesday Ephesians 4:1—5:20
☐ Wednesday Ephesians 5:21—6:24
☐ Thursday Read Philippians Introduction and Key Verse
☐ Friday Philippians 1:1—2:30
☐ Saturday Philippians 3:1–21

Week Forty-Two

☐ Sunday Philippians 4:1–23
☐ Monday Read Colossians Introduction and Key Verse
☐ Tuesday Colossians 1:1—2:5
☐ Wednesday Colossians 2:6–23
☐ Thursday Colossians 3:1—4:1
☐ Friday Colossians 4:2–18
☐ Saturday Read 1 and 2 Thessalonians Introductions and Key Verses

Week Forty-Three

☐ Sunday 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10
☐ Monday 1 Thessalonians 2:1—3:13
☐ Tuesday 1 Thessalonians 4:1—5:28
☐ Wednesday 2 Thessalonians 1:1–12
☐ Thursday 2 Thessalonians 2:1—3:18
☐ Friday Read 1 and 2 Timothy Introductions and Key Verses
☐ Saturday 1 Timothy 1:1—2:15

Week Forty-Four

☐ Sunday 1 Timothy 3:1–16

- ☐ Monday 1 Timothy 4:1—6:21
- ☐ Tuesday 2 Timothy 1:1–18
- ☐ Wednesday 2 Timothy 2:1–26
- ☐ Thursday 2 Timothy 3:1—4:22
- ☐ Friday Read Titus Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Saturday Titus 1:1—2:15

Week Forty-Five

- ☐ Sunday Titus 3:1–15
- ☐ Monday Read Philemon Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Tuesday Philemon 1–25
- ☐ Wednesday Read Hebrews Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Thursday Hebrews 1:1–14
- ☐ Friday Hebrews 2:1—3:19
- ☐ Saturday Hebrews 4:1—5:10

Week Forty-Six

- ☐ Sunday Hebrews 5:11—7:28
- ☐ Monday Hebrews 8:1–13
- ☐ Tuesday Hebrews 9:1–22
- ☐ Wednesday Hebrews 9:23—10:39
- ☐ Thursday Hebrews 11:1–40
- ☐ Friday Hebrews 12:1—13:25
- ☐ Saturday Read James Introduction and Key Verse

Week Forty-Seven

- ☐ Sunday James 1:1–27
- ☐ Monday James 2:1–26
- ☐ Tuesday James 3:1–18
- ☐ Wednesday James 4:1–17
- ☐ Thursday James 5:1–20
- ☐ Friday Read 1 and 2 Peter Introductions and Key Verses
- ☐ Saturday 1 Peter 1:1–25

Week Forty-Eight

- ☐ Sunday 1 Peter 2:1–25
- ☐ Monday 1 Peter 3:1–22
- ☐ Tuesday 1 Peter 4:1–19
- ☐ Wednesday 1 Peter 5:1–14
- ☐ Thursday 2 Peter 1:1–21
- ☐ Friday 2 Peter 2:1–22
- ☐ Saturday 2 Peter 3:1–18

Week Forty-Nine

- ☐ Sunday Read 1 John Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Monday 1 John 1:1–10
- ☐ Tuesday 1 John 2:1–29
- ☐ Wednesday 1 John 3:1–24
- ☐ Thursday 1 John 4:1—5:21
- ☐ Friday Read 2 and 3 John Introductions and Key Verses
- ☐ Saturday 2 John 1–13

Week Fifty

- ☐ Sunday 3 John 1–15
- ☐ Monday Read Jude Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Tuesday Jude 1–25
- ☐ Wednesday Read Revelation Introduction and Key Verse
- ☐ Thursday Revelation 1:1–20
- ☐ Friday Revelation 2:1–29
- ☐ Saturday Revelation 3:1–22

Week Fifty-One

- ☐ Sunday Revelation 4:1—6:17
- ☐ Monday Revelation 7:1–17
- ☐ Tuesday Revelation 8:1—9:21
- ☐ Wednesday Revelation 10:1–11
- ☐ Thursday Revelation 11:1–19
- ☐ Friday Revelation 12:1–18
- ☐ Saturday Revelation 13:1–18

Week Fifty-Two

- ☐ Sunday Revelation 14:1—15:8
- ☐ Monday Revelation 16:1–21
- ☐ Tuesday Revelation 17:1–18
- ☐ Wednesday Revelation 18:1–24
- ☐ Thursday Revelation 19:1–21
- ☐ Friday Revelation 20:1–15
- ☐ Saturday Revelation 21:1—22:21

Preface to the New King James Version

Purpose

In the preface to the 1611 edition, the translators of the Authorized Version, known popularly as the King James Bible, state that it was not their purpose "to make a new translation . . . but to make a good one better." Indebted to the earlier work of William Tyndale and others, they saw their best contribution to consist in revising and enhancing the excellence of the English versions which had sprung from the Reformation of the sixteenth century. In harmony with the purpose of the King James scholars, the translators and editors of the present work have not pursued a goal of innovation. They have perceived the Holy Bible, New King James Version, as a continuation of the labors of the earlier translators, thus unlocking for today's readers the spiritual treasures found especially in the Authorized Version of the Holy Scriptures.

A Living Legacy

For nearly four hundred years, and throughout several revisions of its English form, the King James Bible has been deeply revered among the English-speaking peoples of the world. The precision of translation for which it is historically renowned, and its majesty of style, have enabled that monumental version of the Word of God to become the mainspring of the religion, language, and legal foundations of our civilization.

Although the Elizabethan period and our own era share in zeal for technical advance, the former period was more aggressively devoted to classical learning. Along with this awakened concern for the classics came a flourishing companion interest in the Scriptures, an interest that was enlivened by the conviction that the manuscripts were providentially handed down and were a trustworthy record of the inspired Word of God. The King James translators were committed to producing an English Bible that would be a precise translation, and by no means a paraphrase or a broadly approximate rendering. On the one hand, the scholars were almost as familiar with the original languages of the Bible as with their native English. On the other hand, their reverence for the divine Author and His Word assured a translation of the Scriptures in which only a principle of utmost accuracy could be accepted.

In 1786 Catholic scholar Alexander Geddes said of the King James Bible, "If accuracy and strictest attention to the letter of the text be supposed to constitute an excellent version, this is of all versions the most excellent." George Bernard Shaw became a literary legend in our century because of his severe and often humorous criticisms of our most cherished values. Surprisingly, however, Shaw pays the following tribute to the scholars commissioned by King James: "The translation was extraordinarily well done because to the translators what they were translating was not merely a curious collection of ancient books written by different authors in different stages of culture, but the Word of God divinely revealed through His chosen and expressly inspired scribes. In this conviction they carried out their work with boundless reverence and care and achieved a beautifully artistic result." History agrees with these estimates. Therefore, while seeking to unveil the excellent *form* of the traditional English Bible, special care has also been taken in the present edition to preserve the work of *precision* which is the legacy of the 1611 translators.

Complete Equivalence in Translation

Where new translation has been necessary in the New King James Version, the most complete representation of the original has been rendered by considering the history of usage and etymology of words in their contexts. This principle of complete equivalence seeks to preserve *all* of the information in the text, while presenting it

in good literary form. Dynamic equivalence, a recent procedure in Bible translation, commonly results in paraphrasing where a more literal rendering is needed to reflect a specific and vital sense. For example, complete equivalence truly renders the original text in expressions such as "lifted her voice and wept" (Gen. 21:16); "I gave you cleanness of teeth" (Amos 4:6); "Jesus met them, saying, 'Rejoice!'" (Matt. 28:9); and "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?" (John 2:4). Complete equivalence translates fully, in order to provide an English text that is both accurate and readable.

In keeping with the principle of complete equivalence, it is the policy to translate interjections which are commonly omitted in modern language renderings of the Bible. As an example, the interjection *behold,* in the older King James editions, continues to have a place in English usage, especially in dramatically calling attention to a spectacular scene, or an event of profound importance such as the Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. Consequently, *behold* is retained for these occasions in the present edition. However, the Hebrew and Greek originals for this word can be translated variously, depending on the circumstances in the passage. Therefore, in addition to *behold,* words such as *indeed, look, see,* and *surely* are also rendered to convey the appropriate sense suggested by the context in each case.

In faithfulness to God and to our readers, it was deemed appropriate that all participating scholars sign a statement affirming their belief in the verbal and plenary inspiration of Scripture, and in the inerrancy of the original autographs.

Devotional Quality

The King James scholars readily appreciated the intrinsic beauty of divine revelation. They accordingly disciplined their talents to render well-chosen English words of their time, as well as a graceful, often musical arrangement of language, which has stirred the hearts of Bible readers through the years. The translators, the committees, and the editors of the present edition, while sensitive to the late-twentieth-century English idiom, and while adhering faithfully to the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts, have sought to maintain those lyrical and devotional qualities that are so highly regarded in the Authorized Version. This devotional quality is especially apparent in the poetic and prophetic books, although even the relatively plain style of the Gospels and Epistles cannot strictly be likened, as sometimes suggested, to modern newspaper style. The Koine Greek of the New Testament is influenced by the Hebrew background of the writers, for whom even the gospel narratives were not merely flat utterance, but often song in various degrees of rhythm.

The Style

Students of the Bible applaud the timeless devotional character of our historic Bible. Yet it is also universally understood that our language, like all living languages, has undergone profound change since 1611. Subsequent revisions of the King James Bible have sought to keep abreast of changes in English speech. The present work is a further step toward this objective. Where obsolescence and other reading difficulties exist, present-day vocabulary, punctuation, and grammar have been carefully integrated. Words representing ancient objects, such as *chariot* and *phylactery,* have no modern substitutes and are therefore retained.

A special feature of the New King James Version is its conformity to the thought flow of the 1611 Bible. The reader discovers that the sequence and selection of words, phrases, and clauses of the new edition, while much clearer, are so close to the traditional that there is remarkable ease in listening to the reading of either edition while following with the other.

In the discipline of translating biblical and other ancient languages, a standard method of transliteration, that is, the English spelling of untranslated words, such as names of persons and places, has never been commonly adopted. In keeping with the design of the present work, the King James spelling of untranslated words is retained, although made uniform throughout. For example, instead of the spellings *Isaiah* and *Elijah* in the Old Testament, and *Esaias* and *Elias* in the New Testament, *Isaiah* and *Elijah* now appear in both Testaments.

King James doctrinal and theological

terms, for example, *propitiation, justification,* and *sanctification,* are generally familiar to English-speaking peoples. Such terms have been retained except where the original language indicates need for a more precise translation.

Readers of the Authorized Version will immediately be struck by the absence of several pronouns: *thee, thou,* and *ye* are replaced by the simple *you,* while *your* and *yours* are substituted for *thy* and *thine* as applicable. *Thee, thou, thy* and *thine* were once forms of address to express a special relationship to human as well as divine persons. These pronouns are no longer part of our language. However, reverence for God in the present work is preserved by capitalizing pronouns, including *You, Your,* and *Yours,* which refer to Him. Additionally, capitalization of these pronouns benefits the reader by clearly distinguishing divine and human persons referred to in a passage. Without such capitalization the distinction is often obscure, because the antecedent of a pronoun is not always clear in the English translation.

In addition to the pronoun usages of the seventeenth century, the *-eth* and *-est* verb endings, so familiar in the earlier King James editions, are now obsolete. Unless a speaker is schooled in these verb endings, there is common difficulty in selecting the correct form to be used with a given subject of the verb in vocal prayer. That is, should we use *love, loveth,* or *lovest? do, doeth, doest,* or *dost? have, hath,* or *hast?* Because these forms are obsolete, contemporary English usage has been substituted for the previous verb endings.

In older editions of the King James Version, the frequency of the connective *and* far exceeded the limits of present English usage. Also, biblical linguists agree that the Hebrew and Greek original words for this conjunction may commonly be translated otherwise, depending on the immediate context. Therefore, instead of *and,* alternatives such as *also, but, however, now, so, then,* and *thus* are accordingly rendered in the present edition, when the original language permits.

The real character of the Authorized Version does not reside in its archaic pronouns or verbs or other grammatical forms of the seventeenth century, but rather in the care taken by its scholars to impart the letter and spirit of the original text in a majestic and reverent style.

The Format

The format of the New King James Version is designed to enhance the vividness and devotional quality of the Holy Scriptures:

- Subject headings assist the reader to identify topics and transitions in the biblical content.
- Words or phrases in *italics* indicate expressions in the original language which require clarification by additional English words, as also done throughout the history of the King James Bible.
- Oblique type in the New Testament indicates a quotation from the Old Testament.
- Prose is divided into paragraphs to indicate the structure of thought.
- Poetry is structured as contemporary verse to reflect the poetic form and beauty of the passage in the original language.
- The covenant name of God was usually translated from the Hebrew as LORD or GOD (using capital letters as shown) in the King James Old Testament. This tradition is maintained. In the present edition the name is so capitalized whenever the covenant name is quoted in the New Testament from a passage in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament Text

The Hebrew Bible has come down to us through the scrupulous care of ancient scribes who copied the original text in successive generations. By the sixth century A.D. the scribes were succeeded by a group known as the Masoretes, who continued to preserve the sacred Scriptures for another five hundred years in a form known as the Masoretic Text. Babylonia, Palestine, and Tiberias were the main centers of Masoretic activity; but by the tenth century A.D. the Masoretes of Tiberias, led by the family of ben Asher, gained the ascendancy. Through subsequent editions, the ben Asher text became in the twelfth century the only recognized form of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Daniel Bomberg printed the first

Rabbinic Bible in 1516–17; that work was followed in 1524–25 by a second edition prepared by Jacob ben Chayyim and also published by Bomberg. The text of ben Chayyim was adopted in most subsequent Hebrew Bibles, including those used by the King James translators. The ben Chayyim text was also used for the first two editions of Rudolph Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica* of 1906 and 1912. In 1937 Paul Kahle published a third edition of *Biblia Hebraica.* This edition was based on the oldest dated manuscript of the ben Asher text, the Leningrad Manuscript B19a (A.D. 1008), which Kahle regarded as superior to that used by ben Chayyim.

For the New King James Version the text used was the 1967/1977 Stuttgart edition of the *Biblia Hebraica,* with frequent comparisons being made with the Bomberg edition of 1524–25. The Septuagint (Greek) Version of the Old Testament and the Latin Vulgate also were consulted. In addition to referring to a variety of ancient versions of the Hebrew Scriptures, the New King James Version draws on the resources of relevant manuscripts from the Dead Sea caves. In the few places where the Hebrew was so obscure that the 1611 King James was compelled to follow one of the versions, but where information is now available to resolve the problems, the New King James Version follows the Hebrew text. Significant variations are recorded in the New King James translators' notes.

The New Testament Text

There is more manuscript support for the New Testament than for any other body of ancient literature. Over five thousand Greek, eight thousand Latin, and many more manuscripts in other languages attest the integrity of the New Testament. There is only one basic New Testament used by Protestants, Roman Catholics, and Orthodox, by conservatives and liberals. Minor variations in hand copying have appeared through the centuries, before mechanical printing began about A.D. 1450.

Some variations exist in the spelling of Greek words, in word order, and in similar details. These ordinarily do not show up in translation and do not affect the sense of the text in any way.

Other manuscript differences such as omission or inclusion of a word or a clause, and two paragraphs in the Gospels, should not overshadow the overwhelming degree of *agreement* which exists among the ancient records. Bible readers may be assured that the most important differences in English New Testaments of today are due, not to manuscript divergence, but to the way in which translators view the task of translation: How literally should the text be rendered? How does the translator view the matter of biblical inspiration? Does the translator adopt a paraphrase when a literal rendering would be quite clear and more to the point? The New King James Version follows the historic precedent of the Authorized Version in maintaining a literal approach to translation, except where the idiom of the original language cannot be translated directly into our tongue.

The King James New Testament was based on the traditional text of the Greek-speaking churches, first published in 1516, and later called the Textus Receptus or Received Text. Although based on the relatively few available manuscripts, these were representative of many more which existed at the time but only became known later. In the late nineteenth century, B. Westcott and F. Hort taught that this text had been officially edited by the fourth-century church, but a total lack of historical evidence for this event has forced a revision of the theory. It is now widely held that the Byzantine Text that largely supports the Textus Receptus has as much right as the Alexandrian or any other tradition to be weighed in determining the text of the New Testament.

Since the 1880s most contemporary translations of the New Testament have relied upon a relatively few manuscripts discovered chiefly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such translations depend primarily on two manuscripts, Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus, because of their greater age. The Greek text obtained by using these sources and the related papyri (our most ancient manuscripts) is known as the Alexandrian Text. However, some scholars have grounds for doubting the faithfulness of Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, since they often disagree with one another, and Sinaiticus exhibits excessive omission.

A third viewpoint of New Testament scholarship holds that the best text is based

on the consensus of the majority of existing Greek manuscripts. This text is called the Majority Text. Most of these manuscripts are in substantial agreement. Even though many are late, and none is earlier than the fifth century, usually their readings are verified by papyri, ancient versions, quotations from the early church fathers, or a combination of these. The Majority Text is similar to the Textus Receptus, but it corrects those readings which have little or no support in the Greek manuscript tradition.

Today, scholars agree that the science of New Testament textual criticism is in a state of flux. Very few scholars still favor the Textus Receptus as such, and then often for its historical prestige as the text of Luther, Calvin, Tyndale, and the King James Version. For about a century most have followed a Critical Text (so called because it is edited according to specific principles of textual criticism) which depends heavily upon the Alexandrian type of text. More recently many have abandoned this Critical Text (which is quite similar to the one edited by Westcott and Hort) for one that is more eclectic. Finally, a small but growing number of scholars prefer the Majority Text, which is close to the traditional text except in the Revelation.

In light of these facts, and also because the New King James Version is the fifth revision of a historic document translated from specific Greek texts, the editors decided to retain the traditional text in the body of the New Testament and to indicate major Critical and Majority Text variant readings in the translators' notes. Although these variations are duly indicated in the translators' notes of the present edition, it is most important to emphasize that fully eighty-five percent of the New Testament text is the same in the Textus Receptus, the Alexandrian Text, and the Majority Text.

New King James Translators' Notes

Significant textual explanations, alternate translations, and New Testament citations of Old Testament passages are supplied in the New King James translators' notes.

Important textual variants in the Old Testament are identified in a standard form.

The textual notes in the present edition of the New Testament make no evaluation of readings, but do clearly indicate the manuscript sources of readings. They objectively present the facts without such tendentious remarks as "the best manuscripts omit" or "the most reliable manuscripts read." Such notes are value judgments that differ according to varying viewpoints on the text. By giving a clearly defined set of variants the New King James Version benefits readers of all textual persuasions.

Where significant variations occur in the New Testament Greek manuscripts, textual notes are classified as follows:

NU-Text

These variations from the traditional text generally represent the Alexandrian or Egyptian type of text described previously in "The New Testament Text." They are found in the Critical Text published in the twenty-seventh edition of the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament (N) and in the United Bible Societies' fourth edition (U), hence the acronym, "NU-Text."

M-Text

This symbol indicates points of variation in the Majority Text from the traditional text, as also previously discussed in "The New Testament Text." It should be noted that M stands for whatever reading is printed in the published *Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text,* whether supported by overwhelming, strong, or only a divided majority textual tradition.

The textual notes reflect the scholarship of the past two centuries and will assist the reader to observe the variations between the different manuscript traditions of the New Testament. Such information is generally not available in English translations of the New Testament.

OLD TESTAMENT

THE BOOK OF

GENESIS

INTRODUCTION

So there you are, a teenager at your grandparent's house. You don't really want to be there, but it's one of those family things and so you're there.

You sit politely and act like you are listening as your folks and grandparents talk. Then your grandmother says something that catches your attention. She refers to your great-grandfather and the trip he made to America from the "old country."

"What?" you ask.

Grandma smiles, knowing that at some point we all wonder about our origin and here you are wondering about yours.

She unravels a tale of your family escaping persecution and settling in eastern Virginia. Next she invites you into her room, where she opens a large chest that has sat at the foot of her bed for as long as you can remember. A rush of cedar and mothballs fills the room.

"Thought you might like to see this," she explains, handing you a black-and-white photo in a large walnut frame. "It's your great-grandpa." The only thing stiffer than his collar is his expression. "Here is his father," she hands you another photo, one of a cowboy wearing a wide-brimmed hat, riding a horse.

Piece by piece, the chest tells its family tales. Soon you find yourself lost in a floor covered with old wedding gowns, photo albums, diplomas, and bronzed baby shoes. And before you leave, you find yourself the owner of something precious—a heritage. An ancestry. A beginning. An origin.

You know that you are a part of a family tree. You aren't an isolated pond, but rather a part of a river winding through a great canyon.

You leave a richer person. Knowing where you came from says much about where you are going.

Perhaps that's why the first book of the Bible is a book of beginnings. God wants us to know from where we came. Learning that will teach us much about the place we are going.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Moses

Date Written: c. 1500 B.C.

Key Themes:

- In the ultimate act of creativity, God formed the sky and earth out of nothing.
- Sin entered the world through the wrong choices of the very first humans.
- Back in the Garden of Eden, God set into motion a plan for our redemption.
- God made a covenant with Abraham, to bless him and make him a blessing to all people. Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise.

Key Verse:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).

Contents:

I. Beginning of the World 1:1—11:32
II. Abraham 12:1—25:34
III. Isaac and Jacob 26:1—36:43
IV. Joseph and His Brothers 37:1—50:26

Life LESSONS

Genesis 1:1—2:3

SITUATION
The magnificent story of The Beginning revealed God's creativity, majesty, and love. Yet the most humbling, puzzling, and awe-inspiring act took place when God breathed the breath of life into humanity.

OBSERVATION
God demonstrated power and love by creating. With only a spoken word God created everything around us. Then, with loving care, He formed Adam out of the ground.

INSPIRATION
With one decision, history began. Existence became measurable.

Out of nothing came light.

Out of light came day.

Then came sky . . . and earth.

And on this earth? A mighty hand went to work.

Canyons were carved. Oceans were dug. Mountains erupted out of flatlands. Stars were flung. A universe sparkled.

Our sun became just one of millions. Our galaxy became just one of thousands. Planets invisibly tethered to suns roared through space at breakneck speeds. Stars blazed with heat that could melt our planet in seconds.

The hand behind it was mighty. He is mighty.

And with this might, he created. As naturally as a bird sings and a fish swims, he created. Just as an artist can't not paint and a runner can't not run, he couldn't not create. He was the Creator. Through and through, he was the

The History of Creation

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth
was without form, and void; and darkness *was*[a] on the face of the
deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. 4 And God
saw the light, that *it was* good; and God divided the light from the
darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night.
So the evening and the morning were the first day.

6 Then God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the wa-
ters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." 7 Thus God made the
firmament, and divided the waters which *were* under the firmament
from the waters which *were* above the firmament; and it was so. 8 And
God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning
were the second day.

9 Then God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered
together into one place, and let the dry *land* appear"; and it was so.
10 And God called the dry *land* Earth, and the gathering together of the
waters He called Seas. And God saw that *it was* good.

11 Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb *that*
yields seed, *and* the fruit tree *that* yields fruit according to its kind,
whose seed *is* in itself, on the earth"; and it was so. 12 And the earth
brought forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed according to its kind,
and the tree *that* yields fruit, whose seed *is* in itself according to its
kind. And God saw that *it was* good. 13 So the evening and the morning
were the third day.

14 Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heav-
ens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and
seasons, and for days and years; 15 and let them be for lights in the
firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth"; and it was so.
16 Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day,
and the lesser light to rule the night. *He made* the stars also. 17 God set
them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, 18 and
to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from
the darkness. And God saw that *it was* good. 19 So the evening and the
morning were the fourth day.

20 Then God said, "Let the waters abound with an abundance of liv-
ing creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the
firmament of the heavens." 21 So God created great sea creatures and
every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, ac-
cording to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And
God saw that *it was* good. 22 And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful
and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on
the earth." 23 So the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

24 Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature ac-
cording to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth,
each according to its kind"; and it was so. 25 And God made the beast of
the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and every-
thing that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that
it was good.

1:2 [a]Words in italic type have been added for clarity. They are not found in the original Hebrew or Aramaic.

26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to
Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the
birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all[a] the earth and over every
creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in His
own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He
created them. 28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be
fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over
the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing
that moves on the earth."

29 And God said, "See, I have given you every herb *that* yields seed
which *is* on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields
seed; to you it shall be for food. 30 Also, to every beast of the earth, to
every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in
which *there is* life, *I have given* every green herb for food"; and it was
so. 31 Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed *it was*
very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

2 Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were
finished. 2 And on the seventh day God ended His work which He
had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which
He had done. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified
it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created
and made.

4 This *is* the history[a] of the heavens and the earth when they were
created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens,
5 before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of
the field had grown. For the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the
earth, and *there was* no man to till the ground; 6 but a mist went up
from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground.

7 And the Lord God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and
breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living
being.

Life in God's Garden

8 The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He
put the man whom He had formed. 9 And out of the ground the Lord
God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for
food. The tree of life *was* also in the midst of the garden, and the tree
of the knowledge of good and evil.

10 Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there
it parted and became four riverheads. 11 The name of the first *is* Pis-
hon; it *is* the one which skirts the whole land of Havilah, where *there is*
gold. 12 And the gold of that land *is* good. Bdellium and the onyx stone
are there. 13 The name of the second river *is* Gihon; it *is* the one which
goes around the whole land of Cush. 14 The name of the third river
is Hiddekel;[a] it *is* the one which goes toward the east of Assyria. The
fourth river *is* the Euphrates.

15 Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of
Eden to tend and keep it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man,
saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 but of the tree

1:26 [a]Syriac reads *all the wild animals of.* **2:4** [a]Hebrew *toledoth,* literally *generations*
2:14 [a]Or *Tigris*

Creator. A tireless dreamer and designer.

From the pallet of the Ageless Artist came inimitable splendors. Before there was a person to see it, his creation was pregnant with wonder. . . .

Mundaneness found no home in his universe. . . .

Probe deep within him. Explore every corner. Search every angle. Love is all you find. Go to the beginning of every decision he has made and you'll find it. Go to the end of every story he has told and you'll see it.

Love. . . .

He created a paradise. A sinless sanctuary. A haven before fear. A home before there was a human dweller. No time. No death. No hurt. A gift built by God for his ultimate creation. And when he was through, he knew "it was very good."

But it wasn't enough.

His greatest work hadn't been completed. One final masterpiece was needed before he would stop.

Look to the canyons to see the Creator's splendor. Touch the flowers and see his delicacy. Listen to the thunder and hear his power. But gaze on [humanity]—the zenith—and witness all three . . . and more. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Today you will encounter God's creation. When you see the beauty around you, let each detail remind you to lift your head in praise. Express your appreciation for God's creation. Encourage others to see the beauty of His creation.

EXPLORATION

God the Creator—Nehemiah 9:6; Job 26:7; Psalm 102:25; Acts 14:15; Hebrews 11:3.

Choice

He placed one scoop of clay upon another until a form lay lifeless on the ground. . . .

All were silent as the Creator reached in himself and removed something yet unseen. "It's called 'choice.' The seed of choice."

Creation stood in silence and gazed upon the lifeless form.

An angel spoke, "But what if he . . ."

"What if he chooses not to love?" the Creator finished. "Come, I will show you."

Unbound by today, God and the angel walked into the realm of tomorrow . . .

The angel gasped at what he saw. Spontaneous love. Voluntary devotion. Never had he seen anything like these. . . . The angel stood speechless as they passed through centuries of repugnance. Never had he seen such filth. Rotten hearts. Ruptured promises. Forgotten loyalties. . . .

The Creator walked on in time, further and further into the future, until he stood by a tree. A tree that would be fashioned into a cradle. Even then he could smell the hay that would surround him. . . .

'Wouldn't it be easier to not plant the seed? Wouldn't it be easier to not give the choice?"

"It would," the Creator spoke slowly. "But to remove the choice is to remove the love."

. . . They stepped into the Garden again. The Maker looked earnestly at the clay creation.

A monsoon of love swelled up within him. He had died for the creation before he had made him. God's form bent over the sculptured face and breathed. Dust stirred on the lips of the new one. The chest rose, cracking the red mud. The cheeks fleshened. A finger moved. And an eye opened.

But more incredible than the moving of the flesh was the stirring of the spirit. Those who could see the unseen gasped.

Perhaps it was the wind who said it first. Perhaps what the star saw that moment is what has made it blink ever since. Maybe it was left to an angel to whisper it:

"It looks like . . . it appears so much like . . . it is him!"

The angel wasn't speaking of the face, the features, or the body. He was looking inside at the soul.

"It's eternal!" gasped another.

Within the man, God had placed a divine seed. A seed of his self. The God of might had created earth's mightiest. The Creator had created, not a creature, but another creator. And the One who had chosen to love had created one who could love in return.

Now it's our choice.

Study Guide

Read Genesis 2:4–25

- What part of God's creation fascinates you the most?
- Why did God create the heavens and earth?
- What is the significance of Adam coming from the dust of the ground and God breathing life into him?
- What does creation reveal about God?
- What can we learn about ourselves from creation?
- In what ways do you see glimpses of God in the people He created?
- What kinds of things stand in the way of your choice to love and obey God?
- What most helps you to make the choice to be in relationship with God?

of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

18 And the Lord God said, "*It is* not good that man should be alone;
I will make him a helper comparable to him." 19 Out of the ground the
Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and
brought *them* to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever
Adam called each living creature, that *was* its name. 20 So Adam gave
names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the
field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.

21 And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he
slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.
22 Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into
a woman, and He brought her to the man.

23 And Adam said:

"This *is* now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man."

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to
his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not
ashamed.

The Temptation and Fall of Man

3 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field
which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has
God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"

2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the
trees of the garden; 3 but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of
the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it,
lest you die.' "

4 Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For
God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and
you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

6 So when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, that it
was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise, she
took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and
he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew
that they *were* naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made
themselves coverings.

8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden
in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the
presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

9 Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, "Where *are*
you?"

10 So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid be-
cause I was naked; and I hid myself."

11 And He said, "Who told you that you *were* naked? Have you eaten
from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?"

Life LESSONS

Genesis 2:4—3:24

SITUATION

God the Creator completed His masterpiece by creating man and woman. God breathed life and spirit into His special handiwork. Though sin entered the world, God also provided for redemption from sin.

OBSERVATION

God created people with the freedom to choose or reject Him. Our ancestors Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and the consequences have been handed down to us.

INSPIRATION

What God gave Adam and Eve, he entrusted to you and me. A soul. "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7).

You, a bipedal ape? Chemical fluke? Atomic surprise? By no means. You bear the very breath of God. He exhaled himself into you, making you a "living being" (v. 7). . . .

Your soul distinguishes you from zoo dwellers. God gifted the camel with a hump and the giraffe with a flagpole neck, but he reserved his breath, or a soul, for you. You bear his stamp. You do things God does. Think. Question. Reflect. You blueprint buildings, chart sea crossings, and swallow throat lumps when your kids say their alphabet. You, like Adam, have a soul.

And, like Adam, you've used your soul to disobey God. God's command to the charter couple includes

the Bible's first reference to death. "You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (v. 17 NIV). . . .

Reread God's warning: "*when* you eat of it you will surely die." Sin resulted in Adam's and Eve's immediate deaths. But death of what? Their bodies? No, they continued to breathe. Brain waves flowed. Eyelids blinked. Their bodies functioned, but their hearts hardened. They stopped trusting God. Their friendship with their maker died. . . .

Prior to this act, they followed God like sheep follow their shepherd. He spoke; they listened. He gave assignments; they fulfilled them. They were naked but unashamed, transparent and unafraid. Yet as one drop of ink clouds a glass of water, the stubborn deed darkened their souls. Everything changed. God's presence stirred panic, not peace. Adam ran like a kid caught raiding the pantry. "I was afraid" (3:10). Intimacy with God ceased; separation from God began. We'll always wonder why Adam didn't ask for forgiveness. But he didn't, and the guilty pair was "sent . . . out of the garden of Eden" (3:23).

We've loitered outside the gates ever since. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God did not create us as robots. Praise Him for giving us the ability to choose. Sin is part of our lives, but we can choose to love and obey God. Make that choice today.

EXPLORATION

Human Spirit—Job 32:8; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Acts 7:59.

12 Then the man said, "The woman whom You gave *to be* with me,
she gave me of the tree, and I ate."
13 And the Lord God said to the woman, "What *is* this you have done?"
The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."
14 So the Lord God said to the serpent:

"Because you have done this,
You *are* cursed more than all cattle,
And more than every beast of the field;
On your belly you shall go,
And you shall eat dust
All the days of your life.
15 And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her Seed;
He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise His heel."

16 To the woman He said:

"I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception;
In pain you shall bring forth children;
Your desire *shall be* for your husband,
And he shall rule over you."

17 Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it':

"Cursed *is* the ground for your sake;
In toil you shall eat *of* it
All the days of your life.
18 Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you,
And you shall eat the herb of the field.
19 In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread
Till you return to the ground,
For out of it you were taken;
For dust you *are*,
And to dust you shall return."

20 And Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.
21 Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.
22 Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"— 23 therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. 24 So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

Cain Murders Abel

4 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain,
and said, "I have acquired a man from the Lord."
2 Then she bore
again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but
Cain was a tiller of the ground. 3 And in the process of time it came
to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to
the Lord. 4 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their
fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, 5 but He did not
respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his coun-
tenance fell.

6 So the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your
countenance fallen? 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if
you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire *is* for you, but you
should rule over it."

8 Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; [a] and it came to pass, when
they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and
killed him.

9 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where *is* Abel your brother?"

He said, "I do not know. *Am* I my brother's keeper?"

10 And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's
blood cries out to Me from the ground. 11 So now you *are* cursed from
the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood
from your hand. 12 When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its
strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth."

13 And Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment *is* greater than I can
bear! 14 Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the
ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a
vagabond on the earth, and it will happen *that* anyone who finds me
will kill me."

15 And the Lord said to him, "Therefore, [a] whoever kills Cain, ven-
geance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord set a mark on
Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him.

The Family of Cain

16 Then Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in
the land of Nod on the east of Eden. 17 And Cain knew his wife, and she
conceived and bore Enoch. And he built a city, and called the name
of the city after the name of his son—Enoch. 18 To Enoch was born
Irad; and Irad begot Mehujael, and Mehujael begot Methushael, and
Methushael begot Lamech.

19 Then Lamech took for himself two wives: the name of one *was*
Adah, and the name of the second *was* Zillah. 20 And Adah bore Jabal.
He was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. 21 His
brother's name *was* Jubal. He was the father of all those who play
the harp and flute. 22 And as for Zillah, she also bore Tubal-Cain, an
instructor of every craftsman in bronze and iron. And the sister of
Tubal-Cain *was* Naamah.

23 Then Lamech said to his wives:

4:8 [a] Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate add *"Let us go out to the field."*
4:15 [a] Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *Not so.*

Life Lessons

Genesis 4:1—5:32

SITUATION

After Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), sin affected the life and death of every living creature. Sin and death reigned in every individual. Enoch, the one notable exception to the punishment of death, "walked with God."

OBSERVATION

Cain, like Adam and Eve, wanted to keep his distance from God. Rather than confess his sin, Cain tried to hide it to keep it from God.

INSPIRATION

Here is a good rule of thumb: Those who keep secrets from God keep their distance from God. Those who are honest with God draw near to God.

This is nothing novel. It happens between people. If you loan me your car and I wreck it, will I look forward to seeing you again? No. It is no coincidence that the result of the very first sin was to duck into the bushes. Adam and Eve ate the fruit, heard God in the garden, and crept between the leaves.

"Where are you?" God asked, not for his benefit. He knew exactly where they were. The question was spiritual, not geographical. "Examine where you are, children. You aren't where you were. You were at my side; now you have hidden from me."

Secrets erect a fence while confession builds a bridge.

Once there were a couple of farmers who couldn't get along with each other. A wide ravine separated

their two farms, but as a sign of their mutual distaste for each other, each constructed a fence on his side of the chasm to keep the other out.

In time, however, the daughter of one met the son of the other, and the couple fell in love. Determined not to be kept apart by the folly of their fathers, they tore down the fence and used the wood to build a bridge across the ravine.

Confession does that. Confessed sin becomes the bridge over which we can walk back into the presence of God. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Ask yourself: What am I trying to hide from God? Confess your sins and your desire to live your life independent of God. He wants us to live in full fellowship and communion with Him.

EXPLORATION

Broken Worlds—Exodus 2—3; 2 Samuel 11—12; Psalm 51; Jonah 1—4; Matthew 26:69–75.

"Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
Wives of Lamech, listen to my speech!
For I have killed a man for wounding me,
Even a young man for hurting me.
24 If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold,
Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold."

A New Son

25 And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, "For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed." 26 And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh.[a] Then *men* began to call on the name of the Lord.

The Family of Adam

5 This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. 2 He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created. 3 And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot *a son* in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. 4 After he begot Seth, the days of Adam were eight hundred years; and he had sons and daughters. 5 So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died.

6 Seth lived one hundred and five years, and begot Enosh. 7 After he begot Enosh, Seth lived eight hundred and seven years, and had sons and daughters. 8 So all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years; and he died.

9 Enosh lived ninety years, and begot Cainan.[a] 10 After he begot Cainan, Enosh lived eight hundred and fifteen years, and had sons and daughters. 11 So all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years; and he died.

12 Cainan lived seventy years, and begot Mahalalel. 13 After he begot Mahalalel, Cainan lived eight hundred and forty years, and had sons and daughters. 14 So all the days of Cainan were nine hundred and ten years; and he died.

15 Mahalalel lived sixty-five years, and begot Jared. 16 After he begot Jared, Mahalalel lived eight hundred and thirty years, and had sons and daughters. 17 So all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety-five years; and he died.

18 Jared lived one hundred and sixty-two years, and begot Enoch. 19 After he begot Enoch, Jared lived eight hundred years, and had sons and daughters. 20 So all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years; and he died.

21 Enoch lived sixty-five years, and begot Methuselah. 22 After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters. 23 So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. 24 And Enoch walked with God; and he *was* not, for God took him.

25 Methuselah lived one hundred and eighty-seven years, and begot Lamech. 26 After he begot Lamech, Methuselah lived seven hundred

4:26 [a]Greek *Enos* **5:9** [a]Hebrew *Qenan*

and eighty-two years, and had sons and daughters. 27So all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years; and he died.

28Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and had a son. 29And he called his name Noah, saying, "This *one* will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord has cursed." 30After he begot Noah, Lamech lived five hundred and ninety-five years, and had sons and daughters. 31So all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy-seven years; and he died.

32And Noah was five hundred years old, and Noah begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

The Wickedness and Judgment of Man

6 Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, 2that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they *were* beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose.

3And the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not strive[a] with man forever, for he *is* indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." 4There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore *children* to them. Those *were* the mighty men who *were* of old, men of renown.

5Then the Lord[a] saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. 6And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. 7So the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." 8But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

Noah Pleases God

9This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God. 10And Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

11The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. 12So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.

The Ark Prepared

13And God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. 14Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch. 15And this is how you shall make it: The length of the ark *shall be* three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. 16You shall make a window for the ark, and you shall finish it to a cubit from above; and set the door of the ark in its side. You shall make it *with* lower, second, and third *decks*. 17And behold, I Myself am bringing

6:3 [a]Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate read *abide*. **6:5** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Vulgate reads *God;* Septuagint reads *Lord God*.

Life Lessons

Genesis 6:1—8:22

SITUATION
The size of Noah's ark ensured that it could carry tens of thousands of animals. This dramatic event demonstrated God's wrath toward sin, but also His mercy toward those who seek Him.

OBSERVATION
God offers a way out to safety in Him—no longer an ark, but simple faith.

INSPIRATION
When you make a list of history's harshest scourges, rank the Black Plague near the top. It earns a high spot. But not the highest. Call the disease catastrophic, disastrous. But humanity's deadliest? No. Scripture reserves that title for a darker blight, an older pandemic that by comparison makes the Black Plague seem like a cold sore. No culture avoids, no nation escapes, no person sidesteps the infection of sin.

Blame the bubonic plague on the *Yersinia pestis* bacterium . Blame the plague of sin on a godless decision. Adam and Eve turned their heads toward the hiss of the snake and for the first time ignored God. Eve did not ask, "God, what do you want?" Adam didn't suggest, "Let's consult the Creator." They acted as if they had no heavenly Father. His will was ignored, and sin, with death on its coattails, entered the world.

Sin sees the world with no God in it. . . .

So what can we do? If all have been infected and the world is corrupted, to whom do we turn? Or, to re-ask the great question

of Scripture: "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). The answer offered then is the answer offered still: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God wants us to stand against sin. Sometimes we must do it all by ourselves, but it is always easier to stand with others. But if you must go it alone, remember that you have been saved by Him and He is all you need.

EXPLORATION

Faithful to God—
1 Corinthians 10:13; 15:58; Galatians 5:1; Ephesians 6:14; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; Hebrews 2:18; 12:1–3; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:8–9.

The ripple of today's lie is tomorrow's wave and next year's flood.

—Max Lucado (Just Like Jesus)

floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which *is* the breath of life; everything that *is* on the earth shall die. 18But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. 19And of every living thing of all flesh you shall bring two of every *sort* into the ark, to keep *them* alive with you; they shall be male and female. 20Of the birds after their kind, of animals after their kind, and of every creeping thing of the earth after its kind, two of every *kind* will come to you to keep *them* alive. 21And you shall take for yourself of all food that is eaten, and you shall gather *it* to yourself; and it shall be food for you and for them."

22Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did.

The Great Flood

7 Then the Lord said to Noah, "Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen *that* you *are* righteous before Me in this generation. 2You shall take with you seven each of every clean animal, a male and his female; two each of animals that *are* unclean, a male and his female; 3also seven each of birds of the air, male and female, to keep the species alive on the face of all the earth. 4For after seven more days I will cause it to rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and I will destroy from the face of the earth all living things that I have made." 5And Noah did according to all that the Lord commanded him. 6Noah *was* six hundred years old when the floodwaters were on the earth.

7So Noah, with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives, went into the ark because of the waters of the flood. 8Of clean animals, of animals that *are* unclean, of birds, and of everything that creeps on the earth, 9two by two they went into the ark to Noah, male and female, as God had commanded Noah. 10And it came to pass after seven days that the waters of the flood were on the earth. 11In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. 12And the rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights.

13On the very same day Noah and Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark— 14they and every beast after its kind, all cattle after their kind, every creeping thing that creeps on the earth after its kind, and every bird after its kind, every bird of every sort. 15And they went into the ark to Noah, two by two, of all flesh in which *is* the breath of life. 16So those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the Lord shut him in.

17Now the flood was on the earth forty days. The waters increased and lifted up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. 18The waters prevailed and greatly increased on the earth, and the ark moved about on the surface of the waters. 19And the waters prevailed exceedingly on the earth, and all the high hills under the whole heaven were covered. 20The waters prevailed fifteen cubits upward, and the mountains were covered. 21And all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth,

and every man. 22All in whose nostrils *was* the breath of the spirit[a] of life, all that *was* on the dry *land,* died. 23So He destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground: both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth. Only Noah and those who *were* with him in the ark remained *alive.* 24And the waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days.

Noah's Deliverance

8 Then God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the animals that *were* with him in the ark. And God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided. 2The fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven were also stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained. 3And the waters receded continually from the earth. At the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters decreased. 4Then the ark rested in the seventh month, the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat. 5And the waters decreased continually until the tenth month. In the tenth *month,* on the first *day* of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen.

6So it came to pass, at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made. 7Then he sent out a raven, which kept going to and fro until the waters had dried up from the earth. 8He also sent out from himself a dove, to see if the waters had receded from the face of the ground. 9But the dove found no resting place for the sole of her foot, and she returned into the ark to him, for the waters *were* on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took her, and drew her into the ark to himself. 10And he waited yet another seven days, and again he sent the dove out from the ark. 11Then the dove came to him in the evening, and behold, a freshly plucked olive leaf *was* in her mouth; and Noah knew that the waters had receded from the earth. 12So he waited yet another seven days and sent out the dove, which did not return again to him anymore.

13And it came to pass in the six hundred and first year, in the first *month,* the first *day* of the month, that the waters were dried up from the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and indeed the surface of the ground was dry. 14And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dried.

15Then God spoke to Noah, saying, 16"Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. 17Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that *is* with you: birds and cattle and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth." 18So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. 19Every animal, every creeping thing, every bird, *and* whatever creeps on the earth, according to their families, went out of the ark.

God's Covenant with Creation

20Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. 21And the Lord smelled a soothing aroma. Then the Lord said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although

7:22 [a]Septuagint and Vulgate omit *of the spirit.*

Life Lessons

Genesis 9:1—10:32

SITUATION
God promised that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood. A rainbow would follow rain as a reminder that God keeps His promises. Man must treat all living creatures well.

OBSERVATION
God created a special covenant with humans that gave them dominance over the earth, yet made them accountable to God for each action.

INSPIRATION
God makes and never breaks his promises. . . . His irrevocable covenant runs like a scarlet thread through the tapestry of Scripture. Remember his promise to Noah?

"Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." And God said: "This **is** the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that **is** with you, for perpetual generations: I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth" (Genesis 9:11–13).

Every rainbow reminds us of God's covenant. . . . God's promises are equally unbroken and unending.

Abraham can tell you about promises. God told this patriarch that counting the stars and counting his descendants would be equal challenges. To secure the oath, God had Abraham

cut several animals in half. To seal a covenant in the Ancient East, the promise-maker passed between a divided animal carcass, volunteering to meet the same fate if he broke his word. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
In what areas do you need accountability? Prayer time? Bible study? Sharing your faith? Pick an area in your life that needs improvement. Find someone to hold you accountable to help you make the changes God wants.

EXPLORATION
Accountability—Matthew 12:36; Romans 14:10–12; Hebrews 13:17.

All Old Abe and Sarah had was a social-security check and a promise from heaven. But Abraham decided to trust the promise rather than focus on the problems.

—Max Lucado (In the Grip of Grace)

the imagination of man's heart *is* evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.

22 "While the earth remains,
Seedtime and harvest,
Cold and heat,
Winter and summer,
And day and night
Shall not cease."

9 So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.[a] 2And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move *on* the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. 3Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. 4But you shall not eat flesh with its life, *that is,* its blood. 5Surely for your life-blood I will demand *a reckoning;* from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man.

6 "Whoever sheds man's blood,
By man his blood shall be shed;
For in the image of God
He made man.
7 And as for you, be fruitful and multiply;
Bring forth abundantly in the earth
And multiply in it."

8Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying: 9"And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants[a] after you, 10and with every living creature that *is* with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth. 11Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

12And God said: "This *is* the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that *is* with you, for perpetual generations: 13I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. 14It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; 15and I will remember My covenant which *is* between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that *is* on the earth." 17And God said to Noah, "This *is* the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that *is* on the earth."

9:1 [a]Compare Genesis 1:28 **9:9** [a]Literally *seed*

Noah and His Sons

18 Now the sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham,
and Japheth. And Ham *was* the father of Canaan. 19 These three *were*
the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth was populated.
20 And Noah began *to be* a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. 21 Then
he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his
tent. 22 And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his fa-
ther, and told his two brothers outside. 23 But Shem and Japheth took
a garment, laid *it* on both their shoulders, and went backward and
covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces *were* turned away,
and they did not see their father's nakedness.
24 So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son
had done to him. 25 Then he said:

"Cursed *be* Canaan;
A servant of servants
He shall be to his brethren."

26 And he said:

"Blessed *be* the Lord,
The God of Shem,
And may Canaan be his servant.
27 May God enlarge Japheth,
And may he dwell in the tents of Shem;
And may Canaan be his servant."

28 And Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years. 29 So
all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died.

Nations Descended from Noah

10 Now this *is* the genealogy of the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and
Japheth. And sons were born to them after the flood.
2 The sons of Japheth *were* Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal,
Meshech, and Tiras. 3 The sons of Gomer *were* Ashkenaz, Riphath,[a]
and Togarmah. 4 The sons of Javan *were* Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and
Dodanim.[a] 5 From these the coastland *peoples* of the Gentiles were
separated into their lands, everyone according to his language, ac-
cording to their families, into their nations.
6 The sons of Ham *were* Cush, Mizraim, Put,[a] and Canaan. 7 The
sons of Cush *were* Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabtechah;
and the sons of Raamah *were* Sheba and Dedan.
8 Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth.
9 He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; therefore it is said, "Like
Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord." 10 And the beginning of
his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shi-
nar. 11 From that land he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth
Ir, Calah, 12 and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (that *is* the prin-
cipal city).

10:3 [a]Spelled *Diphath* in 1 Chronicles 1:6 **10:4** [a]Spelled *Rodanim* in Samaritan Pentateuch and 1 Chronicles 1:7 **10:6** [a]Or *Phut*

Life LESSONS

Genesis 11:1–32

SITUATION
People built a tower and a city called Babel as a monument to their own greatness. God thwarted this arrogant behavior by causing all the people to speak in different languages. This caused the people to scatter all over the earth.

OBSERVATION
God will not permit us to replace Him as supreme in the universe. We belong to Him and are responsible for our actions.

INSPIRATION
The scene is almost spooky: a tall, unfinished tower looming solitarily on a dusty plain. Its base is wide and strong but covered with weeds. Large stones originally intended for use in the tower lie forsaken on the ground. Buckets, hammers, and pulleys—all lie abandoned. The silhouette cast by the structure is lean and lonely.

Not too long ago, this tower was buzzing with activity. A bystander would have been impressed with the smooth-running construction of the world's first sky scraper. One group of workers stirred freshly made mortar. Another team pulled bricks out of the oven. A third group carried the bricks to the construction site while a fourth shouldered the load up a winding path to the top of the tower where it was firmly set in place.

Their dream was a tower. A tower that would be taller than anyone had ever dreamed. A tower that would punch through

the clouds and scratch the heavens. And what was the purpose of the tower? To glorify God? No. To try to find God? No. To call people to look upward to God? Try again. To provide a heavenly haven of prayer? Still wrong.

The purpose of the work caused its eventual abortion. The method was right. The plan was effective. But the motive was wrong. Dead wrong. Read these minutes from the "Tower Planning Committee Meeting" and see what I mean:

"Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and [watch out] let us make a name for ourselves."

Why was the tower being built? Selfishness. Pure, 100 percent selfishness. The bricks were made of inflated egos and the mortar was made of pride. Men were giving sweat and blood for a pillar. Why? So that somebody's name could be remembered.

We have a name for that: blind ambition.

We make heroes out of people who are ambitious.

And rightly so. This world would be in sad shape without people who dream of touching the heavens. Ambition is that grit in the soul which creates disenchantment with the ordinary and puts the dare into dreams.

But left unchecked it becomes an insatiable addition to power and prestige; a roaring hunger for achievement that devours people as a lion devours an animal, leaving behind only the skeletal remains of relationships.

Blind ambition. Distorted values.

God won't tolerate it. He didn't then and he won't now. He took the "Climb to Heaven Campaign" into his

13 Mizraim begot Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, 14 Pathrusim, and Casluhim (from whom came the Philistines and Caphtorim).

15 Canaan begot Sidon his firstborn, and Heth; 16 the Jebusite, the Amorite, and the Girgashite; 17 the Hivite, the Arkite, and the Sinite; 18 the Arvadite, the Zemarite, and the Hamathite. Afterward the families of the Canaanites were dispersed. 19 And the border of the Canaanites was from Sidon as you go toward Gerar, as far as Gaza; then as you go toward Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha. 20 These *were* the sons of Ham, according to their families, according to their languages, in their lands *and* in their nations.

21 And *children* were born also to Shem, the father of all the children of Eber, the brother of Japheth the elder. 22 The sons of Shem *were* Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram. 23 The sons of Aram *were* Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash.[a] 24 Arphaxad begot Salah,[a] and Salah begot Eber. 25 To Eber were born two sons: the name of one *was* Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided; and his brother's name *was* Joktan. 26 Joktan begot Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, 27 Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, 28 Obal,[a] Abimael, Sheba, 29 Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. All these *were* the sons of Joktan. 30 And their dwelling place was from Mesha as you go toward Sephar, the mountain of the east. 31 These *were* the sons of Shem, according to their families, according to their languages, in their lands, according to their nations.

32 These *were* the families of the sons of Noah, according to their generations, in their nations; and from these the nations were divided on the earth after the flood.

The Tower of Babel

11 Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. 2 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. 3 Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake *them* thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. 4 And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *is* in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

5 But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. 6 And the Lord said, "Indeed the people *are* one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. 7 Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." 8 So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. 9 Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

Shem's Descendants

10 This *is* the genealogy of Shem: Shem *was* one hundred years old, and begot Arphaxad two years after the flood. 11 After he begot

10:23 [a]Called *Meshech* in Septuagint and 1 Chronicles 1:17 **10:24** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Vulgate, and Targum; Septuagint reads *Arphaxad begot Cainan, and Cainan begot Salah* (compare Luke 3:35, 36). **10:28** [a]Spelled *Ebal* in 1 Chronicles 1:22

Arphaxad, Shem lived five hundred years, and begot sons and daughters.

12 Arphaxad lived thirty-five years, and begot Salah. 13 After he begot Salah, Arphaxad lived four hundred and three years, and begot sons and daughters.

14 Salah lived thirty years, and begot Eber. 15 After he begot Eber, Salah lived four hundred and three years, and begot sons and daughters.

16 Eber lived thirty-four years, and begot Peleg. 17 After he begot Peleg, Eber lived four hundred and thirty years, and begot sons and daughters.

18 Peleg lived thirty years, and begot Reu. 19 After he begot Reu, Peleg lived two hundred and nine years, and begot sons and daughters.

20 Reu lived thirty-two years, and begot Serug. 21 After he begot Serug, Reu lived two hundred and seven years, and begot sons and daughters.

22 Serug lived thirty years, and begot Nahor. 23 After he begot Nahor, Serug lived two hundred years, and begot sons and daughters.

24 Nahor lived twenty-nine years, and begot Terah. 25 After he begot Terah, Nahor lived one hundred and nineteen years, and begot sons and daughters.

26 Now Terah lived seventy years, and begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

Terah's Descendants

27 This *is* the genealogy of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran begot Lot. 28 And Haran died before his father Terah in his native land, in Ur of the Chaldeans. 29 Then Abram and Nahor took wives: the name of Abram's wife *was* Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and the father of Iscah. 30 But Sarai was barren; she had no child.

31 And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there. 32 So the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran.

Promises to Abram

12 Now the Lord had said to Abram:

"Get out of your country,
From your family
And from your father's house,
To a land that I will show you.
2 I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.
3 I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

hands. With one sweep he painted the tower gray with confusion and sent workers babbling in all directions. He took man's greatest achievement and blew it into the winds like a child blows a dandelion.

Are you building any towers? Examine your motives. And remember the statement imprinted on the base of the windswept Tower of Babel: Blind ambition is a giant step away from God and one step closer to catastrophe. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What towers have you been building? Wealth? Success? Recognition? Focus on what God wants you to build. Simplify your life. Surrender your desires to him! Let him guide your efforts.

EXPLORATION

Pride—Judges 8:1–3; 15:14–17; Psalm 10:11; Luke 1:48.

Life LESSONS

Genesis 12:1–20

SITUATION
God promised Abram that many nations would come from his descendants. Abram believed God and obediently moved to an unknown land.

OBSERVATION
Although old, Abram left his comfortable life in Ur with only the Lord's word as a guide. The life changes that he experienced were undoubtedly difficult, but he persevered through the difficult times.

INSPIRATION
Change? a few of you are thinking. *You want to talk about change? Let me tell you about change . . .*

Let me tell you about my changing body—Chemotherapists treat my body like a pincushion.

My changing family—We're "Surprise! Pregnant." I'll wear maternity clothes to the high school graduation of my firstborn.

The changing economy—If my investments don't improve, I'll spend my retirement eating macaroni and cheese.

Our changing business—I'm jobless. Mailing résumés pays no bills.

Change. Had more than your share? Wishing you could freeze-frame the video of your world? Would it help to stand in Saint Peter's Square and tell the fellow on the balcony, "Stop! No more change!"?

Save your breath. He can't help. If you're looking for a place with no change, try a soda machine. With life comes change.

With change comes fear, insecurity, sorrow,

4 So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went
with him. And Abram *was* seventy-five years old when he departed
from Haran. 5 Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's
son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people
whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the
land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. 6 Abram passed
through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree
of Moreh.[a] And the Canaanites *were* then in the land.

7 Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants
I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had
appeared to him. 8 And he moved from there to the mountain east of
Bethel, and he pitched his tent *with* Bethel on the west and Ai on the
east; there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the
Lord. 9 So Abram journeyed, going on still toward the South.[a]

Abram in Egypt

10 Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to
Egypt to dwell there, for the famine *was* severe in the land. 11 And it
came to pass, when he was close to entering Egypt, that he said to
Sarai his wife, "Indeed I know that you *are* a woman of beautiful coun-
tenance. 12 Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that
they will say, 'This *is* his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you
live. 13 Please say you *are* my sister, that it may be well with me for your
sake, and that I[a] may live because of you."

14 So it was, when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw
the woman, that she *was* very beautiful. 15 The princes of Pharaoh
also saw her and commended her to Pharaoh. And the woman was
taken to Pharaoh's house. 16 He treated Abram well for her sake. He
had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female
donkeys, and camels.

17 But the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues
because of Sarai, Abram's wife. 18 And Pharaoh called Abram and said,
"What *is* this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she
was your wife? 19 Why did you say, 'She *is* my sister'? I might have taken
her as my wife. Now therefore, here is your wife; take *her* and go your
way." 20 So Pharaoh commanded *his* men concerning him; and they
sent him away, with his wife and all that he had.

Abram Inherits Canaan

13 Then Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he
had, and Lot with him, to the South.[a] 2 Abram *was* very rich in
livestock, in silver, and in gold. 3 And he went on his journey from the
South as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the be-
ginning, between Bethel and Ai, 4 to the place of the altar which he had
made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the Lord.

5 Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents.
6 Now the land was not able to support them, that they might dwell
together, for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell
together. 7 And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's

12:6 [a]Hebrew *Alon Moreh* **12:9** [a]Hebrew *Negev* **12:13** [a]Literally *my soul*
13:1 [a]Hebrew *Negev*

livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. The Canaanites and the Perizzites then dwelt in the land.

8So Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we *are* brethren. 9*Is* not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If *you take* the left, then I will go to the right; or, if *you go* to the right, then I will go to the left."

10And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it *was* well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. 11Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. 12Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched *his* tent even as far as Sodom. 13But the men of Sodom *were* exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord.

14And the Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; 15for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants[a] forever. 16And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, *then* your descendants also could be numbered. 17Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you."

18Then Abram moved *his* tent, and went and dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre,[a] which *are* in Hebron, and built an altar there to the Lord.

Lot's Captivity and Rescue

14 And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations,[a] 2*that* they made war with Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). 3All these joined together in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea). 4Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

5In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings that *were* with him came and attacked the Rephaim in Ashteroth Karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh Kiriathaim, 6and the Horites in their mountain of Seir, as far as El Paran, which *is* by the wilderness. 7Then they turned back and came to En Mishpat (that *is,* Kadesh), and attacked all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who dwelt in Hazezon Tamar.

8And the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that *is,* Zoar) went out and joined together in battle in the Valley of Siddim 9against Chedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of nations,[a] Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five. 10Now the Valley of Siddim *was full of* asphalt pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled; *some* fell there, and the remainder fled to the mountains. 11Then

13:15 [a]Literally *seed,* and so throughout the book **13:18** [a]Hebrew *Alon Mamre*
14:1 [a]Hebrew *goyim* **14:9** [a]Hebrew *goyim*

stress. So what do you do? Hibernate? Take no risks for fear of failing? Give no love for fear of losing? Some opt to. They hold back.

A better idea is to look up. Set your bearings on the one and only North Star in the universe—God. For though life changes, he never does. Scripture makes pupil-popping claims about his permanence. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you experiencing a painful change in your lifestyle right now: a broken relationship, a betrayal of trust, a budget squeeze, some debilitating illness, jail time, or some other discipline from the Lord? Can you see the plan God may have for you, turning difficult change into something good—as He did for Abraham? Face your struggle courageously and patiently; God may be using it to prepare you for His promised land.

EXPLORATION

Obedient Faith—Genesis 22:2, 3; Deuteronomy 26:16; Joshua 1:8; 11:15; 1 Samuel 15:22; John 14:31; Acts 5:29.

Life Lessons

Genesis 13:1—14:24

SITUATION
In response to God's promise to give land and descendants, Abram's family traveled from Haran through Canaan and Egypt (Genesis 11:27—12:20). God told them to avoid the land of Sodom, whose name became synonymous with gross sin (Genesis 13:13; 18:16—19:29). God would destroy that city, and Lot would barely escape.

OBSERVATION
Our decisions in life bear spiritual consequences. Lot selfishly chose the lush Jordan Valley and got himself in trouble (captured by a gang of marauding kings). Abram was willing to take second choice and God blessed him.

INSPIRATION
You were born prepacked. God looked at your entire life, determined your assignment, and gave you the tools to do the job.

Before traveling, you do something similar. You consider the demands of the journey and pack accordingly. Cold weather? Bring a jacket. Business meeting? Carry the laptop. Time with grandchildren? Better take some sneakers and pain medication.

God did the same with you. *Joe will research animals . . . install curiosity. Meagan will lead a private school . . . add an extra dose of management. I need Eric to comfort the sick . . . include a healthy share of compassion. Denalyn will marry Max . . . instill a double portion of patience.*

"Each of us is an original" (Galatians 5:26 MSG). God

they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way. 12They also took Lot, Abram's brother's son who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

13Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, for he dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre[a] the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner; and they *were* allies with Abram. 14Now when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained *servants* who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. 15He divided his forces against them by night, and he and his servants attacked them and pursued them as far as Hobah, which *is* north of Damascus. 16So he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people.

17And the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that *is,* the King's Valley), after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who *were* with him.

Abram and Melchizedek

18Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he *was* the priest of God Most High. 19And he blessed him and said:

"Blessed be Abram of God Most High,
Possessor of heaven and earth;
20 And blessed be God Most High,
Who has delivered your enemies into your hand."

And he gave him a tithe of all.

21Now the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself."

22But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, 23that I *will take* nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that *is* yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich'— 24except only what the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men who went with me: Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion."

God's Covenant with Abram

15 After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

2But Abram said, "Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house *is* Eliezer of Damascus?" 3Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"

4And behold, the word of the Lord *came* to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." 5Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

14:13 [a]Hebrew *Alon Mamre*

6 And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

7 Then He said to him, "I *am* the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it."

8 And he said, "Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?"

9 So He said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." 10 Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. 11 And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

12 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror *and* great darkness fell upon him. 13 Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is* not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. 14 And also the nation whom they serve I will

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: Grace Before the Cross

Abram was far from perfect. There were times when he trusted the Egyptians before he trusted God. He even lied, telling Pharaoh that his wife was his sister. But Abram made one decision that changed his eternal life: He "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness" (Romans 4:3).

Here is a man justified by faith before his circumcision (v. 10), before the law (v. 13), before Moses and the Ten Commandments. Here is a man justified by faith before the cross! The sin-covering blood of Calvary extends as far into the past as it does into the future.

Abraham is not the only Old Testament hero to cast himself upon God's grace. . . . We must not see grace as a provision made after the law had failed. Grace was offered *before* the law was revealed. Indeed, grace was offered before man was created! "You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (1 Peter 1:18-20). (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 60.

packed you on purpose for a purpose. Is this news to you? If so, you may be living out of the wrong bag.

I once grabbed the wrong bag at the airport. The luggage looked like mine. Same size. Same material. Same color. Thrilled that it had emerged early from the baggage catacombs, I yanked it off the carousel and headed to the hotel. One glance inside, however, and I knew I'd made a mistake. Wrong size, style, and gender. (Besides, my pants would be too short with stiletto heels.)

What would you do in such a case? You could make do with what you have. Cram your body into the tight clothes, deck out in other-gender jewelry, and head out for your appointments. But would you? Only at risk of job loss and jail time.

No, you'd hunt down your own bag. Issue an all-points bulletin. Call the airport. Call the airlines. The taxi service. The FBI. Hire bloodhounds and private investigators. You'd try every possible way to find the person who can't find her suitcase and is wondering what gooney bird failed to check the nametag.

No one wants to live out of someone else's bag.

Then why do we? Odds are, someone has urged a force fit into clothes not packed for you. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you in a situation not the best for you? Lot tried to squeeze himself into the mold of Sodom and it didn't fit—or at least it shouldn't have. We cannot serve God wholeheartedly and eagerly fulfill our sinful desires at the same time.

EXPLORATION
Tests as Part of God's Will—Exodus 17:1–7; Matthew 4:1–11; 1 Corinthians 10:1–13; 2 Timothy 2:14—3:9; Hebrews 4:12–16; James 1.

The consequence of sin is not a bad day or a bad mood but a dead soul. The sign of a dead soul is clear: poisoned lips and cursing mouths, feet that lead to violence and eyes that don't see God.

—Max Lucado (In the Grip of Grace)

judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 15 Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. 16 But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet complete."

17 And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. 18 On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying:

"To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates— 19 the Kenites, the Kenezzites, the Kadmonites, 20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, 21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

Hagar and Ishmael

16 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no *children.* And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. 2 So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing *children.* Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her." And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai. 3 Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. 4 So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes.

5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "My wrong *be* upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes. The Lord judge between you and me."

6 So Abram said to Sarai, "Indeed your maid *is* in your hand; do to her as you please." And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence.

7 Now the Angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. 8 And He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?"

She said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai."

9 The Angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand." 10 Then the Angel of the Lord said to her, "I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude." 11 And the Angel of the Lord said to her:

"Behold, you *are* with child,
And you shall bear a son.
You shall call his name Ishmael,
Because the Lord has heard your affliction.
12 He shall be a wild man;
His hand *shall be* against every man,
And every man's hand against him.
And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren."

13 Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, "Have I also here seen Him who sees me?" 14 Therefore the well was called Beer Lahai Roi;[a] observe, *it is* between Kadesh and Bered.

16:14 [a] Literally *Well of the One Who Lives and Sees Me*

15 So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom
Hagar bore, Ishmael. 16 Abram *was* eighty-six years old when Hagar
bore Ishmael to Abram.

The Sign of the Covenant

17 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to
Abram and said to him, "I *am* Almighty God; walk before Me
and be blameless. 2 And I will make My covenant between Me and you,
and will multiply you exceedingly." 3 Then Abram fell on his face, and
God talked with him, saying: 4 "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with
you, and you shall be a father of many nations. 5 No longer shall your
name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have
made you a father of many nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruit-
ful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.
7 And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your de-
scendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant,
to be God to you and your descendants after you. 8 Also I give to you
and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger,
all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their
God."

9 And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant,
you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.
10 This *is* My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you
and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be
circumcised; 11 and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your fore-
skins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. 12 He
who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male
child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with
money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. 13 He who is
born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be
circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting
covenant. 14 And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circum-
cised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his
people; he has broken My covenant."

15 Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not
call her name Sarai, but Sarah *shall be* her name. 16 And I will bless her
and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be *a*
mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her."

17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart,
"Shall *a child* be born to a man who is one hundred years old?
And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear *a child*?" 18 And Abra-
ham said to God, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!"

19 Then God said: "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you
shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an
everlasting covenant, *and* with his descendants after him. 20 And as for
Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make
him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve
princes, and I will make him a great nation. 21 But My covenant I will
establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next
year." 22 Then He finished talking with him, and God went up from
Abraham.

23 So Abraham took Ishmael his son, all who were born in his house

Life Lessons

Genesis 15:1—17:27

SITUATION
God promised descendants and land to the aging traveler, Abram. Despite God's promise to him, nagging doubt caused Abram to waver between shortsighted compromise and obedient faith.

OBSERVATION
God keeps His promises and rewards our obedient faith. When God promises to direct our paths, we can be confident He will carefully lead us.

INSPIRATION
Hope is not what you expect; it is what you would never dream. It is a wild, improbable tale with a pinch-me-I'm-dreaming ending. It's Abraham adjusting his bifocals so he can see not his grandson, but his son. It's Moses standing in the Promised Land not with Aaron or Miriam at his side, but with Elijah and the transfigured Christ. It's Zechariah left speechless at the sight of wife Elizabeth, gray-headed and pregnant. And it is the two Emmaus-bound pilgrims reaching out to take a piece of bread only to see the hands from which it is offered are pierced.

Hope is not a granted wish or a favor performed; no, it is far greater than that. It is a zany, unpredictable dependence on a God who loves to surprise us out of our socks and be there in the flesh to see our reaction. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Make a list of seven key promises to you from God's Word and commit them to

memory, one a day for a week. Make one promise your motto for the week. Have confidence that God will do what he said. Use the promise to share your faith with someone.

EXPLORATION
Justification by Faith—Romans 4; Galatians 3; Hebrews 11.

The key to forgiving others is to quit focusing on what they did to you and start focusing on what God did for you.

—Max Lucado (In the Grip of Grace)

and all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very same day, as God had said to him. 24Abraham *was* ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 25And Ishmael his son *was* thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. 26That very same day Abraham was circumcised, and his son Ishmael; 27and all the men of his house, born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

The Son of Promise

18 Then the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre,[a] as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. 2So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw *them,* he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, 3and said, "My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. 4Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. 5And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant."

They said, "Do as you have said."

6So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead *it* and make cakes." 7And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave *it* to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. 8So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set *it* before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate.

9Then they said to him, "Where *is* Sarah your wife?"

So he said, "Here, in the tent."

10And He said, "I will certainly return to you according to the time of life, and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son."

(Sarah was listening in the tent door which *was* behind him.) 11Now Abraham and Sarah were old, well advanced in age; *and* Sarah had passed the age of childbearing.[a] 12Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"

13And the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I surely bear *a child,* since I am old?' 14Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son."

15But Sarah denied *it,* saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid.

And He said, "No, but you did laugh!"

Abraham Intercedes for Sodom

16Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way. 17And the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing, 18since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? 19For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that

18:1 [a]Hebrew *Alon Mamre* **18:11** [a]Literally *the manner of women had ceased to be with Sarah*

Impossibilities

Consider the case of Sarai. She is in her golden years, but God promises her a son. She gets excited. She visits the maternity shop and buys a few dresses. She plans her shower and remodels her tent . . . but no son. She eats a few birthday cakes and blows out a lot of candles . . . still no son. She goes through a decade of wall calendars . . . still no son . . . .

Finally, fourteen years later, when Abram is pushing a century of years and Sarai ninety . . . when Abram has stopped listening to Sarai's advice, and Sarai has stopped giving it . . . when the wallpaper in the nursery is faded and the baby furniture is several seasons out of date . . . when the topic of the promised child brings sighs and tears and long looks into a silent sky . . . God pays them a visit and tells them they had better select a name for their new son.

Abram and Sarai have the same response: laughter. They laugh partly because it is too good to happen and partly because it might. They laugh because they have given up hope, and hope born anew is always funny before it is real . . . .

They laugh because that is what you do when someone says he can do the impossible. They laugh a little at God, and a lot with God—for God is laughing, too. Then, with the smile still on his face, he gets busy doing what he does best—the unbelievable . . . .

He changes their faith. He changes the number of their tax deductions. He changes the way they define the word impossible. But most of all, he changes Sarah's attitude about trusting God.

Study Guide

Read Genesis 18:1–15

- Think about a time when you heard that a seemingly impossible thing would happen. How did you react?
- Sarah laughed when she heard she would be having a son. What could have been some thoughts in her head that caused that laughter?
- What do you think Abraham was thinking when the Lord said he would have a son?
- Think of a time when you lacked faith in God's plan. Why did it seem unbelievable?
- Describe a past experience when God fulfilled a promise to you.
- Why do you find it difficult to believe that nothing is too hard for God to handle?
- In what ways have you learned to trust God's perfect timing?
- What are the benefits of trusting God and His plan?
- What would you say to someone who is having trouble facing impossibilities in faith?

they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him." 20And the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, 21I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know."

22Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord. 23And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? 24Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare *it* for the fifty righteous that were in it? 25Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

26So the Lord said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes."

27Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, I who *am but* dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: 28Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous; would You destroy all of the city for *lack of* five?"

So He said, "If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy *it.*"

29And he spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose there should be forty found there?"

So He said, "I will not do *it* for the sake of forty."

30Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Suppose thirty should be found there?"

So He said, "I will not do *it* if I find thirty there."

31And he said, "Indeed now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose twenty should be found there?"

So He said, "I will not destroy *it* for the sake of twenty."

32Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten should be found there?"

And He said, "I will not destroy *it* for the sake of ten." 33So the Lord went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

Sodom's Depravity

19 Now the two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw *them,* he rose to meet them, and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground. 2And he said, "Here now, my lords, please turn in to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise early and go on your way."

And they said, "No, but we will spend the night in the open square."

3But he insisted strongly; so they turned in to him and entered his house. Then he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

4Now before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house. 5And they called to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them *carnally.*"

Life Lessons

Genesis 18:1—20:18

SITUATION
God planned to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for their many sins. Abraham pleaded with God for Sodom in order to save Lot's life. God completely punished the city but rescued Lot by sending two angels to escort him away.

OBSERVATION
God punishes sin but protects righteousness. God destroyed entire cities because the evil practiced in them was great.

INSPIRATION
Though God's people often forgot their God, God didn't forget them. He kept his word. . . . He could have given up. He could have turned his back. He could have walked away from the wretched mess, but he didn't.

He didn't give up.

When he became flesh and was the victim of an assassination attempt before he was two years old, he didn't give up.

When the people from his own home town tried to push him over a cliff, he didn't give up.

When his brothers ridiculed him, he didn't give up.

When he was accused of blaspheming God by people who didn't fear God, he didn't give up.

When Peter worshiped him at the supper and cursed him at the fire, he didn't give up.

When people spat in his face, he didn't spit back. When the bystanders slapped him, he didn't slap them. When a whip ripped his sides, he didn't turn

6 So Lot went out to them through the doorway, shut the door behind him, 7 and said, "Please, my brethren, do not do so wickedly! 8 See now, I have two daughters who have not known a man; please, let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men, since this is the reason they have come under the shadow of my roof."

9 And they said, "Stand back!" Then they said, "This one came in to stay *here,* and he keeps acting as a judge; now we will deal worse with you than with them." So they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near to break down the door. 10 But the men reached out their hands and pulled Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. 11 And they struck the men who *were* at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they became weary *trying* to find the door.

Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed

12 Then the men said to Lot, "Have you anyone else here? Son-in-law, your sons, your daughters, and whomever you have in the city—take *them* out of this place! 13 For we will destroy this place, because the outcry against them has grown great before the face of the Lord, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it."

14 So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who had married his daughters, and said, "Get up, get out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city!" But to his sons-in-law he seemed to be joking.

15 When the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot to hurry, saying, "Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city." 16 And while he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife's hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. 17 So it came to pass, when they had brought them outside, that he[a] said, "Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed."

18 Then Lot said to them, "Please, no, my lords! 19 Indeed now, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have increased your mercy which you have shown me by saving my life; but I cannot escape to the mountains, lest some evil overtake me and I die. 20 See now, this city *is* near *enough* to flee to, and it *is* a little one; please let me escape there (*is* it not a little one?) and my soul shall live."

21 And he said to him, "See, I have favored you concerning this thing also, in that I will not overthrow this city for which you have spoken. 22 Hurry, escape there. For I cannot do anything until you arrive there."

Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.

23 The sun had risen upon the earth when Lot entered Zoar. 24 Then the Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the Lord out of the heavens. 25 So He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.

26 But his wife looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

19:17 [a] Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *they.*

and command the awaiting angels to stuff that whip down that soldier's throat.

And when human hands fastened the divine hands to a cross with spikes, it wasn't the soldiers who held the hands of Jesus steady. It was God who held them steady. For those wounded hands were the same hands that had . . . brought light into thick and dreadful darkness. They had come to do it again. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Does the place where you live resemble Sodom? Stand against evil in your town or city. Be a voice for righteousness. Brainstorm with a friend how you can make a difference.

EXPLORATION

God's Judgment—
Deuteronomy 7:2; Judges 2:1–3; 1 Samuel 2:25; 1 Kings 22:34–38; 1 Chronicles 13:10–14.

27And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord. 28Then he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain; and he saw, and behold, the smoke of the land which went up like the smoke of a furnace. 29And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot had dwelt.

The Descendants of Lot

30Then Lot went up out of Zoar and dwelt in the mountains, and his two daughters were with him; for he was afraid to dwell in Zoar. And he and his two daughters dwelt in a cave. 31Now the firstborn said to the younger, "Our father *is* old, and *there is* no man on the earth to come in to us as is the custom of all the earth. 32Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve the lineage of our father." 33So they made their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn went in and lay with her father, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose.

34It happened on the next day that the firstborn said to the younger, "Indeed I lay with my father last night; let us make him drink wine tonight also, and you go in *and* lie with him, that we may preserve the lineage of our father." 35Then they made their father drink wine that night also. And the younger arose and lay with him, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose.

36Thus both the daughters of Lot were with child by their father. 37The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab; he *is* the father of the Moabites to this day. 38And the younger, she also bore a son and called his name Ben-Ammi; he *is* the father of the people of Ammon to this day.

Abraham and Abimelech

20 And Abraham journeyed from there to the South, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and stayed in Gerar. 2Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She *is* my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.

3But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, "Indeed you *are* a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she *is* a man's wife."

4But Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, "Lord, will You slay a righteous nation also? 5Did he not say to me, 'She *is* my sister'? And she, even she herself said, 'He *is* my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this."

6And God said to him in a dream, "Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. 7Now therefore, restore the man's wife; for he *is* a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not restore *her,* know that you shall surely die, you and all who *are* yours."

8So Abimelech rose early in the morning, called all his servants, and told all these things in their hearing; and the men were very much afraid. 9And Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done." 10Then Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you have in view, that you have done this thing?"

11And Abraham said, "Because I thought, surely the fear of God *is* not in this place; and they will kill me on account of my wife. 12But indeed *she is* truly my sister. She *is* the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. 13And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, 'This *is* your kindness that you should do for me: in every place, wherever we go, say of me, "He *is* my brother." ' "

14Then Abimelech took sheep, oxen, and male and female servants, and gave *them* to Abraham; and he restored Sarah his wife to him. 15And Abimelech said, "See, my land *is* before you; dwell where it pleases you." 16Then to Sarah he said, "Behold, I have given your brother a thousand *pieces* of silver; indeed

20:16 [a]Literally *it is a covering of the eyes for you*

this vindicates you[a] before all who *are* with you and before everybody." Thus she was rebuked.

17 So Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female servants. Then they bore *children;* 18 for the Lord had closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

Isaac Is Born

21 And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken. 2 For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. 3 And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac. 4 Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 And Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, *and* all who hear will laugh with me." 7 She also said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne *him* a son in his old age."

Hagar and Ishmael Depart

8 So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned.

9 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing. 10 Therefore she said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, *namely* with Isaac." 11 And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham's sight because of his son.

12 But God said to Abraham, "Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called. 13 Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he *is* your seed."

14 So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water; and putting *it* on her shoulder, he gave *it* and the boy to Hagar, and sent her away. Then she departed and wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba. 15 And the water in the skin was used up, and she placed the boy under one of the shrubs. 16 Then she went and sat down across from *him* at a distance of about a bowshot; for she said to herself, "Let me not see the death of the boy." So she sat opposite *him,* and lifted her voice and wept.

17 And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, "What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he *is.* 18 Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation."

19 Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink. 20 So God was with the lad; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. 21 He dwelt in the Wilderness of Paran; and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Life Lessons

Genesis 21:1—23:20

SITUATION

Even though Sarah doubted, God demonstrated His faithfulness by providing a son for her. God also took care of Hagar after she was forced to leave Abraham's camp. God fulfilled His promises when conditions appeared hopeless.

OBSERVATION

God will fulfill His promises, no matter how difficult our problems. Even when we don't know how God will act, we must trust that He watches over us.

INSPIRATION

Out of tragedy emerges triumph. Every disaster proves to be a victory.

This turn of events reminds me of the mule in the well. A mule tumbled down a water shaft. The villagers compared the effort of a rescue with the value of the animal and decided to bury him. They started shoveling dirt. The mule had other ideas. As the clods hit his back, he shook them off and stomped them down. Each spade of earth lifted him higher. He reached the top of the well and walked out. What his would-be killers thought would bury him actually delivered him.

The men who murdered Jesus did the same. Their actions elevated Jesus. Everything—the bad and the good, the evil and the decent—worked together for the *coup de grâce* of Christ.

Should we be surprised? Didn't he promise this would happen? "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are

the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Everything? Everything. Chicken-hearted disciples. A two-timing Judas. A pierced side. Spineless Pharisees. A hardhearted high priest. In everything God worked. I dare you to find one element of the cross that he did not manage for good or recycle for symbolism. Give it a go. I think you'll find what I found—every dark detail was actually a golden moment in the cause of Christ.

Can't he do the same for you? Can't he turn your Friday into a Sunday?

Some of you doubt it. How can God use cancer or death or divorce? Simple.

He's smarter than we are. He is to you what I was to four-year-old Amy. I met her at a bookstore. She asked me if I would sign her children's book. When I asked her name, she watched as I began to write, "To Amy . . ."

She stopped me right there. With wide eyes and open mouth, she asked, "How did you know how to spell my name?"

She was awed. You aren't. You know the difference between the knowledge of a child and an adult. Can you imagine the difference between the wisdom of a human and the wisdom of God? What is impossible to us is like spelling "Amy" to him. (From *The Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

When you've made big mistakes and your life appears to be headed for shipwreck, who can help? Are there any promises more comforting than God's? When you feel anxious today, STOP. Pray: "God, I trust in Your faithfulness to change

A Covenant with Abimelech

22 And it came to pass at that time that Abimelech and Phichol, the
commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, "God *is* with you
in all that you do. 23 Now therefore, swear to me by God that you will
not deal falsely with me, with my offspring, or with my posterity; but
that according to the kindness that I have done to you, you will do to
me and to the land in which you have dwelt."

24 And Abraham said, "I will swear."

25 Then Abraham rebuked Abimelech because of a well of water
which Abimelech's servants had seized. 26 And Abimelech said, "I do
not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, nor had I heard
of it until today." 27 So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to
Abimelech, and the two of them made a covenant. 28 And Abraham set
seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves.

29 Then Abimelech asked Abraham, "What *is the meaning of* these
seven ewe lambs which you have set by themselves?"

30 And he said, "You will take *these* seven ewe lambs from my hand,
that they may be my witness that I have dug this well." 31 Therefore he
called that place Beersheba,[a] because the two of them swore an oath
there.

32 Thus they made a covenant at Beersheba. So Abimelech rose with
Phichol, the commander of his army, and they returned to the land of
the Philistines. 33 Then *Abraham* planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba,
and there called on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God. 34 And
Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines many days.

Abraham's Faith Confirmed

22 Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abra-
ham, and said to him, "Abraham!"

And he said, "Here I am."

2 Then He said, "Take now your son, your only *son* Isaac, whom you
love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offer-
ing on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

3 So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey,
and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he
split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place
of which God had told him. 4 Then on the third day Abraham lifted his
eyes and saw the place afar off. 5 And Abraham said to his young men,
"Stay here with the donkey; the lad[a] and I will go yonder and worship,
and we will come back to you."

6 So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid *it* on
Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two
of them went together. 7 But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and
said, "My father!"

And he said, "Here I am, my son."

Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where *is* the lamb
for a burnt offering?"

8 And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb
for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together.

9 Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And

21:31 [a]Literally *Well of the Oath* or *Well of the Seven* **22:5** [a]Or *young man*

Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. 10And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

11But the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!"

So he said, "Here I am."

12And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only *son,* from Me."

13Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind *him was* a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. 14And Abraham called the name of the place, The-Lord-Will-Provide;[a] as it is said *to* this day, "In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

15Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, 16and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only *son*— 17blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which *is* on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." 19So Abraham returned to his young men, and they rose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba.

The Family of Nahor

20Now it came to pass after these things that it was told Abraham, saying, "Indeed Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor: 21Huz his firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, 22Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel." 23And Bethuel begot Rebekah.[a] These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham's brother. 24His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore Tebah, Gaham, Thahash, and Maachah.

Sarah's Death and Burial

23 Sarah lived one hundred and twenty-seven years; *these were* the years of the life of Sarah. 2So Sarah died in Kirjath Arba (that *is,* Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

3Then Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, 4"I *am* a foreigner and a visitor among you. Give me property for a burial place among you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight."

5And the sons of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him, 6"Hear us, my lord: You *are* a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places. None of us will withhold from you his burial place, that you may bury your dead."

7Then Abraham stood up and bowed himself to the people of the land, the sons of Heth. 8And he spoke with them, saying, "If it is your wish that I bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and meet with

22:14 [a]Hebrew *YHWH Yireh* **22:23** [a]Spelled *Rebecca* in Romans 9:10

both my attitude and my circumstances."

EXPLORATION
God's Promises—Genesis 9:8–17; 15:1–6; 50:24; Exodus 6:6–8; Joshua 21:43–45; 2 Peter 1:3, 4.

If you'll remember, deceit was the first tool out of the devil's bag. In the Garden of Eden, Satan didn't discourage Eve. He didn't seduce her. He didn't sneak up on her. He just lied to her.

—Max Lucado (Just Like Jesus)

Life Lessons

Genesis 24:1—25:18

SITUATION
Abraham obeyed God's plan. Abraham might have married Isaac to a local girl or sent him back to his family's land to find a wife. But Abraham obeyed God by selecting the right wife from the right spot. Abraham's loyal servant discerned God's will and found the right wife—Rebekah, a woman of good heart and determination.

OBSERVATION
In God's will we find successful living. God's way may be harder than the world's way—but He rewards obedience!

INSPIRATION
"Sweet spot." Golfers understand the term. So do tennis players. Ever swung a baseball bat or paddled a Ping-Pong ball? If so, you know the oh-so-nice feel of the sweet spot. Connect with these prime inches of real estate and *kapow!* The collective technologies of the universe afterburn the ball into orbit, leaving you Frisbee eyed and strutting. Your arm doesn't tingle, and the ball doesn't ricochet. Your boyfriend remembers birthdays, the tax refund comes early, and the flight attendant bumps you up to first class. Life in the sweet spot rolls like the downhill side of a downwind bike ride.

But you don't have to swing a bat or a club to know this. What engineers give sports equipment, God gave you. A zone, a region, a life precinct in which you were made to dwell. He tailored the curves of your life to fit an empty space in

Ephron the son of Zohar for me, 9"that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which he has, which *is* at the end of his field. Let him give it to me at the full price, as property for a burial place among you."

10Now Ephron dwelt among the sons of Heth; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the presence of the sons of Heth, all who entered at the gate of his city, saying, 11"No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field and the cave that *is* in it; I give it to you in the presence of the sons of my people. I give it to you. Bury your dead!"

12Then Abraham bowed himself down before the people of the land; 13and he spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, "If you *will give it,* please hear me. I will give you money for the field; take *it* from me and I will bury my dead there."

14And Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him, 15"My lord, listen to me; the land *is worth* four hundred shekels of silver. What *is* that between you and me? So bury your dead." 16And Abraham listened to Ephron; and Abraham weighed out the silver for Ephron which he had named in the hearing of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, currency of the merchants.

17So the field of Ephron which *was* in Machpelah, which *was* before Mamre, the field and the cave which *was* in it, and all the trees that *were* in the field, which *were* within all the surrounding borders, were deeded 18to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the sons of Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city.

19And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre (that *is,* Hebron) in the land of Canaan. 20So the field and the cave that *is* in it were deeded to Abraham by the sons of Heth as property for a burial place.

A Bride for Isaac

24 Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. 2So Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had, "Please, put your hand under my thigh, 3and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; 4but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac."

5And the servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I take your son back to the land from which you came?"

6But Abraham said to him, "Beware that you do not take my son back there. 7The Lord God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my family, and who spoke to me and swore to me, saying, 'To your descendants[a] I give this land,' He will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. 8And if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be released from this oath; only do not take my son back there." 9So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter.

10Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed,

24:7 [a]Literally *seed*

for all his master's goods *were in* his hand. And he arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. 11And he made his camels kneel down outside the city by a well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw *water.* 12Then he said, "O Lord God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham. 13Behold, *here* I stand by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. 14Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, 'Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink'—*let* her *be the one* You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. And by this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master."

15And it happened, before he had finished speaking, that behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her pitcher on her shoulder. 16Now the young woman *was* very beautiful to behold, a virgin; no man had known her. And she went down to the well, filled her pitcher, and came up. 17And the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please let me drink a little water from your pitcher."

18So she said, "Drink, my lord." Then she quickly let her pitcher down to her hand, and gave him a drink. 19And when she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw *water* for your camels also, until they have finished drinking." 20Then she quickly emptied her pitcher into the trough, ran back to the well to draw *water,* and drew for all his camels. 21And the man, wondering at her, remained silent so as to know whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not.

22So it was, when the camels had finished drinking, that the man took a golden nose ring weighing half a shekel, and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten *shekels* of gold, 23and said, "Whose daughter *are* you? Tell me, please, is there room *in* your father's house for us to lodge?"

24So she said to him, "I *am* the daughter of Bethuel, Milcah's son, whom she bore to Nahor." 25Moreover she said to him, "We have both straw and feed enough, and room to lodge."

26Then the man bowed down his head and worshiped the Lord. 27And he said, "Blessed *be* the Lord God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His mercy and His truth toward my master. As for me, being on the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren." 28So the young woman ran and told her mother's household these things.

29Now Rebekah had a brother whose name *was* Laban, and Laban ran out to the man by the well. 30So it came to pass, when he saw the nose ring, and the bracelets on his sister's wrists, and when he heard the words of his sister Rebekah, saying, "Thus the man spoke to me," that he went to the man. And there he stood by the camels at the well. 31And he said, "Come in, O blessed of the Lord! Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house, and a place for the camels."

32Then the man came to the house. And he unloaded the camels, and provided straw and feed for the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who *were* with him. 33*Food* was set before him to eat, but he said, "I will not eat until I have told about my errand."

And he said, "Speak on."

his jigsaw puzzle. And life makes sweet sense when you find your spot. But how do you? Where do you go? What pills do you order, class do you take, or infomercial do you watch? None of the above. Simply quarry . . .

your uniqueness.

Da Vinci painted one *Mona Lisa.* Beethoven composed one Fifth Symphony. And God made one version of you. He custom designed you for a one-of-a-kind assignment. Mine like a gold digger the unique-to-you nuggets from your life. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

As you read the Bible, ask God to show you how your plans, goals, and directions conform to His will. Ask Him to reveal to you areas where you have strayed from His leading. Consult with other Christians. Ask them for help in thinking through how the Bible applies to your situation.

EXPLORATION

God's Will—Exodus 40:16; Nehemiah 9:23; Psalm 16:7, 8; Micah 6:8; Acts 21:13, 14; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 5:16–18.

34 So he said, "I *am* Abraham's servant.
35 The Lord has blessed my master greatly, and
he has become great; and He has given him
flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and
female servants, and camels and donkeys.
36 And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my
master when she was old; and to him he has
given all that he has. 37 Now my master made
me swear, saying, 'You shall not take a wife for
my son from the daughters of the Canaanites,
in whose land I dwell; 38 but you shall go to
my father's house and to my family, and take
a wife for my son.' 39 And I said to my master,
'Perhaps the woman will not follow me.' 40 But
he said to me, 'The Lord, before whom I walk,
will send His angel with you and prosper your
way; and you shall take a wife for my son from
my family and from my father's house. 41 You
will be clear from this oath when you arrive
among my family; for if they will not give *her*
to you, then you will be released from my
oath.'

42 "And this day I came to the well and said,
'O Lord God of my master Abraham, if You will
now prosper the way in which I go, 43 behold, I
stand by the well of water; and it shall come to
pass that when the virgin comes out to draw
water, and I say to her, "Please give me a little
water from your pitcher to drink," 44 and she
says to me, "Drink, and I will draw for your
camels also,"—*let* her *be* the woman whom the
Lord has appointed for my master's son.'

45 "But before I had finished speaking in my
heart, there was Rebekah, coming out with her
pitcher on her shoulder; and she went down
to the well and drew *water.* And I said to her,
'Please let me drink.' 46 And she made haste
and let her pitcher down from her *shoulder,*
and said, 'Drink, and I will give your camels a
drink also.' So I drank, and she gave the cam-
els a drink also. 47 Then I asked her, and said,
'Whose daughter *are* you?' And she said, 'The
daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Mil-
cah bore to him.' So I put the nose ring on her
nose and the bracelets on her wrists. 48 And I
bowed my head and worshiped the Lord, and
blessed the Lord God of my master Abraham,
who had led me in the way of truth to take the
daughter of my master's brother for his son.
49 Now if you will deal kindly and truly with my
master, tell me. And if not, tell me, that I may
turn to the right hand or to the left."

50 Then Laban and Bethuel answered and
said, "The thing comes from the Lord; we can-
not speak to you either bad or good. 51 Here *is*
Rebekah before you; take *her* and go, and let
her be your master's son's wife, as the Lord has
spoken."

52 And it came to pass, when Abraham's ser-
vant heard their words, that he worshiped the
Lord, *bowing himself* to the earth. 53 Then the
servant brought out jewelry of silver, jewelry of
gold, and clothing, and gave *them* to Rebekah.
He also gave precious things to her brother
and to her mother.

54 And he and the men who *were* with him
ate and drank and stayed all night. Then they
arose in the morning, and he said, "Send me
away to my master."

55 But her brother and her mother said, "Let
the young woman stay with us *a few* days, at
least ten; after that she may go."

56 And he said to them, "Do not hinder me,
since the Lord has prospered my way; send me
away so that I may go to my master."

57 So they said, "We will call the young
woman and ask her personally." 58 Then they
called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go
with this man?"

And she said, "I will go."

59 So they sent away Rebekah their sister
and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his
men. 60 And they blessed Rebekah and said
to her:

"Our sister, *may* you *become*
The mother of thousands of ten thousands;
And may your descendants possess
The gates of those who hate them."

61 Then Rebekah and her maids arose, and
they rode on the camels and followed the man.
So the servant took Rebekah and departed.

62 Now Isaac came from the way of Beer
Lahai Roi, for he dwelt in the South. 63 And
Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the
evening; and he lifted his eyes and looked, and
there, the camels *were* coming. 64 Then Re-
bekah lifted her eyes, and when she saw Isaac
she dismounted from her camel; 65 for she had
said to the servant, "Who *is* this man walking
in the field to meet us?"

The servant said, "It *is* my master." So she
took a veil and covered herself.

66 And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. 67 Then
Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent; and he took Rebekah
and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted
after his mother's *death.*

Abraham and Keturah

25 Abraham again took a wife, and her name *was* Keturah. 2 And
she bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and
Shuah. 3 Jokshan begot Sheba and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were
Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. 4 And the sons of Midian *were*
Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abidah, and Eldaah. All these *were* the chil-
dren of Keturah.

5 And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. 6 But Abraham gave
gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had; and while he
was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the
country of the east.

Abraham's Death and Burial

7 This *is* the sum of the years of Abraham's life which he lived: one
hundred and seventy-five years. 8 Then Abraham breathed his last and
died in a good old age, an old man and full *of years,* and was gathered
to his people. 9 And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave
of Machpelah, which *is* before Mamre, in the field of Ephron the son of
Zohar the Hittite, 10 the field which Abraham purchased from the sons
of Heth. There Abraham was buried, and Sarah his wife. 11 And it came
to pass, after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac.
And Isaac dwelt at Beer Lahai Roi.

The Families of Ishmael and Isaac

12 Now this *is* the genealogy of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar
the Egyptian, Sarah's maidservant, bore to Abraham. 13 And these *were*
the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their
generations: The firstborn of Ishmael, Nebajoth; then Kedar, Adbeel,
Mibsam, 14 Mishma, Dumah, Massa, 15 Hadar,[a] Tema, Jetur, Naphish,
and Kedemah. 16 These *were* the sons of Ishmael and these *were* their
names, by their towns and their settlements, twelve princes accord-
ing to their nations. 17 These *were* the years of the life of Ishmael: one
hundred and thirty-seven years; and he breathed his last and died,
and was gathered to his people. 18 (They dwelt from Havilah as far as
Shur, which *is* east of Egypt as you go toward Assyria.) He died in the
presence of all his brethren.

19 This *is* the genealogy of Isaac, Abraham's son. Abraham begot
Isaac. 20 Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah as wife, the
daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan Aram, the sister of Laban
the Syrian. 21 Now Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife, because
she *was* barren; and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife
conceived. 22 But the children struggled together within her; and she
said, "If *all is* well, why *am I like* this?" So she went to inquire of the
Lord. 23 And the Lord said to her:

25:15 [a] Masoretic Text reads *Hadad.*

Life Lessons

Genesis 25:19–34

SITUATION

Rebekah gave birth to Jacob and Esau. Before they were even born, the boys were hostile to each other. Conflict between the two intensified throughout their lives. Eventually Esau threatened to kill Jacob.

OBSERVATION

When Esau sold his rights as the firstborn son to Jacob for a bowl of vegetable soup, further dissension grew up between the brothers. Jacob later stole Esau's last remaining firstborn privilege: the blessing.

INSPIRATION

Anger. It's easy to define: the noise of the soul. *Anger.* The unseen irritant of the heart. *Anger.* The relentless invader of silence. . . .

The louder it gets the more desperate we become. . . .

Some of you are thinking, Easy for you to say, Max, sitting there in your office . . . You ought to try living with my wife. Or, You ought to have to cope with my past. Or, You ought to raise my kids. You don't know how my ex has mistreated me. You don't have any idea how hard my life has been. And you're right, I don't. But I have a very clear idea how miserable your future will be unless you deal with your anger.

X-ray the world of the vengeful and behold the tumor of bitterness: black, menacing, malignant. Carcinoma of the spirit. Its fatal fibers creep around the edge of the heart and ravage it. Yesterday you

can't alter, but your reaction to yesterday you can. The past you cannot change, but your response to your past you can. (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Anger. Does it describe how you react? Do you have a reputation for your temper? For your grudge? Are you known for desiring revenge? Ask God to help you change your response to past hurts.

EXPLORATION

Forgiving Others—Genesis 33:1–11; 45:5–15; 50:15–21; 1 Samuel 24:8–12; 26; Luke 23:33, 34; Acts 7:59, 60; 2 Timothy 4:16.

"Two nations *are* in your womb,
Two peoples shall be separated from your body;
One people shall be stronger than the other,
And the older shall serve the younger."

24 So when her days were fulfilled *for her* to give birth, indeed *there were* twins in her womb. 25 And the first came out red. *He was* like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau.[a] 26 Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob.[a] Isaac *was* sixty years old when she bore them.

27 So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. 28 And Isaac loved Esau because he ate *of his* game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Esau Sells His Birthright

29 Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he *was* weary. 30 And Esau said to Jacob, "Please feed me with that same red *stew,* for I *am* weary." Therefore his name was called Edom.[a]

31 But Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright as of this day."

32 And Esau said, "Look, I *am* about to die; so what *is* this birthright to me?"

33 Then Jacob said, "Swear to me as of this day."

So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34 And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised *his* birthright.

Isaac and Abimelech

26 There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines, in Gerar.

2 Then the Lord appeared to him and said: "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. 3 Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. 4 And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; 5 because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws."

6 So Isaac dwelt in Gerar. 7 And the men of the place asked about his wife. And he said, "She *is* my sister"; for he was afraid to say, "*She is* my wife," *because he thought,* "lest the men of the place kill me for Rebekah, because she *is* beautiful to behold." 8 Now it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked through a window, and saw, and there was Isaac, showing endearment to Rebekah his wife. 9 Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Quite obviously she *is* your wife; so how could you say, 'She *is* my sister'?"

Isaac said to him, "Because I said, 'Lest I die on account of her.' "

10 And Abimelech said, "What *is* this you have done to us? One of the people might soon have lain with your wife, and you would have

25:25 [a]Literally *Hairy* **25:26** [a]Literally *Supplanter* **25:30** [a]Literally *Red*

brought guilt on us." 11So Abimelech charged all *his* people, saying, "He who touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."

12Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the Lord blessed him. 13The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous; 14for he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants. So the Philistines envied him. 15Now the Philistines had stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, and they had filled them with earth. 16And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we."

17Then Isaac departed from there and pitched his tent in the Valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. 18And Isaac dug again the wells of water

New Life In Christ

[Isaac] said, "She is my sister"; for he was afraid to say, "She is my wife," because he thought, "lest the men of the place kill me for Rebekah, because she is beautiful to behold." —Genesis 26:7

Telling the Truth

Are you in a dilemma, wondering if you should tell the truth or not? The question to ask in such moments is, Will God bless my deceit? Will he, who hates lies, bless a strategy built on lies? Will the Lord, who loves the truth, bless the business of falsehoods? Will God honor the career of the manipulator? Will God come to the aid of the cheater? Will God bless my dishonesty?

I don't think so. Examine your heart. Ask yourself some tough questions.

Am I being completely honest with my spouse and children? Are my relationships marked by candor? What about my work or school environment? Am I honest in my dealings? Am I a trustworthy student? An honest taxpayer? A reliable witness at work?

Do you tell the truth . . . always?

If not, start today. Don't wait until tomorrow. The ripple of today's lie is tomorrow's wave and next year's flood. Start today. Be just like Jesus. Tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

Question: Are you telling the truth—the *whole* truth—to your friends and family? Is your life an open statement of truth?

For more on "New Life in Christ," see page 89.

Life Lessons

Genesis 26:1–35

SITUATION
Despite God's clear promise to Isaac, he lacked faith. But through his encounter with Abimelech Isaac learned to trust that God would protect him, provide for him, and fulfill His promise.

OBSERVATION
God protects and provides for people who follow Him. Even though we may be afraid, God's faithfulness does not waver.

INSPIRATION
Fear feels dreadful. It sucks the life out of the soul, curls us into an embryonic state, and drains us dry of contentment. We become abandoned barns, rickety and tilting from the winds, a place where humanity used to eat, thrive, and find warmth. No longer. When fear shapes our lives, safety becomes our god. When safety becomes our god, we worship the risk-free life. Can the safety lover do anything great? Can the risk-averse accomplish noble deeds? For God? For others? No. The fear-filled cannot love deeply. Love is risky. They cannot give to the poor. Benevolence has no guarantee of return. The fear-filled cannot dream wildly. What if their dreams sputter and fall from the sky? The worship of safety emasculates greatness. No wonder Jesus wages such a war against fear.

His most common command emerges from the "fear not" genre. The Gospels list some 125 Christ-issued imperatives. Of these, 21 urge us to "not be afraid" or "not fear" or "have courage" or "take

heart" or "be of good cheer." The second most common command, to love God and neighbor, appears on only eight occasions. If quantity is any indicator, Jesus takes our fears seriously. The one statement he made more than any other was this: don't be afraid. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What causes you to feel anxious? Bills? Boss? School? Work project? Pray when these situations arise. Believe that God will be faithful to you.

EXPLORATION
Trusting God—Matthew 6:33, 34; 2 Corinthians 4:16–18; Hebrews 11:1.

God follows us. He pursues us until we finally see him as our Father, even if it takes all the days of our lives.

—Max Lucado (Traveling Light)

which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham. He called them by the names which his father had called them.

19 Also Isaac's servants dug in the valley, and found a well of running water there. 20 But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water *is* ours." So he called the name of the well Esek,[a] because they quarreled with him. 21 Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that *one* also. So he called its name Sitnah.[a] 22 And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth,[a] because he said, "For now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

23 Then he went up from there to Beersheba. 24 And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, "I *am* the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I *am* with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake." 25 So he built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord, and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants dug a well.

26 Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath, one of his friends, and Phichol the commander of his army. 27 And Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, since you hate me and have sent me away from you?"

28 But they said, "We have certainly seen that the Lord is with you. So we said, 'Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us; and let us make a covenant with you, 29 that you will do us no harm, since we have not touched you, and since we have done nothing to you but good and have sent you away in peace. You *are* now the blessed of the Lord.' "

30 So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. 31 Then they arose early in the morning and swore an oath with one another; and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace.

32 It came to pass the same day that Isaac's servants came and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, "We have found water." 33 So he called it Shebah.[a] Therefore the name of the city *is* Beersheba[b] to this day.

34 When Esau was forty years old, he took as wives Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. 35 And they were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah.

Isaac Blesses Jacob

27 Now it came to pass, when Isaac was old and his eyes were so dim that he could not see, that he called Esau his older son and said to him, "My son."

And he answered him, "Here I am."

2 Then he said, "Behold now, I am old. I do not know the day of my death. 3 Now therefore, please take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me. 4 And make me savory food, such as I love, and bring *it* to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die."

26:20 [a]Literally *Quarrel* **26:21** [a]Literally *Enmity* **26:22** [a]Literally *Spaciousness*
26:33 [a]Literally *Oath* or *Seven* [b]Literally *Well of the Oath* or *Well of the Seven*

5 Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to Esau his son.
And Esau went to the field to hunt game and to bring *it.* 6 So Rebekah
spoke to Jacob her son, saying, "Indeed I heard your father speak to
Esau your brother, saying, 7 'Bring me game and make savory food for
me, that I may eat it and bless you in the presence of the Lord before
my death.' 8 Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to what
I command you. 9 Go now to the flock and bring me from there two
choice kids of the goats, and I will make savory food from them for
your father, such as he loves. 10 Then you shall take *it* to your father,
that he may eat *it,* and that he may bless you before his death."

11 And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "Look, Esau my brother
is a hairy man, and I *am* a smooth-*skinned* man. 12 Perhaps my father
will feel me, and I shall seem to be a deceiver to him; and I shall bring
a curse on myself and not a blessing."

13 But his mother said to him, "*Let* your curse *be* on me, my son;
only obey my voice, and go, get *them* for me." 14 And he went and got
them and brought *them* to his mother, and his mother made savory
food, such as his father loved. 15 Then Rebekah took the choice clothes
of her elder son Esau, which *were* with her in the house, and put them
on Jacob her younger son. 16 And she put the skins of the kids of the
goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. 17 Then she
gave the savory food and the bread, which she had prepared, into
the hand of her son Jacob.

18 So he went to his father and said, "My father."

And he said, "Here I am. Who *are* you, my son?"

19 Jacob said to his father, "I *am* Esau your firstborn; I have done
just as you told me; please arise, sit and eat of my game, that your soul
may bless me."

20 But Isaac said to his son, "How *is it* that you have found *it* so
quickly, my son?"

And he said, "Because the Lord your God brought *it* to me."

21 Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my
son, whether you *are* really my son Esau or not." 22 So Jacob went near
to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, "The voice *is* Jacob's voice,
but the hands *are* the hands of Esau." 23 And he did not recognize him,
because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he
blessed him.

24 Then he said, "*Are* you really my son Esau?"

He said, "I *am.*"

25 He said, "Bring *it* near to me, and I will eat of my son's game, so
that my soul may bless you." So he brought *it* near to him, and he ate;
and he brought him wine, and he drank. 26 Then his father Isaac said
to him, "Come near now and kiss me, my son." 27 And he came near
and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his clothing, and blessed
him and said:

"Surely, the smell of my son
Is like the smell of a field
Which the Lord has blessed.
28 Therefore may God give you
Of the dew of heaven,
Of the fatness of the earth,

Life LESSONS

Genesis 27:1—28:9

SITUATION

After Jacob obtained Esau's birthright, their mother, Rebekah, helped Jacob trick his father into giving him his brother's blessing, too.

OBSERVATION

When people choose to hurt others, God disciplines. God seeks, through His discipline, to save His children from eternal harm. He helps get us back on track.

INSPIRATION

In one of my not-so-bright moments, I entered a race that began with a 1.2-mile ocean swim. . . .

We collectively gulped as the flag above stretched straighter and the gales blew harder. Gusts were transforming the bay into a salt-crested mountain range. What's worse, the wind blew south. We were swimming north. "No problem," I coached myself. "Just swim from buoy to buoy."

Within minutes my "buoy to buoy" became "boy oh boy." This minnow stood no chance. Every time I lifted and looked, I saw nothing but the next wave. It was a disaster. For all I knew, I was swimming in circles.

Then all of a sudden help swam over me. Half a dozen swimmers made an overpass out of my body. Initially, I was aggravated. Then I realized, *They know where they are going*, and joined up. How much easier. No searching the waves for bobbing markers; just stay with the gang. So I did. We glided through the bay with dolphin confidence, logging in a good ten minutes, each

stroke bringing us closer to the end.

Then my hand slapped the rescue canoe. I stopped and looked up at the race official. One by one, my newfound water buddies swam into my back or the boat. Midwater pileup.

"Where you folks headed?" asked the canoe guy. For the first time in some time, I looked around. We were at least a quarter mile off track, right on target to reach China. We looked at each other. No one said it, but I know we all thought it. I sure did. *I thought you guys knew where we were going.*

So many swimmers couldn't be wrong, could we? Yes, we could. . . .

Ever have days like that? Days when you suddenly realize you're way off track or out of whack? God sends a rescue boat into such days. Jesus, positioned higher than the waves and enjoying a clear view of the shoreline, offers us his oversight: "Need help getting back on course?" (From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Sometimes we head our own way and God disciplines us by allowing us to face the consequences of our actions. We need to look to Him for help to find our way back to where He wants us.

EXPLORATION

God's Discipline—Psalm 94:12, 13; 119:67; Proverbs 3:11, 12; Jeremiah 46:28.

And plenty of grain and wine.
29 Let peoples serve you,
And nations bow down to you.
Be master over your brethren,
And let your mother's sons bow down to you.
Cursed *be* everyone who curses you,
And blessed *be* those who bless you!"

Esau's Lost Hope

30 Now it happened, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. 31 He also had made savory food, and brought it to his father, and said to his father, "Let my father arise and eat of his son's game, that your soul may bless me."

32 And his father Isaac said to him, "Who *are* you?"

So he said, "I *am* your son, your firstborn, Esau."

33 Then Isaac trembled exceedingly, and said, "Who? Where *is* the one who hunted game and brought *it* to me? I ate all *of it* before you came, and I have blessed him—*and* indeed he shall be blessed."

34 When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me—me also, O my father!"

35 But he said, "Your brother came with deceit and has taken away your blessing."

36 And *Esau* said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!" And he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?"

37 Then Isaac answered and said to Esau, "Indeed I have made him your master, and all his brethren I have given to him as servants; with grain and wine I have sustained him. What shall I do now for you, my son?"

38 And Esau said to his father, "Have you only one blessing, my father? Bless me—me also, O my father!" And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.

39 Then Isaac his father answered and said to him:

"Behold, your dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth,
And of the dew of heaven from above.
40 By your sword you shall live,
And you shall serve your brother;
And it shall come to pass, when you become restless,
That you shall break his yoke from your neck."

Jacob Escapes from Esau

41 So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, "The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob."

42 And the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah. So she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said to him, "Surely your brother Esau comforts himself concerning you *by intending* to kill you. 43 Now therefore, my son, obey my voice: arise, flee to my

brother Laban in Haran. 44And stay with him a few days, until your
brother's fury turns away, 45until your brother's anger turns away
from you, and he forgets what you have done to him; then I will send
and bring you from there. Why should I be bereaved also of you both
in one day?"

46And Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of the
daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, like
these *who are* the daughters of the land, what good will my life be
to me?"

28 Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him,
and said to him: "You shall not take a wife from the daughters
of Canaan. 2Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your
mother's father; and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters
of Laban your mother's brother.

3 "May God Almighty bless you,
And make you fruitful and multiply you,
That you may be an assembly of peoples;
4 And give you the blessing of Abraham,
To you and your descendants with you,
That you may inherit the land
In which you are a stranger,
Which God gave to Abraham."

5So Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Padan Aram, to Laban the
son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob
and Esau.

Esau Marries Mahalath

6Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Padan
Aram to take himself a wife from there, *and that* as he blessed him he
gave him a charge, saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daugh-
ters of Canaan," 7and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother
and had gone to Padan Aram. 8Also Esau saw that the daughters of
Canaan did not please his father Isaac. 9So Esau went to Ishmael and
took Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of
Nebajoth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had.

Jacob's Vow at Bethel

10Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran.
11So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the
sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at
his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. 12Then he dreamed,
and behold, a ladder *was* set up on the earth, and its top reached to
heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending
on it.

13And behold, the Lord stood above it and said: "I *am* the Lord
God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which
you lie I will give to you and your descendants. 14Also your descen-
dants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the
west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your
seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. 15Behold, I *am* with

Life Lessons

Genesis 28:10—30:43

SITUATION
Jacob left his home and started a four hundred-mile trip north to Haran to search for a wife. Jacob married, secured work, and had twelve sons.

OBSERVATION
Jacob's wives knew that children were one way that God blesses His people. The meaning of many of the children's names reflect this understanding: "Judah" means "praise"; "Gad" means "lucky"; "Asher" means "happy"; "Zebulun" means "honor." More than merely status symbols, these children became the patriarchs of Israel.

INSPIRATION
How are things with your kids?

Quiet heroes dot the landscape of our society. They don't wear ribbons or kiss trophies; they wear spit-up and kiss boo-boos. They don't make the headlines, but they do sew the hemlines and check the outlines and stand on the sidelines. You won't find their names on the Nobel Prize short list, but you will find their names on the homeroom, carpool, and Bible teacher lists.

They are parents, both by blood and deed, name and calendar. Heroes. News programs don't call them. But that's okay. Because their kids do . . . They call them Mom. They call them Dad. And these moms and dads, more valuable than all the executives and law-makers west of the Mississippi, quietly hold the world together.

Be numbered among them. Read books to your kids. Play ball while you can and they want you to. Make it your aim to watch every game they play, read every story they write, hear every recital in which they perform.

Children spell love with four letters: T-I-M-E. Not just quality time, but hang time, downtime, anytime, all the time. Your children are not your hobby; they are your calling. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you view children as a blessing or a hassle? What's your attitude when you hear children cry during church or when they get underfoot in the store? Catch yourself during the times when children frustrate you and remember that even the smallest children are gifts from God.

EXPLORATION

Discouragement—Deuteronomy 1:9; Joshua 1:9; 1 Samuel 1:10–18; Psalm 62:5; Proverbs 13:12; Ephesians 3:13; James 5:13–18.

you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."

16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know *it*." 17 And he was afraid and said, "How awesome *is* this place! This *is* none other than the house of God, and this *is* the gate of heaven!"

18 Then Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it. 19 And he called the name of that place Bethel;[a] but the name of that city had been Luz previously. 20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, 21 so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. 22 And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

Jacob Meets Rachel

29 So Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the East. 2 And he looked, and saw a well in the field; and behold, there *were* three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks. A large stone *was* on the well's mouth. 3 Now all the flocks would be gathered there; and they would roll the stone from the well's mouth, water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the well's mouth.

4 And Jacob said to them, "My brethren, where *are* you from?"

And they said, "We *are* from Haran."

5 Then he said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?"

And they said, "We know him."

6 So he said to them, "Is he well?"

And they said, "*He is* well. And look, his daughter Rachel is coming with the sheep."

7 Then he said, "Look, *it is* still high day; *it is* not time for the cattle to be gathered together. Water the sheep, and go and feed *them*."

8 But they said, "We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and they have rolled the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep."

9 Now while he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. 10 And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. 11 Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept. 12 And Jacob told Rachel that he *was* her father's relative and that he *was* Rebekah's son. So she ran and told her father.

13 Then it came to pass, when Laban heard the report about Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house. So he told Laban all these things. 14 And Laban said to him, "Surely you *are* my bone and my flesh." And he stayed with him for a month.

28:19 [a] Literally *House of God*

Jacob Marries Leah and Rachel

15 Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you
are my relative, should you therefore serve
me for nothing? Tell me, what *should* your
wages *be?*" 16 Now Laban had two daughters:
the name of the elder *was* Leah, and the name
of the younger *was* Rachel. 17 Leah's eyes *were*
delicate, but Rachel was beautiful of form and
appearance.

18 Now Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will
serve you seven years for Rachel your younger
daughter."

19 And Laban said, "*It is* better that I give her
to you than that I should give her to another
man. Stay with me." 20 So Jacob served seven
years for Rachel, and they seemed *only* a few
days to him because of the love he had for her.

21 Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give *me* my
wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in
to her." 22 And Laban gathered together all the
men of the place and made a feast. 23 Now it
came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah
his daughter and brought her to Jacob; and
he went in to her. 24 And Laban gave his maid
Zilpah to his daughter Leah *as* a maid. 25 So it
came to pass in the morning, that behold, it
was Leah. And he said to Laban, "What is this
you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel
that I served you? Why then have you deceived
me?"

26 And Laban said, "It must not be done so
in our country, to give the younger before the
firstborn. 27 Fulfill her week, and we will give
you this one also for the service which you will
serve with me still another seven years."

28 Then Jacob did so and fulfilled her week.
So he gave him his daughter Rachel as wife
also. 29 And Laban gave his maid Bilhah to his
daughter Rachel as a maid. 30 Then *Jacob* also
went in to Rachel, and he also loved Rachel
more than Leah. And he served with Laban
still another seven years.

The Children of Jacob

31 When the Lord saw that Leah *was* un-
loved, He opened her womb; but Rachel *was*
barren. 32 So Leah conceived and bore a son,
and she called his name Reuben; [a] for she said,
"The Lord has surely looked on my affliction.
Now therefore, my husband will love me."
33 Then she conceived again and bore a son,
and said, "Because the Lord has heard that I
am unloved, He has therefore given me this
son also." And she called his name Simeon. [a]
34 She conceived again and bore a son, and
said, "Now this time my husband will become
attached to me, because I have borne him
three sons." Therefore his name was called
Levi. [a] 35 And she conceived again and bore
a son, and said, "Now I will praise the Lord."
Therefore she called his name Judah. [a] Then
she stopped bearing.

30 Now when Rachel saw that she bore
Jacob no children, Rachel envied her
sister, and said to Jacob, "Give me children, or
else I die!"

2 And Jacob's anger was aroused against Ra-
chel, and he said, "*Am* I in the place of God,
who has withheld from you the fruit of the
womb?"

3 So she said, "Here is my maid Bilhah; go in
to her, and she will bear *a child* on my knees,
that I also may have children by her." 4 Then
she gave him Bilhah her maid as wife, and
Jacob went in to her. 5 And Bilhah conceived
and bore Jacob a son. 6 Then Rachel said, "God
has judged my case; and He has also heard
my voice and given me a son." Therefore she
called his name Dan. [a] 7 And Rachel's maid Bil-
hah conceived again and bore Jacob a second
son. 8 Then Rachel said, "With great wrestlings
I have wrestled with my sister, *and* indeed I
have prevailed." So she called his name Naph-
tali. [a]

9 When Leah saw that she had stopped
bearing, she took Zilpah her maid and gave
her to Jacob as wife. 10 And Leah's maid Zilpah
bore Jacob a son. 11 Then Leah said, "A troop
comes!" [a] So she called his name Gad. [b] 12 And
Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son.
13 Then Leah said, "I am happy, for the daugh-
ters will call me blessed." So she called his
name Asher. [a]

14 Now Reuben went in the days of wheat
harvest and found mandrakes in the field,
and brought them to his mother Leah. Then

29:32 [a]Literally *See, a Son* **29:33** [a]Literally *Heard* **29:34** [a]Literally *Attached* **29:35** [a]Literally *Praise* **30:6** [a]Literally *Judge* **30:8** [a]Literally *My Wrestling* **30:11** [a]Following Qere, Syriac, and Targum; Kethib, Septuagint, and Vulgate read *in fortune.* [b]Literally *Troop* or *Fortune* **30:13** [a]Literally *Happy*

Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me *some* of your son's mandrakes."

15 But she said to her, "*Is it* a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?"

And Rachel said, "Therefore he will lie with you tonight for your son's mandrakes."

16 When Jacob came out of the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, "You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son's mandrakes." And he lay with her that night.

17 And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. 18 Leah said, "God has given me my wages, because I have given my maid to my husband." So she called his name Issachar.[a] 19 Then Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. 20 And Leah said, "God has endowed me *with* a good endowment; now my husband will dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons." So she called his name Zebulun.[a] 21 Afterward she bore a daughter, and called her name Dinah.

22 Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. 23 And she conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my reproach." 24 So she called his name Joseph,[a] and said, "The Lord shall add to me another son."

Jacob's Agreement with Laban

25 And it came to pass, when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my country. 26 Give *me* my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me go; for you know my service which I have done for you."

27 And Laban said to him, "Please *stay,* if I have found favor in your eyes, *for* I have learned by experience that the Lord has blessed me for your sake." 28 Then he said, "Name me your wages, and I will give *it.*"

29 So *Jacob* said to him, "You know how I have served you and how your livestock has been with me. 30 For what you had before I *came was* little, and it has increased to a great amount; the Lord has blessed you since my coming. And now, when shall I also provide for my own house?"

31 So he said, "What shall I give you?"

And Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this thing for me, I will again feed and keep your flocks: 32 Let me pass through all your flock today, removing from there all the speckled and spotted sheep, and all the brown ones among the lambs, and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and *these* shall be my wages. 33 So my righteousness will answer for me in time to come, when the subject of my wages comes before you: every one that *is* not speckled and spotted among the goats, and brown among the lambs, will be considered stolen, if *it is* with me."

34 And Laban said, "Oh, that it were according to your word!" 35 So he removed that day the male goats that were speckled and spotted, all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had *some* white in it, and all the brown ones among the lambs, and gave *them* into the hand of his sons. 36 Then he put three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks.

37 Now Jacob took for himself rods of green poplar and of the almond and chestnut trees, peeled white strips in them, and exposed the white which *was* in the rods. 38 And the rods which he had peeled, he set before the flocks in the gutters, in the watering troughs where the flocks came to drink, so that they should conceive when they came to drink. 39 So the flocks conceived before the rods, and the flocks brought forth streaked, speckled, and spotted. 40 Then Jacob separated the lambs, and made the flocks face toward the streaked and all the brown in the flock of Laban; but he put his own flocks by themselves and did not put them with Laban's flock.

41 And it came to pass, whenever the stronger livestock conceived, that Jacob placed the rods before the eyes of the livestock in the gutters, that they might conceive among the rods. 42 But when the flocks were feeble, he did not put *them* in; so the feebler were Laban's and the stronger Jacob's. 43 Thus the man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks, female and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

30:18 [a]Literally *Wages* **30:20** [a]Literally *Dwelling* **30:24** [a]Literally *He Will Add*

Jacob Flees from Laban

31 Now *Jacob* heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has acquired all this wealth." 2And Jacob saw the countenance of Laban, and indeed it *was* not *favorable* toward him as before. 3Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you."

4So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field, to his flock, 5and said to them, "I see your father's countenance, that it *is* not *favorable* toward me as before; but the God of my father has been with me. 6And you know that with all my might I have served your father. 7Yet your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to hurt me. 8If he said thus: 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flocks bore speckled. And if he said thus: 'The streaked shall be your wages,' then all the flocks bore streaked. 9So God has taken away the livestock of your father and given *them* to me.

10"And it happened, at the time when the flocks conceived, that I lifted my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the rams which leaped upon the flocks *were* streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted. 11Then the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream, saying, 'Jacob.' And I said, 'Here I am.' 12And He said, 'Lift your eyes now and see, all the rams which leap on the flocks *are* streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. 13I *am* the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar *and* where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family.' "

14Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "Is there still any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? 15Are we not considered strangers by him? For he has sold us, and also completely consumed our money. 16For all these riches which God has taken from our father are *really* ours and our children's; now then, whatever God has said to you, do it."

17Then Jacob rose and set his sons and his wives on camels. 18And he carried away all his livestock and all his possessions which he had gained, his acquired livestock which he had gained in Padan Aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan. 19Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel had stolen the household idols that were her father's. 20And Jacob stole away, unknown to Laban the Syrian, in that he did not tell him that he intended to flee. 21So he fled with all that he had. He arose and crossed the river, and headed toward the mountains of Gilead.

Laban Pursues Jacob

22And Laban was told on the third day that Jacob had fled. 23Then he took his brethren with him and pursued him for seven days' journey, and he overtook him in the mountains of Gilead. 24But God had come to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said to him, "Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad."

25So Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mountains, and Laban with his brethren pitched in the mountains of Gilead.

26And Laban said to Jacob: "What have you done, that you have

Life LESSONS

Genesis 31:1—33:20

SITUATION

God commanded Jacob to return to his homeland after years of being mistreated by his father-in-law Laban. Jacob nervously prepared for his meeting with his brother, Esau, whom he'd wronged years ago. God turned Esau's heart to be reconciled with his brother.

OBSERVATION

God led Jacob through challenging trials and tests that increased his faith. Jacob realized that this deliverance from Esau's anger was of God.

INSPIRATION

A couple of weeks after I returned home [from a men's conference where I spoke on the topic of anger] I received this letter from a man named Harold Staub.

Max, Thank you so much for speaking on forgiveness at Promise Keepers in Syracuse, NY, on June 7 and 8. I was there. Just want you to know I went home, talked to my wife on many subjects about forgiveness—the best two weeks of my life. You see, she went home to be with the Lord on June 24, totally forgiven. How wonderful is his love. Thank you so very much.

When we called Harold to ask his permission to print his letter, he shared the touching details of his final days with his wife. He didn't know she was near death, nor did she. He did know, however, that some unresolved issues lay between them. Upon arriving home, he went to her, knelt before her and asked forgiveness for

anything he'd ever done. The gesture opened a floodgate of emotions and the two talked late into the night. The initial effort at reconciliation continued for two weeks. The marriage enjoyed a depth not yet known. When Harold's wife died suddenly of an embolism, he was shocked. But he was ready and now he is at peace.

What about you? Would you like some peace? Then quit giving your neighbor such a hassle. Want to enjoy God's generosity? Then let others enjoy yours. Would you like assurance that God forgives you? I think you know what you need to do. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What keeps you from reconciling with family and friends on earth? Base your ability to forgive on God's reconciling you to Himself through Jesus Christ. An inability to forgive will hinder your relationship with God and others. Take the steps that will provide you with inner peace.

EXPLORATION

Persistence—Matthew 7:7, 8; Luke 11:8; Philippians 3:12–14; Colossians 4:2.

stolen away unknown to me, and carried away my daughters like captives *taken* with the sword? 27Why did you flee away secretly, and steal away from me, and not tell me; for I might have sent you away with joy and songs, with timbrel and harp? 28And you did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters. Now you have done foolishly in *so* doing. 29It is in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.' 30And now you have surely gone because you greatly long for your father's house, *but* why did you steal my gods?"

31Then Jacob answered and said to Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I said, 'Perhaps you would take your daughters from me by force.' 32With whomever you find your gods, do not let him live. In the presence of our brethren, identify what I have of yours and take *it* with you." For Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them.

33And Laban went into Jacob's tent, into Leah's tent, and into the two maids' tents, but he did not find *them.* Then he went out of Leah's tent and entered Rachel's tent. 34Now Rachel had taken the household idols, put them in the camel's saddle, and sat on them. And Laban searched all about the tent but did not find *them.* 35And she said to her father, "Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise before you, for the manner of women *is* with me." And he searched but did not find the household idols.

36Then Jacob was angry and rebuked Laban, and Jacob answered and said to Laban: "What *is* my trespass? What *is* my sin, that you have so hotly pursued me? 37Although you have searched all my things, what part of your household things have you found? Set *it* here before my brethren and your brethren, that they may judge between us both! 38These twenty years I *have been* with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried their young, and I have not eaten the rams of your flock. 39That which was torn *by beasts* I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, *whether* stolen by day or stolen by night. 40*There* I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes. 41Thus I have been in your house twenty years; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. 42Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked *you* last night."

Laban's Covenant with Jacob

43And Laban answered and said to Jacob, "*These* daughters *are* my daughters, and *these* children *are* my children, and *this* flock *is* my flock; all that you see *is* mine. But what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne? 44Now therefore, come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me."

45So Jacob took a stone and set it up *as* a pillar. 46Then Jacob said to his brethren, "Gather stones." And they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there on the heap. 47Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha,[a]

31:47 [a]Literally, in Aramaic, *Heap of Witness*

but Jacob called it Galeed.[b] 48And Laban said, "This heap *is* a witness between you and me this day." Therefore its name was called Galeed, 49also Mizpah,[a] because he said, "May the Lord watch between you and me when we are absent one from another. 50If you afflict my daughters, or if you take *other* wives besides my daughters, *although* no man *is* with us—see, God *is* witness between you and me!"

51Then Laban said to Jacob, "Here is this heap and here is *this* pillar, which I have placed between you and me. 52This heap *is* a witness, and *this* pillar *is* a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. 53The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father judge between us." And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac. 54Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his brethren to eat bread. And they ate bread and stayed all night on the mountain. 55And early in the morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place.

Esau Comes to Meet Jacob

32 So Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. 2When Jacob saw them, he said, "This *is* God's camp." And he called the name of that place Mahanaim.[a]

3Then Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. 4And he commanded them, saying, "Speak thus to my lord Esau, 'Thus your servant Jacob says: "I have dwelt with Laban and stayed there until now. 5I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight." ' "

6Then the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and he also is coming to meet you, and four hundred men *are* with him." 7So Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that *were* with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies. 8And he said, "If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the other company which is left will escape."

9Then Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the Lord who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you': 10I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies. 11Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me *and* the mother with the children. 12For You said, 'I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.' "

13So he lodged there that same night, and took what came to his hand as a present for Esau his brother: 14two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, 15thirty milk camels with their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten foals. 16Then he delivered *them* to the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass over before me, and put some distance between successive droves." 17And he commanded the first one, saying, "When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, saying, 'To whom do you belong, and where are you going? Whose *are* these in front of you?' 18then you shall say, 'They *are* your servant Jacob's. It *is* a present sent to my lord Esau; and behold, he also *is* behind us.' " 19So he commanded the second, the third, and all who followed the droves, saying, "In this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him; 20and also say, 'Behold, your servant Jacob *is* behind us.' " For he said, "I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me." 21So the present went on over before him, but he himself lodged that night in the camp.

Wrestling with God

22And he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. 23He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had. 24Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the

31:47 [b]Literally, in Hebrew, *Heap of Witness* **31:49** [a]Literally *Watch* **32:2** [a]Literally *Double Camp*

breaking of day. 25Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. 26And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks."

But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"

27So He said to him, "What *is* your name?"

He said, "Jacob."

28And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel;[a] for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed."

29Then Jacob asked, saying, "Tell *me* Your name, I pray."

And He said, "Why *is* it *that* you ask about My name?" And He blessed him there.

30So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel:[a] "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." 31Just as he crossed over Penuel[a] the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip. 32Therefore to this day the children of Israel do not eat the muscle that shrank, which *is* on the hip socket, because He touched the socket of Jacob's hip in the muscle that shrank.

Jacob and Esau Meet

33 Now Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and there, Esau was coming, and with him were four hundred men. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two maidservants. 2And he put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children behind, and Rachel and Joseph last. 3Then he crossed over before them and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

4But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. 5And he lifted his eyes and saw the women and children, and said, "Who *are* these with you?"

So he said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." 6Then the maidservants came near, they and their children, and bowed down. 7And Leah also came near with her children, and they bowed down. Afterward Joseph and Rachel came near, and they bowed down.

8Then Esau said, "What *do* you *mean by* all this company which I met?"

And he said, "*These are* to find favor in the sight of my lord."

9But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself."

10And Jacob said, "No, please, if I have now found favor in your sight, then receive my present from my hand, inasmuch as I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God, and you were pleased with me. 11"Please, take my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough." So he urged him, and he took *it.*

12Then Esau said, "Let us take our journey; let us go, and I will go before you."

13But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children *are* weak, and the flocks and herds which are nursing *are* with me. And if the men should drive them hard one day, all the flock will die. 14Please let my lord go on ahead before his servant. I will lead on slowly at a pace which the livestock that go before me, and the children, are able to endure, until I come to my lord in Seir."

15And Esau said, "Now let me leave with you *some* of the people who *are* with me."

But he said, "What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord." 16So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. 17And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, built himself a house, and made booths for his livestock. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.[a]

Jacob Comes to Canaan

18Then Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which *is* in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan Aram; and he pitched his tent before the city. 19And he bought the parcel of land, where he had pitched his tent, from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money. 20Then he erected an altar there and called it El Elohe Israel.[a]

The Dinah Incident

34 Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went

32:28 [a]Literally *Prince with God* **32:30** [a]Literally *Face of God* **32:31** [a]Same as *Peniel,* verse 30 **33:17** [a]Literally *Booths* **33:20** [a]Literally *God, the God of Israel*

out to see the daughters of the land. 2And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her and lay with her, and violated her. 3His soul was strongly attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the young woman and spoke kindly to the young woman. 4So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, "Get me this young woman as a wife."

5And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter. Now his sons were with his livestock in the field; so Jacob held his peace until they came. 6Then Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. 7And the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard *it;* and the men were grieved and very angry, because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, a thing which ought not to be done.

8But Hamor spoke with them, saying, "The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him as a wife. 9And make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters to yourselves. 10So you shall dwell with us, and the land shall be before you. Dwell and trade in it, and acquire possessions for yourselves in it."

11Then Shechem said to her father and her brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give. 12Ask me ever so much dowry and gift, and I will give according to what you say to me; but give me the young woman as a wife."

13But the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father, and spoke deceitfully, because he had defiled Dinah their sister. 14And they said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that *would be* a reproach to us. 15But on this *condition* we will consent to you: If you will become as we *are,* if every male of you is circumcised, 16then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to us; and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people. 17But if you will not heed us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and be gone."

18And their words pleased Hamor and Shechem, Hamor's son. 19So the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he delighted in Jacob's daughter. He *was* more honorable than all the household of his father.

20And Hamor and Shechem his son came to the gate of their city, and spoke with the men of their city, saying: 21"These men *are* at peace with us. Therefore let them dwell in the land and trade in it. For indeed the land *is* large enough for them. Let us take their daughters to us as wives, and let us give them our daughters. 22Only on this *condition* will the men consent to dwell with us, to be one people: if every male among us is circumcised as they *are* circumcised. 23*Will* not their livestock, their property, and every animal of theirs *be* ours? Only let us consent to them, and they will dwell with us." 24And all who went out of the gate of his city heeded Hamor and Shechem his son; every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

25Now it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came boldly upon the city and killed all the males. 26And they killed Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah from Shechem's house, and went out. 27The

Life LESSONS

Genesis 34:1—36:43

SITUATION

Even though Shechem's rape of Dinah was wrong, Simeon and Levi overreacted and sinned. Consequently, God told Jacob to move to Bethel and Hebron.

OBSERVATION

In the middle of life's continuing problems and challenges, God reminded Jacob of his new name, Israel. Through this reminder, God shows He is faithful to His promises. God's promises set believers apart.

INSPIRATION

The forgiven who won't forgive can expect a sad fate—a life full of many bad and bitter days. . . .

Hoard hurts in your heart and expects the joy level of a Siberian death camp. A friend shared with me the fate of a hoarding grandmother. . . . She refused to part with anything. Her family witnessed two terrible consequences: she lost sleep and treasures. She couldn't rest because junk covered her bed. She lost treasures because they were obscured by mountains of trash. Jewelry, photographs, favorite books—all were hidden.

No rest. No treasures. Squirrel away your hurts and expect the same.

Or clean your house and give the day a fresh chance!

"But, Max, the hurt is so deep."

I know. They took much. Your innocence, your youth, your retirement. But why let them keep taking from you? Haven't they stolen enough? Refusing to forgive

keeps them loitering, taking still.

"But, Max, what they did was so bad."

You bet it was. Forgiveness does not mean approval. You aren't endorsing misbehavior. You are entrusting your offender to "Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

"But, Max, I've been so angry for so long."

And forgiveness won't come overnight. But you can take baby steps in the direction of grace. Forgive in phases. Quit cussing the perpetrator's name. Start praying for him. Try to understand her situation. . . .

In the end, we all choose what lives inside us.

May you choose forgiveness. (From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Have you been wronged or harmed and responded, "I'm going to get even if it's the last thing I do!" Each time you remember the hurt, consciously turn to God for His justice and comfort. When resentment enters your mind today, say a quick silent prayer: "Not a chance! God, You are my father. Take over; I'll follow."

EXPLORATION

Revenge—Judges 15; 2 Samuel 3:26–29; Matthew 5:38–45; Romans 12:17–21; 1 Peter 3:9.

sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled. 28They took their sheep, their oxen, and their donkeys, what *was* in the city and what *was* in the field, 29and all their wealth. All their little ones and their wives they took captive; and they plundered even all that *was* in the houses.

30Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I *am* few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I."

31But they said, "Should he treat our sister like a harlot?"

Jacob's Return to Bethel

35 Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother."

2And Jacob said to his household and to all who *were* with him, "Put away the foreign gods that *are* among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. 3Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone." 4So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which *were* in their hands, and the earrings which *were* in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which *was* by Shechem.

5And they journeyed, and the terror of God was upon the cities that *were* all around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. 6So Jacob came to Luz (that *is,* Bethel), which *is* in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who *were* with him. 7And he built an altar there and called the place El Bethel,[a] because there God appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother.

8Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the terebinth tree. So the name of it was called Allon Bachuth.[a]

9Then God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him. 10And God said to him, "Your name *is* Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name." So He called his name Israel. 11Also God said to him: "I *am* God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. 12The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land." 13Then God went up from him in the place where He talked with him. 14So Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He talked with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured a drink offering on it, and he poured oil on it. 15And Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke with him, Bethel.

Death of Rachel

16Then they journeyed from Bethel. And when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel labored *in childbirth,* and she had hard labor. 17Now it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that

35:7 [a]Literally *God of the House of God* **35:8** [a]Literally *Terebinth of Weeping*

the midwife said to her, "Do not fear; you will have this son also." 18And so it was, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-Oni;[a] but his father called him Benjamin.[b] 19So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that *is,* Bethlehem). 20And Jacob set a pillar on her grave, which *is* the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day.

21Then Israel journeyed and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder. 22And it happened, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard *about it.*

Jacob's Twelve Sons

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve: 23the sons of Leah *were* Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun; 24the sons of Rachel *were* Joseph and Benjamin; 25the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant, *were* Dan and Naphtali; 26and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maidservant, *were* Gad and Asher. These *were* the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Padan Aram.

Death of Isaac

27Then Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kirjath Arba[a] (that *is,* Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had dwelt. 28Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years. 29So Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, *being* old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

The Family of Esau

36 Now this *is* the genealogy of Esau, who is Edom. 2Esau took his wives from the daughters of Canaan: Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite; Aholibamah the daughter of Anah, the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite; 3and Basemath, Ishmael's daughter, sister of Nebajoth. 4Now Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau, and Basemath bore Reuel. 5And Aholibamah bore Jeush, Jaalam, and Korah. These *were* the sons of Esau who were born to him in the land of Canaan.

6Then Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the persons of his household, his cattle and all his animals, and all his goods which he had gained in the land of Canaan, and went to a country away from the presence of his brother Jacob. 7For their possessions were too great for them to dwell together, and the land where they were strangers could not support them because of their livestock. 8So Esau dwelt in Mount Seir. Esau *is* Edom.

9And this *is* the genealogy of Esau the father of the Edomites in Mount Seir. 10These *were* the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz the son of Adah the wife of Esau, and Reuel the son of Basemath the wife of Esau. 11And the sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho,[a] Gatam, and Kenaz.

12Now Timna was the concubine of Eliphaz, Esau's son, and she bore Amalek to Eliphaz. These *were* the sons of Adah, Esau's wife.

13These *were* the sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. These were the sons of Basemath, Esau's wife.

14These were the sons of Aholibamah, Esau's wife, the daughter of Anah, the daughter of Zibeon. And she bore to Esau: Jeush, Jaalam, and Korah.

The Chiefs of Edom

15These *were* the chiefs of the sons of Esau. The sons of Eliphaz, the firstborn *son* of Esau, were Chief Teman, Chief Omar, Chief Zepho, Chief Kenaz, 16Chief Korah,[a] Chief Gatam, *and* Chief Amalek. These *were* the chiefs of Eliphaz in the land of Edom. They *were* the sons of Adah.

17These *were* the sons of Reuel, Esau's son: Chief Nahath, Chief Zerah, Chief Shammah, and Chief Mizzah. These *were* the chiefs of Reuel in the land of Edom. These *were* the sons of Basemath, Esau's wife.

18And these *were* the sons of Aholibamah, Esau's wife: Chief Jeush, Chief Jaalam, and Chief Korah. These *were* the chiefs *who descended* from Aholibamah, Esau's wife, the daughter of Anah. 19These *were* the sons of Esau, who is Edom, and these *were* their chiefs.

The Sons of Seir

20These *were* the sons of Seir the Horite who inhabited the land: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon,

35:18 [a]Literally *Son of My Sorrow* [b]Literally *Son of the Right Hand* **35:27** [a]Literally *Town of Arba* **36:11** [a]Spelled *Zephi* in 1 Chronicles 1:36 **36:16** [a]Samaritan Pentateuch omits *Chief Korah.*

Anah, 21 Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. These *were* the chiefs of the Horites, the sons of Seir, in the land of Edom.

22 And the sons of Lotan were Hori and Hemam.[a] Lotan's sister *was* Timna.

23 These *were* the sons of Shobal: Alvan,[a] Manahath, Ebal, Shepho,[b] and Onam.

24 These *were* the sons of Zibeon: both Ajah and Anah. This *was the* Anah who found the water[a] in the wilderness as he pastured the donkeys of his father Zibeon. 25 These *were* the children of Anah: Dishon and Aholibamah the daughter of Anah.

26 These *were* the sons of Dishon:[a] Hemdan,[b] Eshban, Ithran, and Cheran. 27 These *were* the sons of Ezer: Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan.[a] 28 These *were* the sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran.

29 These *were* the chiefs of the Horites: Chief Lotan, Chief Shobal, Chief Zibeon, Chief Anah, 30 Chief Dishon, Chief Ezer, and Chief Dishan. These *were* the chiefs of the Horites, according to their chiefs in the land of Seir.

The Kings of Edom

31 Now these *were* the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the children of Israel: 32 Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom, and the name of his city *was* Dinhabah. 33 And when Bela died, Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his place. 34 When Jobab died, Husham of the land of the Temanites reigned in his place. 35 And when Husham died, Hadad the son of Bedad, who attacked Midian in the field of Moab, reigned in his place. And the name of his city *was* Avith. 36 When Hadad died, Samlah of Masrekah reigned in his place. 37 And when Samlah died, Saul of Rehoboth-*by*-the-River reigned in his place. 38 When Saul died, Baal-Hanan the son of Achbor reigned in his place. 39 And when Baal-Hanan the son of Achbor died, Hadar[a] reigned in his place; and the name of his city *was* Pau.[b] His wife's name *was* Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, the daughter of Mezahab.

The Chiefs of Esau

40 And these *were* the names of the chiefs of Esau, according to their families and their places, by their names: Chief Timnah, Chief Alvah,[a] Chief Jetheth, 41 Chief Aholibamah, Chief Elah, Chief Pinon, 42 Chief Kenaz, Chief Teman, Chief Mibzar, 43 Chief Magdiel, and Chief Iram. These *were* the chiefs of Edom, according to their dwelling places in the land of their possession. Esau *was* the father of the Edomites.

Joseph Dreams of Greatness

37 Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. 2 This *is* the history of Jacob.

36:22 [a]Spelled *Homam* in 1 Chronicles 1:39 **36:23** [a]Spelled *Alian* in 1 Chronicles 1:40 [b]Spelled *Shephi* in 1 Chronicles 1:40 **36:24** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate (*hot springs*); Septuagint reads *Jamin;* Targum reads *mighty men;* Talmud interprets as *mules.* **36:26** [a]Hebrew *Dishan* [b]Spelled *Hamran* in 1 Chronicles 1:41 **36:27** [a]Spelled *Jaakan* in 1 Chronicles 1:42 **36:39** [a]Spelled *Hadad* in Samaritan Pentateuch, Syriac, and 1 Chronicles 1:50 [b]Spelled *Pai* in 1 Chronicles 1:50 **36:40** [a]Spelled *Aliah* in 1 Chronicles 1:51

Life Lessons

Genesis 37:1–36

SITUATION

Joseph, naïve and boastful, told his brothers of a dream that portrayed his superiority. Worse, his father Jacob showed him favoritism by giving Joseph a special robe. His brothers were jealous of him and plotted to kill him. But Reuben and Judah rescued Joseph, who was sold as a slave instead.

OBSERVATION

Although we don't want to admit it, we are by nature self-centered and self-serving. Even a cursory glance at the local newspaper reveals how jealousy can lead to death. We see these motives at work in the world all around us.

INSPIRATION

Resting at the end of this trail of thoughts is the deadly briefcase of envy. . . .

Who is his victim? Anyone who has more than he has. More karats, more horsepower, more office space, more church members. Jealousy sets her crosshairs on the one who has more. "You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2).

Honestly, Max, I would never do that. I would never kill.

With a rifle, maybe not. But with your tongue? With your glare? Your gossip? Jealousy, informs Proverbs 6:34, will make you furious. Are your sights set on someone? If so, be careful; jealousy "is rottenness

Joseph, *being* seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. And the lad *was* with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father.

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he *was* the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of *many* colors. 4 But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.

5 Now Joseph had a dream, and he told *it* to his brothers; and they hated him even more. 6 So he said to them, "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: 7 There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf."

8 And his brothers said to him, "Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

9 Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, "Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me."

10 So he told *it* to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What *is* this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?" 11 And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter *in mind.*

Joseph Sold by His Brothers

12 Then his brothers went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. 13 And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers feeding *the flock* in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them."

So he said to him, "Here I am."

14 Then he said to him, "Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks, and bring back word to me." So he sent him out of the Valley of Hebron, and he went to Shechem.

15 Now a certain man found him, and there he was, wandering in the field. And the man asked him, saying, "What are you seeking?"

16 So he said, "I am seeking my brothers. Please tell me where they are feeding *their flocks.*"

17 And the man said, "They have departed from here, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.' " So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan.

18 Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him. 19 Then they said to one another, "Look, this dreamer is coming! 20 Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, 'Some wild beast has devoured him.' We shall see what will become of his dreams!"

21 But Reuben heard *it,* and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, "Let us not kill him." 22 And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood, *but* cast him into this pit which *is* in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him"—that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father.

23 So it came to pass, when Joseph had come to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph *of* his tunic, the tunic of *many* colors that *was*

to the bones" (Proverbs 14:30).

Need a deterrent for envy? An antidote for jealousy? . . . Rather than bemoan what you don't have, rejoice in the abundant cup you do. "My cup overflows with blessings" (Psalm 23:5, NLT) . . .

The last thing we need to worry about is not having enough. Our cup overflows with blessings.

Let me ask a question—a crucial question. If focusing on our diminishing items leads to envy, what would happen if we focused on the unending items? If awareness of what we don't have creates jealousy, is it possible that an awareness of our abundance will lead to contentment? Let's give it a try and see what happens. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Take an inventory of what you don't have that is causing you jealousy or envy. Then ask yourself if that item is really a necessity or a luxury. Next, take an inventory of what you *do* have. Ask God to give you a heart of thanksgiving that will lead to contentment.

EXPLORATION

God's Mysterious Actions—Esther 4—8; Job 1—3; 42; Jonah 1—4; Philippians 1; Hebrews 11—12.

Grudges

Grudge is one of those words that defines itself. Its very sound betrays its meaning. Say it slowly: "Grr-uuuud-ge."

It starts with a growl. "Grr . . . " Like a bear with bad breath coming out of hibernation or a mangy mongrel defending his bone in an alley. "Grr . . . ."

Being near a resentful person and petting a growling dog are equally enjoyable.

Don't you just love being next to people who are nursing a grudge? Isn't it a delight to listen to them sing their songs of woe? They are so optimistic! They are so full of hope. They are bubbling with life.

You know better. You know as well as I that if they are bubbling with anything, it is anger. And if they are full of anything, it is poisonous barbs of condemnation for all the people who have hurt them. Grudge bearers and angry animals are a lot alike. Both are irritable. Both are explosive. Both can be rabid. Someone needs to make a sign that can be worn around the neck of the resentful: "Beware of the Grrrrrrudge Bearer."

Add an M to the second part of the word, and you see what grudge bearers throw. Mud. It's not enough to accuse; the other person's character must be attacked. It's insufficient to point a finger; a rifle must be aimed. Slander is slung. Names are called. Circles are drawn. Walls are built. And enemies are made . . . .

Is this the way you are coping with your hurts?

Study Guide

Read Genesis 37:3–20

- In what ways has your life been affected by grudges?
- Describe the anatomy of a grudge. How do they come about?
- Think about a time that you held a grudge against someone. What changed about you during that time?
- How can a grudge, if unchecked, lead to even more serious sins?
- How do grudges affect your relationship with God?
- In what ways do you need God's help to deal with a grudge in your life, either in you or against you?
- What does it feel like to be on the receiving end of a grudge?
- What does it feel like to be grudge-free?

on him. 24Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit *was* empty; *there was* no water in it.

25And they sat down to eat a meal. Then they lifted their eyes and looked, and there was a company of Ishmaelites, coming from Gilead with their camels, bearing spices, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry *them* down to Egypt. 26So Judah said to his brothers, "What profit *is there* if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? 27Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he *is* our brother *and* our flesh." And his brothers listened. 28Then Midianite traders passed by; so *the brothers* pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty *shekels* of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

29Then Reuben returned to the pit, and indeed Joseph *was* not in the pit; and he tore his clothes. 30And he returned to his brothers and said, "The lad *is* no *more;* and I, where shall I go?"

31So they took Joseph's tunic, killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the tunic in the blood. 32Then they sent the tunic of *many* colors, and they brought *it* to their father and said, "We have found this. Do you know whether it *is* your son's tunic or not?"

33And he recognized it and said, "*It is* my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces." 34Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days. 35And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, "For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning." Thus his father wept for him.

36Now the Midianites[a] had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh *and* captain of the guard.

Judah and Tamar

38 It came to pass at that time that Judah departed from his brothers, and visited a certain Adullamite whose name *was* Hirah. 2And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name *was* Shua, and he married her and went in to her. 3So she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. 4She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. 5And she conceived yet again and bore a son, and called his name Shelah. He was at Chezib when she bore him.

6Then Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name *was* Tamar. 7But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord killed him. 8And Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and marry her, and raise up an heir to your brother." 9But Onan knew that the heir would not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in to his brother's wife, that he emitted on the ground, lest he should give an heir to his brother. 10And the thing which he did displeased the Lord; therefore He killed him also.

11Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house till my son Shelah is grown." For he said, "Lest he also die like his brothers." And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house.

12Now in the process of time the daughter of Shua, Judah's wife, died; and Judah was comforted, and went up to his sheepshearers

37:36 [a]Masoretic Text reads *Medanites.*

Life Lessons

Genesis 38:1–30

SITUATION
Onan and Judah shirked their moral responsibilities to produce a child by Tamar and preserve her husband's line.

OBSERVATION
Trusting God is critical—especially when it is difficult to do so. Sometimes trusting in God's help and timing seems to fight against our own interests and aspirations. Still, obeying and trusting God yields His blessing.

INSPIRATION
Some of my friends saw an example of God's perfect timing during a trip to Natal, Brazil. They were conducting a children's seminar at a delightful congregation called Refugio da Graca. The church is situated five minutes from a tall bridge that has become infamous for suicide attempts. So many people have taken their lives by jumping from the structure that the church held a prayer vigil specifically for the bridge. Their prayers saw fruit when my friends were walking past at the very moment a woman was about to jump. She had climbed over the railing and was only a step from death. With much persuasion and effort, they talked her back from the ledge and saved her life.

Remarkably, their walk across the bridge was not in their original plan. They had been eating lunch at a restaurant and needed to return to the church building for the afternoon session. But the person scheduled to pick them up

was late; hence, they chose to walk back. Their host was tardy, but God was right on time.

Isn't he always? He sends help at the hour we need it.

You don't have wisdom for tomorrow's problems. But you will tomorrow. You don't have resources for tomorrow's needs. But you will tomorrow. You don't have courage for tomorrow's challenges. But you will when tomorrow comes.

. . . God meets daily needs daily and miraculously. He did then, he does still, and he will for you. (From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you waiting patiently for God to work out his loving plan? Instead of trying to "make things happen," trust God's timing and submit your dreams to him.

EXPLORATION

Relying on God—Psalm 32:10; 37:3; Proverbs 3:5; John 14:1; Romans 9:33.

God does everything just right and on time, but people can never completely understand what he is doing.

—Max Lucado (A Gentle Thunder)

at Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. 13And it was told Tamar, saying, "Look, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep." 14So she took off her widow's garments, covered *herself* with a veil and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place which *was* on the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given to him as a wife. 15When Judah saw her, he thought she *was* a harlot, because she had covered her face. 16Then he turned to her by the way, and said, "Please let me come in to you"; for he did not know that she *was* his daughter-in-law.

So she said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?"

17And he said, "I will send a young goat from the flock."

So she said, "Will you give *me* a pledge till you send *it*?"

18Then he said, "What pledge shall I give you?" So she said, "Your signet and cord, and your staff that *is* in your hand." Then he gave *them* to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him. 19So she arose and went away, and laid aside her veil and put on the garments of her widowhood.

20And Judah sent the young goat by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive *his* pledge from the woman's hand, but he did not find her. 21Then he asked the men of that place, saying, "Where is the harlot who *was* openly by the roadside?"

And they said, "There was no harlot in this *place*."

22So he returned to Judah and said, "I cannot find her. Also, the men of the place said there was no harlot in this *place*."

23Then Judah said, "Let her take *them* for herself, lest we be shamed; for I sent this young goat and you have not found her."

24And it came to pass, about three months after, that Judah was told, saying, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot; furthermore she *is* with child by harlotry."

So Judah said, "Bring her out and let her be burned!"

25When she *was* brought out, she sent to her father-in-law, saying, "By the man to whom these belong, I *am* with child." And she said, "Please determine whose these *are*—the signet and cord, and staff."

26So Judah acknowledged *them* and said, "She has been more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son." And he never knew her again.

27Now it came to pass, at the time for giving birth, that behold, twins *were* in her womb. 28And so it was, when she was giving birth, that *the one* put out *his* hand; and the midwife took a scarlet *thread* and bound it on his hand, saying, "This one came out first." 29Then it happened, as he drew back his hand, that his brother came out unexpectedly; and she said, "How did you break through? *This* breach *be* upon you!" Therefore his name was called Perez.[a] 30Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet *thread* on his hand. And his name was called Zerah.

Joseph a Slave in Egypt

39 Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. And Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him down there. 2The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house

38:29 [a]Literally *Breach* or *Breakthrough*

of his master the Egyptian. 3And his master saw that the Lord *was* with him and that the Lord made all he did to prosper in his hand. 4So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all *that* he had he put under his authority. 5So it was, from the time *that* he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had in the house and in the field. 6Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

7And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me."

8But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what *is* with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. 9*There is* no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you *are* his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

10So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her *or* to be with her.

11But it happened about this time, when Joseph went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the house *was* inside, 12that she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. 13And so it was, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and fled outside, 14that she called to the men of her house and spoke to them, saying, "See, he has brought in to us a Hebrew to mock us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. 15And it happened, when he heard that I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me, and fled and went outside."

16So she kept his garment with her until his master came home. 17Then she spoke to him with words like these, saying, "The Hebrew servant whom you brought to us came in to me to mock me; 18so it happened, as I lifted my voice and cried out, that he left his garment with me and fled outside."

19So it was, when his master heard the words which his wife spoke to him, saying, "Your servant did to me after this manner," that his anger was aroused. 20Then Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners *were* confined. And he was there in the prison. 21But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. 22And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who *were* in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing. 23The keeper of the prison did not look into anything *that was* under *Joseph's* authority,[a] because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made *it* prosper.

The Prisoners' Dreams

40 It came to pass after these things *that* the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt. 2And

39:23 [a]Literally *his hand*

Life Lessons

Genesis 39:1—40:23

SITUATION

Even though Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, God used the situation to bless Joseph. First, an Egyptian officer entrusted his household to Joseph. When Joseph rejected the sexual advances of the officer's wife, she falsely accused Joseph of rape and had him jailed. Again, even in prison, God developed Joseph's character.

OBSERVATION

In order to experience God's power, leaders must often endure hardship. Then they emerge to make their contribution.

INSPIRATION

Turn a deaf ear to the old voices.

Open a wide eye to the new choices.

Who knows, you may be a prayer away from a *nevertheless.* God loves to give them.

He gave one to Pete. Remember him? Speak-now-and-think-later Pete? God released Satan's stronghold on his tongue. For proof, read Peter's Pentecost sermon in Acts 2. God turned impetuous Peter into the apostle Peter (Luke 22:54–62).

And Joe, the failure? Fired by his family. Jailed by his employer . . . Can Jobless Joe ever amount to anything? Joseph did. He became prime minister of Egypt (Genesis 37–50).

What about the five-time divorcée? The woman whom men discarded, Jesus discipled. Last report had her introducing her entire village to Christ. The

Samaritan woman was Jesus' first missionary (John 4:1–42). Further proof that "God's mighty weapons . . . knock down the Devil's strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4 NLT).

Peter stuck his foot in his mouth.

Joseph was imprisoned in Egypt.

The Samaritan woman had been married five times.

Jesus was dead in the grave . . .

Nevertheless, Peter preached, Joseph ruled, the woman shared, Jesus rose—and you?

You fill in the blank. Your *nevertheless* awaits you. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God often develops leaders through humility and suffering. If you have a position of leadership, realize that suffering and success both come with the job. Both build character and ability. Take heart in the examples of Joseph and Jesus, two leaders who rose above suffering to lead and to love. Accept your problems today as opportunities for growth.

EXPLORATION

God's Presence at All Times—Genesis 28:15; Exodus 33:14; Deuteronomy 20:1; Isaiah 43:2; Matthew 18:20; 28:20.

Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief butler and the chief baker. 3So he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison, the place where Joseph *was* confined. 4And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them; so they were in custody for a while.

5Then the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, who *were* confined in the prison, had a dream, both of them, each man's dream in one night *and* each man's dream with its *own* interpretation. 6And Joseph came in to them in the morning and looked at them, and saw that they *were* sad. 7So he asked Pharaoh's officers who *were* with him in the custody of his lord's house, saying, "Why do you look *so* sad today?"

8And they said to him, "We each have had a dream, and *there is* no interpreter of it."

So Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell *them* to me, please."

9Then the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, "Behold, in my dream a vine *was* before me, 10and in the vine *were* three branches; it *was* as though it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and its clusters brought forth ripe grapes. 11Then Pharaoh's cup *was* in my hand; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand."

12And Joseph said to him, "This *is* the interpretation of it: The three branches *are* three days. 13Now within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your place, and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand according to the former manner, when you were his butler. 14But remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to Pharaoh, and get me out of this house. 15For indeed I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and also I have done nothing here that they should put me into the dungeon."

16When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said to Joseph, "I also *was* in my dream, and there *were* three white baskets on my head. 17In the uppermost basket *were* all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, and the birds ate them out of the basket on my head."

18So Joseph answered and said, "This *is* the interpretation of it: The three baskets *are* three days. 19Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head from you and hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh from you."

20Now it came to pass on the third day, *which was* Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants; and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants. 21Then he restored the chief butler to his butlership again, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand. 22But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them. 23Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

Pharaoh's Dreams

41 Then it came to pass, at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh had a dream; and behold, he stood by the river. 2Suddenly there came up out of the river seven cows, fine looking and fat; and

they fed in the meadow. 3Then behold, seven other cows came up after them out of the river, ugly and gaunt, and stood by the *other* cows on the bank of the river. 4And the ugly and gaunt cows ate up the seven fine looking and fat cows. So Pharaoh awoke. 5He slept and dreamed a second time; and suddenly seven heads of grain came up on one stalk, plump and good. 6Then behold, seven thin heads, blighted by the east wind, sprang up after them. 7And the seven thin heads devoured the seven plump and full heads. So Pharaoh awoke, and indeed, *it was* a dream. 8Now it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but *there was* no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh.

9Then the chief butler spoke to Pharaoh, saying: "I remember my faults this day. 10When Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, *both* me and the chief baker, 11we each had a dream in one night, he and I. Each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his *own* dream. 12Now there *was* a young Hebrew man with us there, a servant of the captain of the guard. And we told him, and he interpreted our dreams for us; to each man he interpreted according to his *own* dream. 13And it came to pass, just as he interpreted for us, so it happened. He restored me to my office, and he hanged him."

14Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him quickly out of the dungeon; and he shaved, changed his clothing, and came to Pharaoh. 15And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and *there is* no one who can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you *that* you can understand a dream, to interpret it."

16So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "*It is* not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace."

17Then Pharaoh said to Joseph: "Behold, in my dream I stood on the bank of the river. 18Suddenly seven cows came up out of the river, fine looking and fat; and they fed in the meadow. 19Then behold, seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and gaunt, such ugliness as I have never seen in all the land of Egypt. 20And the gaunt and ugly cows ate up the first seven, the fat cows. 21When they had eaten them up, no one would have known that they had eaten them, for they *were* just as ugly as at the beginning. So I awoke. 22Also I saw in my dream, and suddenly seven heads came up on one stalk, full and good. 23Then behold, seven heads, withered, thin, *and* blighted by the east wind, sprang up after them. 24And the thin heads devoured the seven good heads. So I told *this* to the magicians, but *there was* no one who could explain *it* to me."

25Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh *are* one; God has shown Pharaoh what He *is* about to do: 26The seven good cows *are* seven years, and the seven good heads *are* seven years; the dreams *are* one. 27And the seven thin and ugly cows which came up after them *are* seven years, and the seven empty heads blighted by the east wind are seven years of famine. 28This *is* the thing which I have spoken to Pharaoh. God has shown Pharaoh what He *is* about to do. 29Indeed seven years of great plenty will come throughout all the land of Egypt; 30but after them seven years of famine will arise, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine

Life Lessons

Genesis 41:1–57

SITUATION
The chief officer finally remembered that Joseph was able to interpret dreams. Joseph not only interpreted the king's dream, but he also advised Pharaoh how to plan for the upcoming years of famine. As a result, he became the second in command (v. 40).

OBSERVATION
Joseph had spent thirteen years in slavery, probably wondering if he would ever be able to get out. Sometimes God's plans differ from ours.

INSPIRATION
This is how Jesus chose to view the storm that came his way: necessary turbulence in the plan of God. Where others saw gray skies, Jesus saw a divine order. His suffering was necessary to fulfill prophecy, and his sacrifice was necessary to fulfill the law.

Wouldn't you love to have a hope-filled heart? Wouldn't you love to see the world through the eyes of Jesus? Where we see unanswered prayer, Jesus saw answered prayer. Where we see the absence of God, Jesus saw the plan of God. Note especially [Matthew 26] verse 53: "Do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?" Of all the treasures Jesus saw in the trash, this is most significant. He saw his father. He saw his father's presence in the problem. Twelve armies of angels were within his sight.

Sure, Max, but Jesus

was God. He could see the unseen. He had eyes for heaven and a vision for the supernatural. I can't see the way he saw.

Not yet maybe, but don't underestimate God's power. He can change the way you look at life. . . .

God never promises to remove us from our struggles. He does promise, however, to change the way we look at them. The apostle Paul dedicates a paragraph to listing trash bags: troubles, problems, sufferings, hunger, nakedness, danger, and violent death. These are the very dumpsters of difficulty we hope to escape. Paul, however, states their value. "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:35–37). We'd prefer another preposition. We'd opt for "*apart* from all these things," or, "*away* from all these things," or even, "*without* all these things." But Paul says, "*in*" all these things. The solution is not to avoid trouble but to change the way we see our troubles.

God can correct your vision. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you need to change the way you look at your problems? Try to look at them from God's perspective and divine order. Thank God that He is always present with you!

EXPLORATION

Dreams/Visions—Deuteronomy 18:21, 22; Daniel 2:26–30; Matthew 1:20–24; Acts 10:1–20.

will deplete the land. 31So the plenty will not be known in the land because of the famine following, for it *will be* very severe. 32And the dream was repeated to Pharaoh twice because the thing *is* established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

33"Now therefore, let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt. 34Let Pharaoh do *this,* and let him appoint officers over the land, to collect one-fifth *of the produce* of the land of Egypt in the seven plentiful years. 35And let them gather all the food of those good years that are coming, and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. 36Then that food shall be as a reserve for the land for the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land may not perish during the famine."

Joseph's Rise to Power

37So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. 38And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find *such a one* as this, a man in whom *is* the Spirit of God?"

39Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, *there is* no one as discerning and wise as you. 40You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you." 41And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt."

42Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. 43And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, "Bow the knee!" So he set him over all the land of Egypt. 44Pharaoh also said to Joseph, "I *am* Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." 45And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-Paaneah. And he gave him as a wife Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On. So Joseph went out over *all* the land of Egypt.

46Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt. 47Now in the seven plentiful years the ground brought forth abundantly. 48So he gathered up all the food of the seven years which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities; he laid up in every city the food of the fields which surrounded them. 49Joseph gathered very much grain, as the sand of the sea, until he stopped counting, for *it was* immeasurable.

50And to Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On, bore to him. 51Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: [a] "For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house." 52And the name of the second he called Ephraim: [a] "For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction."

53Then the seven years of plenty which were in the land of Egypt ended, 54and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had

41:51 [a]Literally *Making Forgetful* **41:52** [a]Literally *Fruitfulness*

said. The famine was in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. 55So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do." 56The famine was over all the face of the earth, and Joseph opened all the storehouses[a] and sold to the Egyptians. And the famine became severe in the land of Egypt. 57So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy *grain,* because the famine was severe in all lands.

Joseph's Brothers Go to Egypt

42 When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?" 2And he said, "Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die."

3So Joseph's ten brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. 4But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, "Lest some calamity befall him." 5And the sons of Israel went to buy *grain* among those who journeyed, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

6Now Joseph *was* governor over the land; and it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed down before him with *their* faces to the earth. 7Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he acted as a stranger to them and spoke roughly to them. Then he said to them, "Where do you come from?"

And they said, "From the land of Canaan to buy food."

8So Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. 9Then Joseph remembered the dreams which he had dreamed about them, and said to them, "You *are* spies! You have come to see the nakedness of the land!"

10And they said to him, "No, my lord, but your servants have come to buy food. 11We *are* all one man's sons; we *are* honest *men;* your servants are not spies."

12But he said to them, "No, but you have come to see the nakedness of the land."

13And they said, "Your servants *are* twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and in fact, the youngest *is* with our father today, and one *is* no more."

14But Joseph said to them, "It *is* as I spoke to you, saying, 'You *are* spies!' 15In this *manner* you shall be tested: By the life of Pharaoh, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. 16Send one of you, and let him bring your brother; and you shall be kept in prison, that your words may be tested to see whether *there is* any truth in you; or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you *are* spies!" 17So he put them all together in prison three days.

18Then Joseph said to them the third day, "Do this and live, *for* I fear God: 19If you *are* honest *men,* let one of your brothers be confined to your prison house; but you, go and carry grain for the famine of your houses. 20And bring your youngest brother to me; so your words will be verified, and you shall not die."

And they did so. 21Then they said to one another, "We *are* truly

41:56 [a]Literally *all that was in them*

Life Lessons

Genesis 42:1—43:34

SITUATION
Severe famine afflicted Palestine. But under Joseph's guidance, Egypt stored enough food for itself and other nations. Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy food.

OBSERVATION
Joseph's brothers bowed before him in submission, fulfilling the dream God had given Joseph many years before. God's Word always comes true.

INSPIRATION
Abraham, or Abram as he was known at the time, was finding God's promises about as easy to swallow as a chicken bone. The promise? That his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. The problem? No son. "No problem," came God's response.

Abram looked over at his wife Sarah as she shuffled by in her gown and slippers with the aid of a walker. The chicken bone stuck for a few minutes but eventually slid down his throat.

Just as he was turning away to invite Sarah to a candlelight dinner he heard promise number two.

"Abram."

"Yes, Lord."

"All this land will be yours."

Imagine God telling you that your children will someday own Fifth Avenue, and you will understand Abram's hesitation.

"On that one, Father, I need a little help."

And a little help was given.

It's a curious scene.

Twilight. The sky is a soft blue ceiling with starry

diamonds. The air is cool. The animals in the pasture are quiet. The trees are silhouettes. Abram dozes under a tree. His sleep is fitful.

It's as if God is allowing Abram's doubt to run its course. In his dreams Abram is forced to face the lunacy of it all. The voices of doubt speak convincingly.

How do I know God is with me?

What if this is all a hoax?

How do you know that is God who is speaking?

The thick and dreadful darkness of doubt. . . .

God had told Abram to take three animals, cut them in half, and arrange the halves facing each other. To us the command is mysterious. To Abram, it wasn't. He'd seen the ceremony before. He'd participated in it. He'd sealed many covenants by walking through the divided carcasses and stating, "May what has happened to these animals happen also to me if I fail to uphold my word."

That is why his heart must have skipped a beat when he saw the lights in the darkness passing between the carcasses. The soft golden glow from the coals in the fire pot and the courageous flames from the torch. What did they mean?

The invisible God had drawn near to make his immovable promise. "To your descendants I give this land."

And though God's people often forgot their God, God didn't forget them. He kept his word. The land became theirs.

God didn't give up. He never gives up. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Study the Bible to find God's promises to you. Thank God for each one you find. Let

guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us."

22 And Reuben answered them, saying, "Did I not speak to you, saying, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us." 23 But they did not know that Joseph understood *them,* for he spoke to them through an interpreter. 24 And he turned himself away from them and wept. Then he returned to them again, and talked with them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: Restorer of Hope

Your Shepherd knows that you were not made for this place. He knows you are not equipped for this place. So he has come to guide you out.

He has come to restore your soul. He is the perfect one to do so.

He has the right vision. . . . He also has the right direction. . . . But most of all, he is the right person, for he is our God. Who knows the jungle better than the One who made it? And who knows the pitfalls of the path better than the One who has walked it? . . . So rather than give us an answer, Jesus gives us a far greater gift. He gives us himself.

Does he remove the jungle? No, the vegetation is still thick.

Does he purge the predators? No, danger still lurks.

Jesus doesn't give us hope by changing the jungle; he restores our hope by giving us himself. And he promised to stay until the very end. "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

We need that reminder. We all need that reminder. For all of us need hope. . . .

And though you don't need your hope restored today, you may tomorrow. And you need to know to whom to turn.

Or perhaps you do need hope today. You know you were not made for this place. You know you are not equipped. You want someone to lead you out.

If so, call out for your Shepherd. He knows your voice. And he's just waiting for your request. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 91.

The Brothers Return to Canaan

25 Then Joseph gave a command to fill their sacks with grain, to restore every man's money to his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. Thus he did for them. 26 So they loaded their donkeys with the grain and departed from there. 27 But as one *of them* opened his sack to give his donkey feed at the encampment, he saw his money; and there it was, in the mouth of his sack. 28 So he said to his brothers, "My money has been restored, and there it is, in my sack!" Then their hearts failed *them* and they were afraid, saying to one another, "What *is* this *that* God has done to us?"

29 Then they went to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan and told him all that had happened to them, saying: 30 "The man *who is* lord of the land spoke roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country. 31 But we said to him, 'We *are* honest *men;* we are not spies. 32 We *are* twelve brothers, sons of our father; one *is* no *more,* and the youngest *is* with our father this day in the land of Canaan.' 33 Then the man, the lord of the country, said to us, 'By this I will know that you *are* honest *men:* Leave one of your brothers *here* with me, take *food for* the famine of your households, and be gone. 34 And bring your youngest brother to me; so I shall know that you *are* not spies, but *that* you *are* honest *men.* I will grant your brother to you, and you may trade in the land.' "

35 Then it happened as they emptied their sacks, that surprisingly each man's bundle of money *was* in his sack; and when they and their father saw the bundles of money, they were afraid. 36 And Jacob their father said to them, "You have bereaved me: Joseph is no *more,* Simeon is no *more,* and you want to take Benjamin. All these things are against me."

37 Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, "Kill my two sons if I do not bring him *back* to you; put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you."

38 But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is left alone. If any calamity should befall him along the way in which you go, then you would bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave."

Joseph's Brothers Return with Benjamin

43 Now the famine *was* severe in the land. 2 And it came to pass, when they had eaten up the grain which they had brought from Egypt, that their father said to them, "Go back, buy us a little food."

3 But Judah spoke to him, saying, "The man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother *is* with you.' 4 If you send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. 5 But if you will not send *him,* we will not go down; for the man said to us, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother *is* with you.' "

6 And Israel said, "Why did you deal *so* wrongfully with me *as* to tell the man whether you had still *another* brother?"

7 But they said, "The man asked us pointedly about ourselves and our family, saying, '*Is* your father still alive? Have you *another* brother?' And we told him according to these words. Could we possibly have known that he would say, 'Bring your brother down'?"

8 Then Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the lad with me, and

the promises teach you that God never gives up on you. God stands faithfully behind His promises. Let your faith increase!

EXPLORATION
Promises Fulfilled—Joshua 21:43–45; 1 Kings 8:20–24; Hebrews 6:13–15; 11:11; 2 Peter 3:8–10.

we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you *and* also our little ones. 9I myself will be surety for him; from my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him *back* to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. 10For if we had not lingered, surely by now we would have returned this second time."

11And their father Israel said to them, "If *it must be* so, then do this: Take some of the best fruits of the land in your vessels and carry down a present for the man—a little balm and a little honey, spices and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. 12Take double money in your hand, and take back in your hand the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks; perhaps it was an oversight. 13Take your brother also, and arise, go back to the man. 14And may God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release your other brother and Benjamin. If I am bereaved, I am bereaved!"

15So the men took that present and Benjamin, and they took double money in their hand, and arose and went down to Egypt; and they stood before Joseph. 16When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Take *these* men to my home, and slaughter an animal and make ready; for *these* men will dine with me at noon." 17Then the man did as Joseph ordered, and the man brought the men into Joseph's house.

18Now the men were afraid because they were brought into Joseph's house; and they said, "*It is* because of the money, which was returned in our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may make a case against us and seize us, to take us as slaves with our donkeys."

19When they drew near to the steward of Joseph's house, they talked with him at the door of the house, 20and said, "O sir, we indeed came down the first time to buy food; 21but it happened, when we came to the encampment, that we opened our sacks, and there, *each* man's money *was* in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight; so we have brought it back in our hand. 22And we have brought down other money in our hands to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks."

23But he said, "Peace *be* with you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money." Then he brought Simeon out to them.

24So the man brought the men into Joseph's house and gave *them* water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their donkeys feed. 25Then they made the present ready for Joseph's coming at noon, for they heard that they would eat bread there.

26And when Joseph came home, they brought him the present which *was* in their hand into the house, and bowed down before him to the earth. 27Then he asked them about *their* well-being, and said, "*Is* your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? *Is* he still alive?"

28And they answered, "Your servant our father *is* in good health; he *is* still alive." And they bowed their heads down and prostrated themselves.

29Then he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, "*Is* this your younger brother of whom you spoke to me?" And he said, "God be gracious to you, my son." 30Now his heart yearned for his brother; so Joseph made haste and sought *somewhere* to weep. And he went into *his* chamber and wept there. 31Then he washed his face and came out; and he restrained himself, and said, "Serve the bread."

32So they set him a place by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves; because the Egyptians could not eat food with the Hebrews, for that *is* an abomination to the Egyptians. 33And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth; and the men looked in astonishment at one another. 34Then he took servings to them from before him, but Benjamin's serving was five times as much as any of theirs. So they drank and were merry with him.

Joseph's Cup

44 And he commanded the steward of his house, saying, "Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money in the mouth of his sack. 2Also put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, and his grain money." So he did according to the word that Joseph had

spoken. 3As soon as the morning dawned, the men were sent away, they and their donkeys. 4When they had gone out of the city, *and* were not *yet* far off, Joseph said to his steward, "Get up, follow the men; and when you overtake them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid evil for good? 5*Is* not this *the one* from which my lord drinks, and with which he indeed practices divination? You have done evil in so doing.' "

6So he overtook them, and he spoke to them these same words. 7And they said to him, "Why does my lord say these words? Far be it from us that your servants should do such a thing. 8Look, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan the money which we found in the mouth of our sacks. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? 9With whomever of your servants it is found, let him die, and we also will be my lord's slaves."

10And he said, "Now also *let* it *be* according to your words; he with whom it is found shall be my slave, and you shall be blameless." 11Then each man speedily let down his sack to the ground, and each opened his sack. 12So he searched. He began with the oldest and left off with the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. 13Then they tore their clothes, and each man loaded his donkey and returned to the city.

14So Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, and he *was* still there; and they fell before him on the ground. 15And Joseph said to them, "What deed *is* this you have done? Did you not know that such a man as I can certainly practice divination?"

16Then Judah said, "What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants; here we are, my lord's slaves, both we and *he* also with whom the cup was found."

17But he said, "Far be it from me that I should do so; the man in whose hand the cup was found, he shall be my slave. And as for you, go up in peace to your father."

Judah Intercedes for Benjamin

18Then Judah came near to him and said: "O my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord's hearing, and do not let your anger burn against your servant; for you *are* even like Pharaoh. 19"My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father or a brother?' 20And we said to my lord, 'We have a father, an old man, and a child of *his* old age, *who is* young; his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him.' 21Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.' 22And we said to my lord, 'The lad cannot leave his father, for *if* he should leave his father, *his father* would die.' 23But you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more.'

24"So it was, when we went up to your servant my father, that we told him the words of my lord. 25And our father said, 'Go back *and* buy us a little food.' 26But we said, 'We cannot go down; if our youngest brother is with us, then we will go down; for we may not see the man's face unless our youngest brother *is* with us.' 27Then your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons; 28and the one went out from me, and I said, "Surely he is torn to pieces"; and I

Life Lessons

Genesis 44:1—45:28

SITUATION

Joseph tested his brothers' sincerity before he revealed himself to them. He realized that they were genuinely sorry for their sinful plot to get rid of him.

OBSERVATION

Joseph exemplified God's forgiveness. We, too, must learn not to harbor a grudge.

INSPIRATION

Our Savior kneels down and gazes upon the darkest acts of our lives. But rather than recoil in horror, he reaches out in kindness and says, "I can clean that if you want." And from the basin of his grace, he scoops a palm full of mercy and washes away our sin.

But that's not all he does. Because he lives in us, you and I can do the same. Because he has forgiven us, we can forgive others. Because he has a forgiving heart, we can have a forgiving heart. We can have a heart like his.

"If I then, **your** Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:14, 15).

Jesus washes our feet for two reasons. The first is to give us mercy; the second is to give us a message, and that message is simply this: Jesus offers unconditional grace; we are to offer unconditional grace. The mercy of Christ preceded our mistakes; our mercy must precede the mistakes of others. Those in the circle of Christ had no doubt of

his love; those in our circles should have no doubts about ours.

What does it mean to have a heart like his? It means to kneel as Jesus knelt, touching the grimy parts of the people we are stuck with and washing away their unkindnesses with kindness. Or as Paul wrote, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

"But, Max," you are saying, "I've done nothing wrong. I'm not the one who cheated. I'm not the one who lied. I'm not the guilty party here." Perhaps you aren't. But neither was Jesus. Of all the men in that room, only one was worthy of having his feet washed. And he was the one who washed the feet. The one worthy of being served, served others. The genius of Jesus' example is that the burden of bridge-building falls on the strong one, not on the weak one. The one who is innocent is the one who makes the gesture.

And you know what happens? More often than not, if the one in the right volunteers to wash the feet of the one in the wrong, both parties get on their knees. Don't we all think we are right? Hence we wash each other's feet.

Please understand. Relationships don't thrive because the guilty are punished but because the innocent are merciful. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What person seems impossible for you to forgive? What keeps you from fully forgiving the one who hurt you? God's love outweighs any harmful experience. Will you obey God and forgive?

have not seen him since. 29But if you take this one also from me, and calamity befalls him, you shall bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave.'

30"Now therefore, when I come to your servant my father, and the lad *is* not with us, since his life is bound up in the lad's life, 31it will happen, when he sees that the lad *is* not *with us,* that he will die. So your servants will bring down the gray hair of your servant our father with sorrow to the grave. 32For your servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him *back* to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father forever.' 33Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the lad as a slave to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brothers. 34For how shall I go up to my father if the lad *is* not with me, lest perhaps I see the evil that would come upon my father?"

Joseph Revealed to His Brothers

45 Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Make everyone go out from me!" So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard *it.*

3Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I *am* Joseph; does my father still live?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. 4And Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come near to me." So they came near. Then he said: "I *am* Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. 5But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6For these two years the famine *has been* in the land, and *there are* still five years in which *there will be* neither plowing nor harvesting. 7And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. 8So now *it was* not you *who* sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

9"Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph: "God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry. 10You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children's children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. 11There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for *there are* still five years of famine." '

12"And behold, your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that *it is* my mouth that speaks to you. 13So you shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen; and you shall hurry and bring my father down here."

14Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. 15Moreover he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that his brothers talked with him.

16Now the report of it was heard in Pharaoh's house, saying, "Joseph's brothers have come." So it pleased Pharaoh and his servants well. 17And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: Load your animals and depart; go to the land of Canaan. 18Bring your father and

your households and come to me; I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you will eat the fat of the land. 19Now you are commanded—do this: Take carts out of the land of Egypt for your little ones and your wives; bring your father and come. 20Also do not be concerned about your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt *is* yours.' "

21Then the sons of Israel did so; and Joseph gave them carts, according to the command of Pharaoh, and he gave them provisions for the journey. 22He gave to all of them, to each man, changes of garments; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred *pieces* of silver and five changes of garments. 23And he sent to his father these *things:* ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and food for his father for the journey. 24So he sent his brothers away, and they departed; and he said to them, "See that you do not become troubled along the way."

25Then they went up out of Egypt, and came to the land of Canaan to Jacob their father. 26And they told him, saying, "Joseph *is* still alive, and he *is* governor over all the land of Egypt." And Jacob's heart stood still, because he did not believe them. 27But when they told him all the words which Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived. 28Then Israel said, "*It is* enough. Joseph my son *is* still alive. I will go and see him before I die."

Jacob's Journey to Egypt

46 So Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. 2Then God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night, and said, "Jacob, Jacob!"

And he said, "Here I am."

3So He said, "I *am* God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. 4I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up *again;* and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes."

5Then Jacob arose from Beersheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob, their little ones, and their wives, in the carts which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. 6So they took their livestock and their goods, which they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and went to Egypt, Jacob and all his descendants with him. 7His sons and his sons' sons, his daughters and his sons' daughters, and all his descendants he brought with him to Egypt.

8Now these *were* the names of the children of Israel, Jacob and his sons, who went to Egypt: Reuben *was* Jacob's firstborn. 9The sons of Reuben *were* Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. 10The sons of Simeon *were* Jemuel,[a] Jamin, Ohad, Jachin,[b] Zohar,[c] and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman. 11The sons of Levi *were* Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. 12The sons of Judah *were* Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah (but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan). The sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. 13The sons of Issachar *were* Tola, Puvah,[a] Job,[b]

46:10 [a]Spelled *Nemuel* in 1 Chronicles 4:24 [b]Called *Jarib* in 1 Chronicles 4:24 [c]Called *Zerah* in 1 Chronicles 4:24 **46:13** [a]Spelled *Puah* in 1 Chronicles 7:1 [b]Same as *Jashub* in Numbers 26:24 and 1 Chronicles 7:1

EXPLORATION
Forgiveness—Hosea 3:1, 2; Matthew 18:21–35; Luke 15:11–32; Romans 5:8.

It isn't the circumstance that matters; it is God in the circumstance. It isn't the words; it is God speaking them.

—Max Lucado (A Gentle Thunder)

Life Lessons

Genesis 46:1—47:27

SITUATION
At the invitation of Joseph, Jacob and his family moved to Egypt. When they settled, Joseph arranged for them to receive the best land for their herds.

OBSERVATION
Jacob was reassured that God would not abandon him in Egypt. Yes, he was going to a foreign land with people who did not understand or know God. But God's reassuring words reminded Jacob that no matter where he went, God remained with him. The same is true for us. No matter what difficulty we face, God remains a faithful friend.

INSPIRATION
God occupies the only seat on the supreme court of heaven. He wears the robe and refuses to share the gavel. For this reason Paul wrote, "Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. 'I'll do the judging,' says God. 'I'll take care of it'" (Romans 12:19 MSG).

Revenge removes God from the equation. Vigilantes displace and replace God. "I'm not sure you can handle this one, Lord. You may punish too little or too slowly. I'll take this matter into my hands, thank you."

Is this what you want to say? Jesus didn't. No one had a clearer sense of right and wrong than the perfect Son of God. Yet, "when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed **Himself** to Him

and Shimron. 14The sons of Zebulun *were* Sered, Elon, and Jahleel. 15These *were* the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Padan Aram, with his daughter Dinah. All the persons, his sons and his daughters, *were* thirty-three.

16The sons of Gad *were* Ziphion,[a] Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon,[b] Eri, Arodi,[c] and Areli. 17The sons of Asher *were* Jimnah, Ishuah, Isui, Beriah, and Serah, their sister. And the sons of Beriah *were* Heber and Malchiel. 18These *were* the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter; and these she bore to Jacob: sixteen persons.

19The sons of Rachel, Jacob's wife, *were* Joseph and Benjamin. 20And to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On, bore to him. 21The sons of Benjamin *were* Belah, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim,[a] and Ard. 22These *were* the sons of Rachel, who were born to Jacob: fourteen persons in all.

23The son of Dan *was* Hushim.[a] 24The sons of Naphtali *were* Jahzeel,[a] Guni, Jezer, and Shillem.[b] 25These *were* the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to Rachel his daughter, and she bore these to Jacob: seven persons in all.

26All the persons who went with Jacob to Egypt, who came from his body, besides Jacob's sons' wives, *were* sixty-six persons in all. 27And the sons of Joseph who were born to him in Egypt *were* two persons. All the persons of the house of Jacob who went to Egypt were seventy.

Jacob Settles in Goshen

28Then he sent Judah before him to Joseph, to point out before him *the way* to Goshen. And they came to the land of Goshen. 29So Joseph made ready his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; and he presented himself to him, and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while.

30And Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face, because you *are* still alive."

31Then Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and say to him, 'My brothers and those of my father's house, who *were* in the land of Canaan, have come to me. 32And the men *are* shepherds, for their occupation has been to feed livestock; and they have brought their flocks, their herds, and all that they have.' 33So it shall be, when Pharaoh calls you and says, 'What is your occupation?' 34that you shall say, 'Your servants' occupation has been with livestock from our youth even till now, both we *and* also our fathers,' that you may dwell in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd *is* an abomination to the Egyptians."

47 Then Joseph went and told Pharaoh, and said, "My father and my brothers, their flocks and their herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan; and indeed they *are* in the land of Goshen." 2And he took five men from among his brothers and presented them to Pharaoh. 3Then Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What *is* your occupation?"

46:16 [a]Spelled *Zephon* in Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, and Numbers 26:15 [b]Called *Ozni* in Numbers 26:16 [c]Spelled *Arod* in Numbers 26:17 **46:21** [a]Called *Hupham* in Numbers 26:39 **46:23** [a]Called *Shuham* in Numbers 26:42
46:24 [a]Spelled *Jahziel* in 1 Chronicles 7:13 [b]Spelled *Shallum* in 1 Chronicles 7:13

And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants *are* shepherds, both we *and* also our fathers." 4And they said to Pharaoh, "We have come to dwell in the land, because your servants have no pasture for their flocks, for the famine *is* severe in the land of Canaan. Now therefore, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen."

5Then Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, saying, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. 6The land of Egypt *is* before you. Have your father and brothers dwell in the best of the land; let them dwell in the land of Goshen. And if you know *any* competent men among them, then make them chief herdsmen over my livestock."

7Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob and set him before Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. 8Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How old *are* you?"

9And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage *are* one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage." 10So Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh.

11And Joseph situated his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. 12Then Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with bread, according to the number in *their* families.

Joseph Deals with the Famine

13Now *there was* no bread in all the land; for the famine *was* very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. 14And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, for the grain which they bought; and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house.

15So when the money failed in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, "Give us bread, for why should we die in your presence? For the money has failed."

16Then Joseph said, "Give your livestock, and I will give you *bread* for your livestock, if the money is gone." 17So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them bread *in exchange* for the horses, the flocks, the cattle of the herds, and for the donkeys. Thus he fed them with bread *in exchange* for all their livestock that year.

18When that year had ended, they came to him the next year and said to him, "We will not hide from my lord that our money is gone; my lord also has our herds of livestock. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our lands. 19Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants of Pharaoh; give *us* seed, that we may live and not die, that the land may not be desolate."

20Then Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for every man of the Egyptians sold his field, because the famine was severe upon them. So the land became Pharaoh's. 21And as for the people, he moved them into the cities,[a] from *one* end of the borders of Egypt

47:21 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, and Vulgate read *made the people virtual slaves.*

who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

Only God assesses accurate judgments. We impose punishments too slight or severe. God dispenses perfect justice. Vengeance is his job. Leave your enemies in God's hands. You're not endorsing their misbehavior when you do. You can hate what someone did without letting hatred consume you. Forgiveness is not excusing. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Have you been treated poorly? Have people hurt you? Take a page from Joseph and let God take care of it. He is with you; His presence will care for you. You can let it go.

EXPLORATION

God's Presence—Genesis 28:15; Exodus 33:14; Psalm 16:8; 145:18; Isaiah 43:2.

to the *other* end. 22Only the land of the priests he did not buy; for the priests had rations *allotted to them* by Pharaoh, and they ate their rations which Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their lands.

23Then Joseph said to the people, "Indeed I have bought you and your land this day for Pharaoh. Look, *here is* seed for you, and you shall sow the land. 24And it shall come to pass in the harvest that you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh. Four-fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and for your food, for those of your households and as food for your little ones."

25So they said, "You have saved our lives; let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's servants." 26And Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt to this day, *that* Pharaoh should have one-fifth, except for the land of the priests only, *which* did not become Pharaoh's.

Joseph's Vow to Jacob

27So Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions there and grew and multiplied exceedingly. 28And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the length of Jacob's life was one hundred and forty-seven years. 29When the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "Now if I have found favor in your sight, please put your hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me. Please do not bury me in Egypt, 30but let me lie with my fathers; you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place."

And he said, "I will do as you have said."

31Then he said, "Swear to me." And he swore to him. So Israel bowed himself on the head of the bed.

Jacob Blesses Joseph's Sons

48 Now it came to pass after these things that Joseph was told, "Indeed your father *is* sick"; and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. 2And Jacob was told, "Look, your son Joseph is coming to you"; and Israel strengthened himself and sat up on the bed. 3Then Jacob said to Joseph: "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, 4and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you *as* an everlasting possession.' 5And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, *are* mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. 6Your offspring whom you beget after them shall be yours; they will be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance. 7But as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died beside me in the land of Canaan on the way, when *there was* but a little distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)."

8Then Israel saw Joseph's sons, and said, "Who *are* these?"

9Joseph said to his father, "They *are* my sons, whom God has given me in this *place*." And he said, "Please bring them to me, and I will bless them." 10Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, *so that* he could not see. Then Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed

Life Lessons

Genesis 47:28—48:22

SITUATION

Jacob was ill and near death, so Joseph brought his two sons—Jacob's grandchildren—to the family patriarch for a formal blessing.

OBSERVATION

Jewish patriarchs blessed their children. This action models how parents should appreciate their children today. Parents should communicate each child's high value and special strengths.

INSPIRATION

In order to reach the destination, we have to say no to some requests.

Can you imagine the outcome if a parent honored each request of each child during a trip? We'd inch our bloated bellies from one ice-cream store to the next. Our priority would be popcorn and our itinerary would read like a fast-food menu. "Go to the Cherry Malt and make a right. Head north until you find the Chili Cheeseburger. Stay north for 1,300 calories and bear left at the Giant Pizza. When you see the two-for-one Chili Dog Special, take the Pepto-Bismol Turnpike east for five convenience stores. At the sixth toilet . . . "

Can you imagine the chaos if a parent indulged every indulgence?

Can you imagine the chaos if God indulged each of ours?

No is a necessary word to take on a trip. Destination has to reign over Dairy Deluxe Ice Cream Sundae.

"For God has not

them and embraced them. 11And Israel said to Joseph, "I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!"

12So Joseph brought them from beside his knees, and he bowed down with his face to the earth. 13And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought *them* near him. 14Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid *it* on Ephraim's head, who *was* the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh *was* the firstborn. 15And he blessed Joseph, and said:

"God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,
The God who has fed me all my life long to this day,
16 The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil,
Bless the lads;
Let my name be named upon them,
And the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac;
And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."

17Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. 18And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this *one is* the firstborn; put your right hand on his head."

19But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations."

20So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will bless, saying, 'May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!' " And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh.

21Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers. 22"Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow."

Jacob's Last Words to His Sons

49 And Jacob called his sons and said, "Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days:

2 "Gather together and hear, you sons of Jacob,
And listen to Israel your father.

3 "Reuben, you are my firstborn,
My might and the beginning of my strength,
The excellency of dignity and the excellency of power.
4 Unstable as water, you shall not excel,
Because you went up to your father's bed;
Then you defiled *it*—
He went up to my couch.

destined us [italics mine] to the terrors of judgment, but to the full attainment of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" [1 Thessalonians 5:9, NEB].

Note God's destiny for your life. Salvation.

God's overarching desire is that you reach that destiny. His itinerary includes stops that encourage your journey. He frowns on stops that deter you. When his sovereign plan and your earthly plan collide, a decision must be made. Who's in charge of this journey?

If God must choose between your earthly satisfaction and your heavenly salvation, which do you hope he chooses?

Me, too. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Given the significance of the blessing in Jewish homes, consider how you could extend the blessing to your children—and their children—so that they grow up convinced of God's steadfast love. Begin this week with meaningful touch, spoken words, and symbolic gestures that say, "I love you."

EXPLORATION

Blessing Children—Genesis 12:2, 3; 27:1–41; 49:1–28; Deuteronomy 21:15–17; Mark 10:13–16; Romans 9:6–13.

Life Lessons

Genesis 49:1–33

SITUATION
In previous chapters Joseph played an instrumental role in saving Egypt from the famine. In the process he revealed his identity to his brothers and called his father to join them in Egypt. As the entire family was reunited, Jacob delivered a final blessing to each of his sons.

OBSERVATION
Jacob reflected upon the lives of his sons and described what they could expect in the future.

INSPIRATION
Parents, we can do this. We can be loyal advocates, stubborn intercessors. We can take our parenting fears to Christ. In fact, if we don't, we'll take our fears out on our kids. Fear turns some parents into paranoid prison guards who monitor every minute, check the background of every friend. They stifle growth and communicate distrust. A family with no breathing room suffocates a child.

On the other hand, fear can also create permissive parents. For fear that their child will feel too confined or fenced in, they lower all boundaries. High on hugs and low on discipline. They don't realize that appropriate discipline is an expression of love. Permissive parents. Paranoid parents. How can we avoid the extremes? We pray. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Write a letter or note to someone you love. Tell that person a story of what God is doing in your life. Express

5 "Simeon and Levi *are* brothers;
Instruments of cruelty *are in* their dwelling place.
6 Let not my soul enter their council;
Let not my honor be united to their assembly;
For in their anger they slew a man,
And in their self-will they hamstrung an ox.
7 Cursed *be* their anger, for *it is* fierce;
And their wrath, for it is cruel!
I will divide them in Jacob
And scatter them in Israel.

8 "Judah, you *are he* whom your brothers shall praise;
Your hand *shall be* on the neck of your enemies;
Your father's children shall bow down before you.
9 Judah *is* a lion's whelp;
From the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He bows down, he lies down as a lion;
And as a lion, who shall rouse him?
10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes;
And to Him *shall be* the obedience of the people.
11 Binding his donkey to the vine,
And his donkey's colt to the choice vine,
He washed his garments in wine,
And his clothes in the blood of grapes.
12 His eyes *are* darker than wine,
And his teeth whiter than milk.

13 "Zebulun shall dwell by the haven of the sea;
He *shall become* a haven for ships,
And his border shall adjoin Sidon.

14 "Issachar is a strong donkey,
Lying down between two burdens;
15 He saw that rest *was* good,
And that the land *was* pleasant;
He bowed his shoulder to bear *a burden,*
And became a band of slaves.

16 "Dan shall judge his people
As one of the tribes of Israel.
17 Dan shall be a serpent by the way,
A viper by the path,
That bites the horse's heels
So that its rider shall fall backward.
18 I have waited for your salvation, O Lord!

19 "Gad, a troop shall tramp upon him,
But he shall triumph at last.

20 "Bread from Asher *shall be* rich,

And he shall yield royal dainties.

21 "Naphtali *is* a deer let loose;
He uses beautiful words.

22 "Joseph *is* a fruitful bough,
A fruitful bough by a well;
His branches run over the wall.
23 The archers have bitterly grieved him,
Shot *at him* and hated him.
24 But his bow remained in strength,
And the arms of his hands were made strong
By the hands of the Mighty *God* of Jacob
(From there *is* the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),
25 By the God of your father who will help you,
And by the Almighty who will bless you
With blessings of heaven above,
Blessings of the deep that lies beneath,
Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.
26 The blessings of your father
Have excelled the blessings of my ancestors,
Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.
They shall be on the head of Joseph,
And on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers.

27 "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;
In the morning he shall devour the prey,
And at night he shall divide the spoil."

28 All these *are* the twelve tribes of Israel, and this *is* what their father spoke to them. And he blessed them; he blessed each one according to his own blessing.

Jacob's Death and Burial

29 Then he charged them and said to them: "I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that *is* in the field of Ephron the Hittite, 30 in the cave that *is* in the field of Machpelah, which *is* before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite as a possession for a burial place. 31 There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah. 32 The field and the cave that *is* there *were* purchased from the sons of Heth." 33 And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

50 Then Joseph fell on his father's face, and wept over him, and kissed him. 2 And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel. 3 Forty days were required for him, for such are the days required for those who are embalmed; and the Egyptians mourned for him seventy days.

4 Now when the days of his mourning were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, "If now I have found favor in your

appreciation for what that person has done in your life.

EXPLORATION
Blessings—Genesis 27:25–29; Deuteronomy 33; Joshua 14:13. Teaching Children—Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:6–9; Psalm 78:5–7; Proverbs 22:6; Isaiah 28:9.

Life Lessons

Genesis 50:1–26

SITUATION
Jacob died. Joseph mourned. His brothers feared Joseph's long smothered revenge would break out upon them. But Joseph forgave.

OBSERVATION
We face obstacles every day. We can have confidence, though, that through every struggle, God will help and guide us.

INSPIRATION
Judgment is God's job.

Revenge is irreverent.

Joseph understands that. Rather than get even, he reveals his identity and has his father and the rest of the family brought to Egypt.

But then Jacob dies and the moment of truth comes. The brothers go to Joseph and plead for mercy.

"Before your father died he commanded, saying . . . 'Please forgive the trespass of your brothers'" (Genesis 50:16, 17).

Joseph's response? "Joseph wept" (v. 17). "What more do I have to do?" his tears implore. "I've given you a home. I've provided for your families. Why do you still mistrust my grace?"

May I restate the obvious? Revenge belongs to God!

Why? The answer is found in the second part of Joseph's statement: "You meant evil against me; **but** God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as **it is** this day, to save many people alive" (v. 20).

Forgiveness comes easier with a wide-angle lens. Joseph uses one to get the whole picture.

It always helps to see the

eyes, please speak in the hearing of Pharaoh, saying, [5] 'My father made me swear, saying, "Behold, I am dying; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me." Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father, and I will come back.' "

[6] And Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear."

[7] So Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, [8] as well as all the house of Joseph, his brothers, and his father's house. Only their little ones, their flocks, and their herds they left in the land of Goshen. [9] And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen, and it was a very great gathering.

[10] Then they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which *is* beyond the Jordan, and they mourned there with a great and very solemn lamentation. He observed seven days of mourning for his father. [11] And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "This *is* a deep mourning of the Egyptians." Therefore its name was called Abel Mizraim, [a] which *is* beyond the Jordan.

[12] So his sons did for him just as he had commanded them. [13] For his sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite as property for a burial place. [14] And after he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers and all who went up with him to bury his father.

Joseph Reassures His Brothers

[15] When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him." [16] So they sent *messengers* to Joseph, saying, "Before your father died he commanded, saying, [17] 'Thus you shall say to Joseph: "I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you." ' Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

[18] Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold, we *are* your servants."

[19] Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for *am* I in the place of God? [20] But as for you, you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive. [21] Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Death of Joseph

[22] So Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he and his father's household. And Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. [23] Joseph saw Ephraim's children to the third *generation*. The children of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were also brought up on Joseph's knees.

[24] And Joseph said to his brethren, "I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore

50:11 [a] Literally *Mourning of Egypt*

to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." 25Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." 26So Joseph died, *being* one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

big picture. (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

To forgive, what rights must you give up? What sense of personal revenge must you release to God's control? Put these feelings behind you. Be like Joseph . . . forgive!

EXPLORATION

Forgiveness—Psalm 103:12; Matthew 6:14, 15; Romans 12:17–21; Hebrews 10:17; 1 John 1:9.

THE BOOK OF

EXODUS

INTRODUCTION

What follows is the greatest scene in the Book of Exodus.

Risky claim, you say? Exodus is one startling scene after another. Burning bushes, dividing seas, manna falling, quail scampering. The plagues, the slaves, the king of Egypt, and the fire. How could they be ranked?

Do we dare isolate one moment as the greatest?

Yes, we do.

We turn to the Hebrew slaves and stand silently as they perform an act of faith. A brush is dipped into a bowl of lamb's blood and streaked over the doorpost. Do it, they were told, and the angel of death will pass over. They obeyed. And death took an alternate route.

That's the peak of Exodus. Exodus is a book of deliverance. Liberation from slavery. The blood on the doorpost reminds us, however, that it wasn't Moses who set them free. It was God. The blood on the doorpost reminds us of blood smeared on another post.

Blood of another lamb.

The Lamb of God.

Because of His blood, we, too, are free.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Moses

Date Written: c. 1500 B.C.

Key Themes:

- Within a worst case scenario, God raised up Moses, leader of the Hebrews.
- Against the king of Egypt and his armies, God prevailed.
- God cared for His people and provided for their needs.
- God provided the Ten Commandments so that His people would know how to live in relationship with Him and each other.

Key Verse:

"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine" (Exodus 19:5).

Contents:

I. God Brings His People Out of Egypt 1:1—14:31

II. The Hebrews' Journey 15:1—19:25

III. God Gives His Laws 20:1—23:33

IV. God Explains Worship in the Holy Tent 24:1—40:38

Israel's Suffering in Egypt

Now these *are* the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt; each man and his household came with Jacob: 2Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah; 3Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin; 4Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. 5All those who were descendants[a] of Jacob were seventy[b] persons (for Joseph was in Egypt *already*). 6And Joseph died, all his brothers, and all that generation. 7But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them.

8Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. 9And he said to his people, "Look, the people of the children of Israel *are* more and mightier than we; 10come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and *so* go up out of the land." 11Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses. 12But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel. 13So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. 14And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve *was* with rigor.

15Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of one *was* Shiphrah and the name of the other Puah; 16and he said, "When you do the duties of a midwife for the Hebrew women, and see *them* on the birthstools, if it *is* a son, then you shall kill him; but if it *is* a daughter, then she shall live." 17But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive. 18So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing, and saved the male children alive?"

19And the midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women *are* not like the Egyptian women; for they *are* lively and give birth before the midwives come to them."

20Therefore God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and grew very mighty. 21And so it was, because the midwives feared God, that He provided households for them.

22So Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, "Every son who is born[a] you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive."

Moses Is Born

2 And a man of the house of Levi went and took *as wife* a daughter of Levi. 2So the woman conceived and bore a son. And when she saw that he *was* a beautiful *child,* she hid him three months. 3But when she could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, put the child in it, and laid *it* in the

1:5 [a]Literally *who came from the loins of* [b]Dead Sea Scrolls and Septuagint read *seventy-five* (compare Acts 7:14). **1:22** [a]Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, and Targum add *to the Hebrews.*

Life Lessons

Exodus 1:1—4:31

SITUATION

Moses, who saved the Hebrews from bondage, was born and raised under extraordinary circumstances. Son of a Hebrew slave, he became a member of the Egyptian royal family. Later he became an outcast to the Egyptians and fled to the desert, where God prepared him for his future role.

OBSERVATION

God's plans for us contain a lot of surprises. God leads and provides the means to reach His goals.

INSPIRATION

Consider the rod of Moses. By this time in his life, Moses had been a shepherd as long as he had been a prince, and he'd grown accustomed to it. Herding sheep wasn't as lively as living with Egyptian royalty, but it had its moments, especially the moment God spoke to him through a burning bush that didn't burn up. God announced that Moses was His man to deliver the Israelites. Moses wasn't convinced he was the one for the job. God said that who Moses was didn't matter; what mattered was who God was. And God set out to demonstrate.

"Moses," spoke the voice from the bush, "throw down your staff."

Moses, who had walked this mountain for forty years, was not comfortable with the command.

"God, You know a lot about a lot of things, but You may not know that out here, well, you just don't go around throwing down

your staff. You never know when . . ."

"Throw it down, Moses."

Moses threw it down. The rod became a snake, and Moses began to run.

"Moses!"

The old shepherd stopped.

"Pick up the snake."

Moses peered over his shoulder, first at the snake and then the bush, and then he gave the most courageous response he could muster.

"What?"

"Pick up the snake . . . by the tail." (God had to be smiling at this point.)

"God, I don't mean to object. I mean, You know a lot of things, but out here in the desert, well, you don't pick up snakes too often, and you *never* pick up snakes by the tail."

"Moses!"

"Yessir."

Just as Moses' hand touched the squirmy scales of the snake, it hardened. And Moses lifted up the rod. The same rod he would lift up in Pharaoh's court. The same rod he would lift up to divide the water and guide two million people through a desert. The rod that would remind Moses that if God can make a stick become a snake, then become a stick again—then perhaps He can do something with stubborn hearts and a stiff-necked people.

Perhaps He can do something with the common. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Have you ever been in a hopeless position at work, school, or home? Have you felt trapped and powerless to act? Remember, God hears our needs and answers prayers in the manner that will help us,

reeds by the river's bank. 4And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him.

5Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river. And her maidens walked along the riverside; and when she saw the ark among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it. 6And when she opened *it,* she saw the child, and behold, the baby wept. So she had compassion on him, and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children."

7Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?"

8And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the maiden went and called the child's mother. 9Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give *you* your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. 10And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. So she called his name Moses,[a] saying, "Because I drew him out of the water."

Moses Flees to Midian

11Now it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out to his brethren and looked at their burdens. And he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. 12So he looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. 13And when he went out the second day, behold, two Hebrew men were fighting, and he said to the one who did the wrong, "Why are you striking your companion?"

14Then he said, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?"

So Moses feared and said, "Surely this thing is known!" 15When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh and dwelt in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well.

16Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters. And they came and drew water, and they filled the troughs to water their father's flock. 17Then the shepherds came and drove them away; but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock.

18When they came to Reuel their father, he said, "How *is it that* you have come so soon today?"

19And they said, "An Egyptian delivered us from the hand of the shepherds, and he also drew enough water for us and watered the flock."

20So he said to his daughters, "And where *is* he? Why *is* it *that* you have left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread."

21Then Moses was content to live with the man, and he gave Zipporah his daughter to Moses. 22And she bore *him* a son. He called his name Gershom,[a] for he said, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land."

23Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. 24So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant

2:10 [a]Literally *Drawn Out* **2:22** [a]Literally *Stranger There*

with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. 25And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged *them*.

Moses at the Burning Bush

3 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush *was* not consumed. 3Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn."

4So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!"

And he said, "Here I am."

5Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand *is* holy ground." 6Moreover He said, "I *am* the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.

7And the Lord said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who *are* in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. 8"So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. 9"Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. 10Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

11But Moses said to God, "Who *am* I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

12So He said, "I will certainly be with you. And this *shall be* a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

13Then Moses said to God, "Indeed, *when* I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What *is* His name?' what shall I say to them?"

14And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' " 15Moreover God said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This *is* My name forever, and this *is* My memorial to all generations.' 16Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, 'The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, "I have surely visited you and *seen* what is done to you in Egypt; 17and I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey." ' 18Then they will heed your voice; and you shall come, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt; and you shall

serve His will, and often surprise us. Trust God in prayer right now for special guidance today.

EXPLORATION
Plans—Genesis 45:4–8; Matthew 2:16–23; Mark 1:2, 3; 1 Corinthians 2:7.

The framer of our destiny is familiar with our denseness. God knows we sometimes miss the signs. Maybe that's why He gave us so many.

—Max Lucado (He Chose the Nails)

Almighty God

Your achievements, however noble they may be, are not important. Your credentials, as starry as they may be, are of no concern. God is the foundation of this house. The key question in life is not "How strong am I?" but rather "How strong is God?" Focus on His strength, not yours. Occupy yourself with the nature of God, not the size of your biceps.

That's what Moses did. Or at least that's what God told Moses to do. Remember the conversation at the burning bush? The tone was set in the first sentence. "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). With these fifteen words Moses is enrolled in a class on God. Immediately the roles are defined. God is holy. Approaching Him on even a quarter-inch of leather is too pompous. And as we read further, we discover that no time is spent convincing Moses what Moses can do, but much time is spent explaining to Moses what God can do.

The strength of Moses is never considered. No pep talk is given, no pats on the backs are offered. Not one word is spoken to recruit Moses. But many words are used to reveal God. The strength of Moses is not the issue; the strength of God is.

Study Guide

Read Exodus 3:1–6

- What have been the "burning bushes" of your life, the things that have caught your attention and directed your focus God-ward?
- Think of a time when you felt you were standing on holy ground. What was your response to the holiness of that moment?
- Moses hid his face out of reverence and fear of God. What do believers do today to show reverence?
- Why is there a temptation to focus on our own strength rather than God's?
- How can you see God's strength in the ways He meets your needs?
- How does the fact that God exists make the world a different place?
- How can God's strength work through you?
- What have you been trying to do in your own strength rather than in God's?

say to him, 'The Lord God of the Hebrews has met with us; and now, please, let us go three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.' [19]But I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not even by a mighty hand. [20]So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go. [21]And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and it shall be, when you go, that you shall not go empty-handed. [22]But every woman shall ask of her neighbor, namely, of her who dwells near her house, articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing; and you shall put *them* on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians."

Miraculous Signs for Pharaoh

4 Then Moses answered and said, "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you.' "

[2]So the Lord said to him, "What *is* that in your hand?"

He said, "A rod."

[3]And He said, "Cast it on the ground." So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. [4]Then the Lord said to Moses, "Reach out your hand and take *it* by the tail" (and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand), [5]"that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."

[6]Furthermore the Lord said to him, "Now put your hand in your bosom." And he put his hand in his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand *was* leprous, like snow. [7]And He said, "Put your hand in your bosom again." So he put his hand in his bosom again, and drew it out of his bosom, and behold, it was restored like his *other* flesh. [8]"Then it will be, if they do not believe you, nor heed the message of the first sign, that they may believe the message of the latter sign. [9]And it shall be, if they do not believe even these two signs, or listen to your voice, that you shall take water from the river[a] and pour *it* on the dry *land*. The water which you take from the river will become blood on the dry *land*."

[10]Then Moses said to the Lord, "O my Lord, I *am* not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I *am* slow of speech and slow of tongue."

[11]So the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? *Have* not I, the Lord? [12]Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say."

[13]But he said, "O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever *else* You may send."

[14]So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and He said: "Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look, he is also coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. [15]Now you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth. And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do. [16]So he shall be your spokesman to the people. And he himself shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God. [17]And you shall take this rod in your hand, with which you shall do the signs."

Moses Goes to Egypt

[18]So Moses went and returned to Jethro his father-in-law, and said to him, "Please let me go and return to my brethren who *are* in Egypt, and see whether they are still alive."

And Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace."

[19]Now the Lord said to Moses in Midian, "Go, return to Egypt; for all the men who sought your life are dead." [20]Then Moses took his wife and his sons and set them on a donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the rod of God in his hand.

[21]And the Lord said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. [22]Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord: "Israel *is* My son, My firstborn. [23]So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn." ' "

[24]And it came to pass on the way, at the

4:9 [a]That is, the Nile

encampment, that the Lord met him and sought to kill him. 25Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast *it* at *Moses'* [a] feet, and said, "Surely you *are* a husband of blood to me!" 26So He let him go. Then she said, "*You are* a husband of blood!"—because of the circumcision.

27And the Lord said to Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." So he went and met him on the mountain of God, and kissed him. 28So Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord who had sent him, and all the signs which He had commanded him. 29Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel. 30And Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the people. 31So the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped.

First Encounter with Pharaoh

5 Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.' "

2And Pharaoh said, "Who *is* the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go."

3So they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please, let us go three days' journey into the desert and sacrifice to the Lord our God, lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword."

4Then the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people from their work? Get *back* to your labor." 5And Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land *are* many now, and you make them rest from their labor!"

6So the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their officers, saying, 7"You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves. 8And you shall lay on them the quota of bricks which they made before. You shall not reduce it. For they are idle; therefore they cry out, saying, 'Let us go *and* sacrifice to our God.' 9Let more work be laid on the men, that they may labor in it, and let them not regard false words."

10And the taskmasters of the people and their officers went out and spoke to the people, saying, "Thus says Pharaoh: 'I will not give you straw. 11Go, get yourselves straw where you can find it; yet none of your work will be reduced.' " 12So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble instead of straw. 13And the taskmasters forced *them* to hurry, saying, "Fulfill your work, *your* daily quota, as when there was straw." 14Also the officers of the children of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten *and* were asked, "Why have you not fulfilled your task in making brick both yesterday and today, as before?"

15Then the officers of the children of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, "Why are you dealing thus with your servants? 16There is no straw given to your servants, and they say to us, 'Make

4:25 [a]Literally *his*

Life Lessons

Exodus 5:1—6:27

SITUATION

Moses demanded that Pharaoh release the Hebrews so they could worship God. But Pharaoh refused and made the Hebrews work even harder. The discouraged Hebrews almost turned their backs on God. Moses asked God for help, and God assured him the Hebrews would leave Egypt.

OBSERVATION

When Moses complained to God, God answered him by reminding him about His character. God identifies Himself as "Yahweh" four times in 6:2–8 (translated here as "the Lord").

INSPIRATION

The Israelites considered the name too holy to be spoken by human lips. Whenever they needed to say *Yahweh,* they substituted the word *Adonai,* which means "Lord." If the name needed to be written, the scribes would take a bath before they wrote it and destroy the pen afterward.

God never gives a definition of the word *Yahweh,* and Moses never requests one. Many scholars wish he had, for the study of the name has raised some healthy discussions.

The name "I AM" sounds strikingly close to the Hebrew word "to be"—*havah.* It's quite possibly a combination of the present tense form (I am) and the causative tense (I cause to be). Yahweh, then, seems to mean "I AM" and "I cause." God is the "One who is" and the "One who causes."

Why is that important?

brick!' And indeed your servants *are* beaten, but the fault *is* in your *own* people."

17 But he said, "You *are* idle! Idle! Therefore you say, 'Let us go *and* sacrifice to the Lord.' 18 Therefore go now *and* work; for no straw shall be given you, yet you shall deliver the quota of bricks." 19 And the officers of the children of Israel saw *that* they *were* in trouble after it was said, "You shall not reduce *any* bricks from your daily quota."

20 Then, as they came out from Pharaoh, they met Moses and Aaron who stood there to meet them. 21 And they said to them, "Let the Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us."

Israel's Deliverance Assured

22 So Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why *is* it You have sent me? 23 For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all."

6 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. For with a strong hand he will let them go, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land."

2 And God spoke to Moses and said to him: "I *am* the Lord. 3 I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but *by* My name Lord[a] I was not known to them. 4 I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, in which they were strangers. 5 And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. 6 Therefore say to the children of Israel: 'I *am* the Lord; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. 7 I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. 8 And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you *as* a heritage: I *am* the Lord.' " 9 So Moses spoke thus to the children of Israel; but they did not heed Moses, because of anguish of spirit and cruel bondage.

10 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 11 "Go in, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the children of Israel go out of his land."

12 And Moses spoke before the Lord, saying, "The children of Israel have not heeded me. How then shall Pharaoh heed me, for I *am* of uncircumcised lips?"

13 Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, and gave them a command for the children of Israel and for Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

The Family of Moses and Aaron

14 These *are* the heads of their fathers' houses: The sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel, *were* Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. These

6:3 [a] Hebrew *YHWH,* traditionally *Jehovah*

Because we need a big God. And if God is the "One who is," then He is an unchanging God.

Think about it. Do you know anyone who goes around saying, "I am"? Neither do I. When we say "I am," we always add another word. "I am *happy.*" "I am *sad.*" "I am *strong.*" "I am *Max.*" God, however, starkly states, "I AM" and adds nothing else.

"You are what?" we want to ask. "I AM," He replies. God needs no descriptive word because He never changes. God is what He is. He is what He has always been. His immutability motivated the psalmist to declare, "You are the same" (Psalm 102:27). The writer is saying, "You are the One who is. You never change." Yahweh is an unchanging God. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

The fact that God is an unchanging God should affect the way you worship and approach Him. Look for ways this week that you can praise such a great God.

EXPLORATION

Unchangeableness of God—Exodus 3:14; Numbers 23:19; Malachi 3:6; John 8:58; James 1:17.

Life Lessons

Exodus 6:28—8:32

SITUATION
The Lord assured Moses that He would punish Egypt terribly and bring the Israelites out of the land in order to prove that He was the Lord. Although he thought he could not persuade Pharaoh, Moses saw that with God, nothing is impossible.

OBSERVATION
After the plague of flies, Pharaoh suggested two compromises. The Israelites could sacrifice to their God in Egypt, but not in the desert. And they could sacrifice—but only a short distance into the wilderness. Both were unacceptable, and Moses refused to compromise and make a deal with Pharaoh.

INSPIRATION
God gets into things! Red Seas. Big fish. Lions' dens and furnaces. Bankrupt businesses and jail cells. Judean wildernesses, weddings, funerals, and Galilean tempests. Look and you'll find what everyone from Moses to Martha discovered. God in the middle of our storms.

That includes yours.

During the days this book was written, a young woman died in our city. She was recently married, the mother of an eighteen-month-old. Her life felt abbreviated. The shelves of help and hope go barren at such times. But at the funeral the officiating priest shared a memory in his eulogy that gave both.

For several years she had lived and worked in New York City. Due to their long friendship, he stayed in

are the families of Reuben. 15And the sons of Simeon *were* Jemuel,[a] Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman. These *are* the families of Simeon. 16These *are* the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. And the years of the life of Levi *were* one hundred and thirty-seven. 17The sons of Gershon *were* Libni and Shimi according to their families. 18And the sons of Kohath *were* Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. And the years of the life of Kohath *were* one hundred and thirty-three. 19The sons of Merari *were* Mahli and Mushi. These *are* the families of Levi according to their generations.

20Now Amram took for himself Jochebed, his father's sister, as wife; and she bore him Aaron and Moses. And the years of the life of Amram *were* one hundred and thirty-seven. 21The sons of Izhar *were* Korah, Nepheg, and Zichri. 22And the sons of Uzziel *were* Mishael, Elzaphan, and Zithri. 23Aaron took to himself Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab, sister of Nahshon, as wife; and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. 24And the sons of Korah *were* Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph. These are the families of the Korahites. 25Eleazar, Aaron's son, took for himself one of the daughters of Putiel as wife; and she bore him Phinehas. These *are* the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites according to their families.

26These *are the same* Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said, "Bring out the children of Israel from the land of Egypt according to their armies." 27These *are* the ones who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring out the children of Israel from Egypt. These *are the same* Moses and Aaron.

Aaron Is Moses' Spokesman

28And it came to pass, on the day the Lord spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, 29that the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "I *am* the Lord. Speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you."

30But Moses said before the Lord, "Behold, I *am* of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh heed me?"

7 So the Lord said to Moses: "See, I have made you *as* God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. 2You shall speak all that I command you. And Aaron your brother shall tell Pharaoh to send the children of Israel out of his land. 3And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. 4But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies *and* My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. 5And the Egyptians shall know that I *am* the Lord, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them."

6Then Moses and Aaron did *so;* just as the Lord commanded them, so they did. 7And Moses *was* eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three years old when they spoke to Pharaoh.

Aaron's Miraculous Rod

8Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 9"When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Show a miracle for yourselves,' then you

6:15 [a]Spelled *Nemuel* in Numbers 26:12

shall say to Aaron, 'Take your rod and cast *it* before Pharaoh, *and* let it become a serpent.' " 10So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh, and they did so, just as the Lord commanded. And Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent.

11But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. 12For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods. 13And Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said.

The First Plague: Waters Become Blood

14So the Lord said to Moses: "Pharaoh's heart *is* hard; he refuses to let the people go. 15Go to Pharaoh in the morning, when he goes out to the water, and you shall stand by the river's bank to meet him; and the rod which was turned to a serpent you shall take in your hand. 16And you shall say to him, 'The Lord God of the Hebrews has sent me to you, saying, "Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness"; but indeed, until now you would not hear! 17Thus says the Lord: "By this you shall know that I *am* the Lord. Behold, I will strike the waters which *are* in the river with the rod that *is* in my hand, and they shall be turned to blood. 18And the fish that *are* in the river shall die, the river shall stink, and the Egyptians will loathe to drink the water of the river." ' "

19Then the Lord spoke to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their streams, over their rivers, over their ponds, and over all their pools of water, that they may become blood. And there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in *buckets of* wood and *pitchers of* stone.' " 20And Moses and Aaron did so, just as the Lord commanded. So he lifted up the rod and struck the waters that *were* in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants. And all the waters that *were* in the river were turned to blood. 21The fish that *were* in the river died, the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink the water of the river. So there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.

22Then the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments; and Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said. 23And Pharaoh turned and went into his house. Neither was his heart moved by this. 24So all the Egyptians dug all around the river for water to drink, because they could not drink the water of the river. 25And seven days passed after the Lord had struck the river.

The Second Plague: Frogs

8 And the Lord spoke to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord: "Let My people go, that they may serve Me. 2But if you refuse to let *them* go, behold, I will smite all your territory with frogs. 3So the river shall bring forth frogs abundantly, which shall go up and come into your house, into your bedroom, on your bed, into the houses of your servants, on your people, into your ovens, and into your kneading bowls. 4And the frogs shall come up on you, on your people, and on all your servants." ' "

5Then the Lord spoke to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your rod over the streams, over the rivers, and over the

constant touch with her via e-mail. Late one night he received a message indicative of God's persistent presence.

She had missed her station on the subway. By the time she realized her mistake, she didn't know what to do. She prayed for safety and some sign of God's presence. This was no hour or place for a young, attractive woman to be passing through a rough neighborhood alone. At that moment the doors opened, and a homeless, disheveled man came on board and plopped down next to her. *God? Are you near?* she prayed. The answer came in a song. The man pulled out a harmonica and played, "Be Thou My Vision"—her mother's favorite hymn.

The song was enough to convince her. Christ was there, in the midst of it all. . . .

And you? Look closer. He's there. Right in the middle of it all. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Have you ever found yourself adjusting your beliefs to go along with the world's values, "making deals" with God? The Lord wants our obedience above everything else. And He is with us, right in the middle of it all.

EXPLORATION

Compromise with the World—1 Corinthians 1:26–31; 2 Corinthians 7:10; James 1:27; 1 John 2:15–17.

ponds, and cause frogs to come up on the land of Egypt.' " 6So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. 7And the magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs on the land of Egypt.

8Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said, "Entreat the Lord that He may take away the frogs from me and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may sacrifice to the Lord."

9And Moses said to Pharaoh, "Accept the honor of saying when I shall intercede for you, for your servants, and for your people, to destroy the frogs from you and your houses, *that* they may remain in the river only."

10So he said, "Tomorrow." And he said, "*Let it be* according to your word, that you may know that *there is* no one like the Lord our God. 11And the frogs shall depart from you, from your houses, from your servants, and from your people. They shall remain in the river only."

12Then Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh. And Moses cried out to the Lord concerning the frogs which He had brought against Pharaoh. 13So the Lord did according to the word of Moses. And the frogs died out of the houses, out of the courtyards, and out of the fields. 14They gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank. 15But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not heed them, as the Lord had said.

The Third Plague: Lice

16So the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your rod, and strike the dust of the land, so that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt.' " 17And they did so. For Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod and struck the dust of the earth, and it became lice on man and beast. All the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt.

18Now the magicians so worked with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not. So there were lice on man and beast. 19Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This *is* the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as the Lord had said.

The Fourth Plague: Flies

20And the Lord said to Moses, "Rise early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh as he comes out to the water. Then say to him, 'Thus says the Lord: "Let My people go, that they may serve Me. 21Or else, if you will not let My people go, behold, I will send swarms *of flies* on you and your servants, on your people and into your houses. The houses of the Egyptians shall be full of swarms *of flies,* and also the ground on which they *stand.* 22And in that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell, that no swarms *of flies* shall be there, in order that you may know that I *am* the Lord in the midst of the land. 23I will make a difference[a] between My people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall be." ' " 24And the Lord did so. Thick swarms *of flies* came into the house of Pharaoh, *into* his servants' houses, and into all the land of Egypt. The land was corrupted because of the swarms *of flies.*

25Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God in the land."

26And Moses said, "It is not right to do so, for we would be sacrificing the abomination of the Egyptians to the Lord our God. If we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, then will they not stone us? 27We will go three days' journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God as He will command us."

28So Pharaoh said, "I will let you go, that you may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; only you shall not go very far away. Intercede for me."

29Then Moses said, "Indeed I am going out from you, and I will entreat the Lord, that the swarms *of flies* may depart tomorrow from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people. But let Pharaoh not deal deceitfully anymore in not letting the people go to sacrifice to the Lord."

30So Moses went out from Pharaoh and entreated the Lord. 31And the Lord did according to the word of Moses; He removed the swarms

8:23 [a]Literally *set a ransom* (compare Exodus 9:4 and 11:7)

of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people. Not one remained. 32But Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also; neither would he let the people go.

The Fifth Plague: Livestock Diseased

9 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh and tell him, 'Thus says the Lord God of the Hebrews: "Let My people go, that they may serve Me. 2For if you refuse to let *them* go, and still hold them, 3behold, the hand of the Lord will be on your cattle in the field, on the horses, on the donkeys, on the camels, on the oxen, and on the sheep—a very severe pestilence. 4And the Lord will make a difference between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt. So nothing shall die of all *that* belongs to the children of Israel." ' " 5Then the Lord appointed a set time, saying, "Tomorrow the Lord will do this thing in the land."

6So the Lord did this thing on the next day, and all the livestock of Egypt died; but of the livestock of the children of Israel, not one died. 7Then Pharaoh sent, and indeed, not even one of the livestock of the Israelites was dead. But the heart of Pharaoh became hard, and he did not let the people go.

The Sixth Plague: Boils

8So the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Take for yourselves handfuls of ashes from a furnace, and let Moses scatter it toward the heavens in the sight of Pharaoh. 9And it will become fine dust in all the land of Egypt, and it will cause boils that break out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt." 10Then they took ashes from the furnace and stood before Pharaoh, and Moses scattered *them* toward heaven. And *they* caused boils that break out in sores on man and beast. 11And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians and on all the Egyptians. 12But the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh; and he did not heed them, just as the Lord had spoken to Moses.

The Seventh Plague: Hail

13Then the Lord said to Moses, "Rise early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord God of the Hebrews: "Let My people go, that they may serve Me, 14for at this time I will send all My plagues to your very heart, and on your servants and on your people, that you may know that *there is* none like Me in all the earth. 15Now if I had stretched out My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, then you would have been cut off from the earth. 16But indeed for this *purpose* I have raised you up, that I may show My power *in* you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth. 17As yet you exalt yourself against My people in that you will not let them go. 18Behold, tomorrow about this time I will cause very heavy hail to rain down, such as has not been in Egypt since its founding until now. 19Therefore send now *and* gather your livestock and all that you have in the field, for the hail shall come down on every man and every animal which is found in the field and is not brought home; and they shall die." ' "

20He who feared the word of the Lord among the servants of

Life Lessons

Exodus 9:1—10:29

SITUATION

Moses began to reveal the majesty of God through individual miracles and plagues. The first four plagues turned the Nile to blood and infested the country with frogs, gnats, and flies. Though the entire country of Egypt suffered these plagues, the king refused to free the Israelites.

OBSERVATION

Pride makes us stubborn. Not only is pride unattractive, it can be ruinous (like it was to Pharaoh).

INSPIRATION

How is your hearing? Do you hear the servants whom God sends? Do you hear the conscience that God stirs?

And your vision? Do you still see people? Or do you see only their functions? Do you see people who need you, or do you see people beneath you? . . .

"First pride, then the crash—the bigger the ego, the harder the fall" (Proverbs 16:18 MSG).

This must be why God hates arrogance. He hates to see His children fall. He hates to see His Davids seduce and His Bathshebas be victimized. God hates what pride does to His children. He doesn't dislike arrogance. He hates it. Could he state it any clearer than Proverbs 8:13: "I hate pride and arrogance" (NIV)? And then a few chapters later: "God can't stomach arrogance or pretense; believe me, he'll put those upstarts in their place" (16:5 MSG).

You don't want God to do that. . . . 'Tis far wiser to

descend the mountain than fall from it. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What are some ways your pride has kept you from God? Has it ever ruined you? Acknowledge your bent toward independence, and ask the Lord to rid you of your self-reliance.

EXPLORATION
Pride—Proverbs 8:13; 16:18; Mark 7:20–23; 1 John 2:16.

The key question in life is not "How strong am I?" but rather "How strong is God?" Focus on His strength, not yours. Occupy yourself with the nature of God, not the size of your biceps.

—Max Lucado (The Great House of God)

Pharaoh made his servants and his livestock flee to the houses. 21But he who did not regard the word of the Lord left his servants and his livestock in the field.

22Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt—on man, on beast, and on every herb of the field, throughout the land of Egypt." 23And Moses stretched out his rod toward heaven; and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire darted to the ground. And the Lord rained hail on the land of Egypt. 24So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, so very heavy that there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. 25And the hail struck throughout the whole land of Egypt, all that *was* in the field, both man and beast; and the hail struck every herb of the field and broke every tree of the field. 26Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel *were,* there was no hail.

27And Pharaoh sent and called for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "I have sinned this time. The Lord *is* righteous, and my people and I *are* wicked. 28Entreat the Lord, that there may be no *more* mighty thundering and hail, for *it is* enough. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer."

29So Moses said to him, "As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will spread out my hands to the Lord; the thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, that you may know that the earth *is* the Lord's. 30But as for you and your servants, I know that you will not yet fear the Lord God."

31Now the flax and the barley were struck, for the barley *was* in the head and the flax *was* in bud. 32But the wheat and the spelt were not struck, for they *are* late crops.

33So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh and spread out his hands to the Lord; then the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain was not poured on the earth. 34And when Pharaoh saw that the rain, the hail, and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet more; and he hardened his heart, he and his servants. 35So the heart of Pharaoh was hard; neither would he let the children of Israel go, as the Lord had spoken by Moses.

The Eighth Plague: Locusts

10 Now the Lord said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before him, 2and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and your son's son the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I *am* the Lord."

3So Moses and Aaron came in to Pharaoh and said to him, "Thus says the Lord God of the Hebrews: 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me. 4Or else, if you refuse to let My people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your territory. 5And they shall cover the face of the earth, so that no one will be able to see the earth; and they shall eat the residue of what is left, which remains to you from the hail, and they shall eat every tree which grows up for you out of the field. 6They shall fill your houses, the houses of all your servants, and the houses of all the

Egyptians—which neither your fathers nor your fathers' fathers have seen, since the day that they were on the earth to this day.' " And he turned and went out from Pharaoh.

7 Then Pharaoh's servants said to him, "How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God. Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?"

8 So Moses and Aaron were brought again to Pharaoh, and he said to them, "Go, serve the Lord your God. Who *are* the ones that are going?"

9 And Moses said, "We will go with our young and our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we will go, for we must hold a feast to the Lord."

10 Then he said to them, "The Lord had better be with you when I let you and your little ones go! Beware, for evil is ahead of you. 11 Not so! Go now, you *who are* men, and serve the Lord, for that is what you desired." And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence.

12 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come upon the land of Egypt, and eat every herb of the land—all that the hail has left." 13 So Moses stretched out his rod over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind on the land all that day and all *that* night. When it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts. 14 And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt and rested on all the territory of Egypt. *They were* very severe; previously there had been no such locusts as they, nor shall there be such after them. 15 For they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they ate every herb of the land and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left. So there remained nothing green on the trees or on the plants of the field throughout all the land of Egypt.

16 Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste, and said, "I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you. 17 "Now therefore, please forgive my sin only this once, and entreat the Lord your God, that He may take away from me this death only." 18 So he went out from Pharaoh and entreated the Lord. 19 And the Lord turned a very strong west wind, which took the locusts away and blew them into the Red Sea. There remained not one locust in all the territory of Egypt. 20 But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go.

The Ninth Plague: Darkness

21 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, darkness *which* may even be felt." 22 So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. 23 They did not see one another; nor did anyone rise from his place for three days. But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.

24 Then Pharaoh called to Moses and said, "Go, serve the Lord; only let your flocks and your herds be kept back. Let your little ones also go with you."

25 But Moses said, "You must also give us sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. 26 Our livestock also shall go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind. For we must take some of them to serve the Lord our God, and even we do not know with what we must serve the Lord until we arrive there."

27 But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go. 28 Then Pharaoh said to him, "Get away from me! Take heed to yourself and see my face no more! For in the day you see my face you shall die!"

29 So Moses said, "You have spoken well. I will never see your face again."

Death of the Firstborn Announced

11 And the Lord said to Moses, "I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets *you* go, he will surely drive you out of here altogether. 2 Speak now in the hearing of the people, and let every man ask from his neighbor and every woman from her neighbor, articles of silver and articles of gold." 3 And the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover the man Moses *was* very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people.

4 Then Moses said, "Thus says the Lord: 'About midnight I will go out into the midst of Egypt; 5 and all the firstborn in the land of

Life LESSONS

Exodus 11:1—12:50

SITUATION

In this passage, nine of the ten plagues in Egypt had already occurred. Pharaoh, despite the pleadings of Moses, refused to give in. God told the Israelites to prepare the Passover, which would protect His people from the final plague.

OBSERVATION

God did not protect the Israelites because they were better than the Egyptians, but because they were His people. God gives grace to His followers—whether through the blood of a lamb or the blood of *the* Lamb, Jesus—not based on merit but on His lovingkindness.

INSPIRATION

"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. . . . For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:19, 21).

The perfect record of Jesus was given to you, and your imperfect record was given to Christ. Jesus "suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). As a result, God's holiness is honored and His children are forgiven.

By His perfect life Jesus fulfilled the commands of the law. By His death He satisfied the demands of sin. Jesus suffered not like a sinner, but as a sinner. Why else would He cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me" (Matthew 27:46)?

Ponder the achievement

Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the female servant who *is* behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the animals. 6Then there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as was not like it *before,* nor shall be like it again. 7But against none of the children of Israel shall a dog move its tongue, against man or beast, that you may know that the Lord does make a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.' 8And all these your servants shall come down to me and bow down to me, saying, 'Get out, and all the people who follow you!' After that I will go out." Then he went out from Pharaoh in great anger.

9But the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not heed you, so that My wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt." 10So Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh; and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go out of his land.

The Passover Instituted

12 Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, 2"This month *shall be* your beginning of months; it *shall be* the first month of the year to you. 3Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: 'On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of *his* father, a lamb for a household. 4And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take *it* according to the number of the persons; according to each man's need you shall make your count for the lamb. 5Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take *it* from the sheep or from the goats. 6Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. 7And they shall take *some* of the blood and put *it* on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. 8Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread *and* with bitter *herbs* they shall eat it. 9Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire—its head with its legs and its entrails. 10You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. 11And thus you shall eat it: *with* a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It *is* the Lord's Passover.

12'For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I *am* the Lord. 13Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you *are.* And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy *you* when I strike the land of Egypt.

14'So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance. 15Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. 16On the first day *there shall be* a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them;

but *that* which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you. 17So you shall observe *the Feast of* Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance. 18In the first *month,* on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. 19For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether *he is* a stranger or a native of the land. 20You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.' "

21Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Pick out and take lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover *lamb.* 22And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip

New Life In Christ

When I see the blood, I will pass over you. —Exodus 12:13

The Blood of Christ

"But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out" (John 19:34). Even a casual student of Scripture notes the connection between blood and mercy. As far back as the son of Adam, worshipers knew "without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22 NLT). . . . With a field as his temple and the ground as his altar, Abel became the first to do what millions would imitate. He offered a blood sacrifice for sin. . . .

Those who followed suit form a long line: Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Samson, Saul, David . . . But the line ended at the cross. What Abel sought to accomplish in the field, God achieved with His Son. What Abel began, Christ completed. . . .

What needed to be paid was paid. What had to be done was done. Innocent blood was required. Innocent blood was offered, once and for all time. . . .

As a result of "being saved" (the work of the blood), what do we do? We obey God with fear and trembling and shrink back from all that might displease Him. (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

Question: What steps can you take today to learn obedience?

For more on "New Life in Christ," see page 155.

of God. He doesn't condone our sin; nor does He compromise His standard. He doesn't ignore our rebellion; nor does He relax His demands. Rather than dismiss our sin He assumes our sin and, incredibly, sentences Himself. God's holiness is honored. Our sin is punished. And we are redeemed. God is still God. The wages of sin is still death. And we are made perfect.

That's right, perfect. "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14).

God justifies (makes perfect) then sanctifies (makes holy). God does what we cannot do so we can be what we dare not dream, perfect before God. He justly justifies the unjust. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God has given grace to you—an unconditional gift. Receive it and accept it. Look for opportunities to be "graceful" to those around you.

EXPLORATION

Grace—Exodus 33:19; Proverbs 3:34; Romans 3:23, 24; 5:15–17; Ephesians 2:8.

it in the blood that *is* in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that *is* in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. 23For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike *you.* 24And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. 25It will come to pass when you come to the land which the Lord will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. 26And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' 27that you shall say, 'It *is* the Passover sacrifice of the Lord, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.' " So the people bowed their heads and worshiped. 28Then the children of Israel went away and did *so;* just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

The Tenth Plague: Death of the Firstborn

29And it came to pass at midnight that the Lord struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who *was* in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. 30So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for *there was* not a house where *there was* not one dead.

The Exodus

31Then he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, "Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the Lord as you have said. 32Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also."

33And the Egyptians urged the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, "We *shall* all *be* dead." 34So the people took their dough before it was leavened, having their kneading bowls bound up in their clothes on their shoulders. 35Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. 36And the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them *what they requested.* Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

37Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. 38A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds—a great deal of livestock. 39And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves.

40Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt[a] *was* four hundred and thirty years. 41And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years—on that very same day—it came to pass that all the armies of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt. 42It *is* a night of solemn observance to the Lord for bringing them out of the land of Egypt. This *is* that night of the Lord, a solemn observance for all the children of Israel throughout their generations.

Passover Regulations

43And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "This *is* the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner shall eat it. 44"But every man's servant who is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, then he may eat it. 45A sojourner and a hired servant shall not eat it. 46In one house it shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house, nor shall you break one of its bones. 47All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. 48And when a stranger dwells with you *and wants* to keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it. 49One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you."

50Thus all the children of Israel did; as the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. 51And it came to pass, on that very same

12:40 [a]Samaritan Pentateuch and Septuagint read *Egypt and Canaan.*

day, that the Lord brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt according to their armies.

The Firstborn Consecrated

13 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2"Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, *both* of man and beast; it is Mine."

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

3And Moses said to the people: "Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: Our Redeemer and Deliverer

Think about the first time you ever saw Him. Think about your first encounter with Christ. Robe yourself in that moment. Resurrect the relief. Recall the purity. Summon forth the passion. Can you remember?

I can. 1965. A red-headed ten-year-old with a tornado of freckles sits in a Bible class on a Wednesday night. What I remember of the class are scenes—school desks with initials carved in them. A blackboard. A dozen or so kids, some listening, some not. A teacher wearing a suit coat too tight to button around his robust belly.

He is talking about Jesus. He is explaining the Cross. I know I had heard it before, but that night I heard it for sure. "You can't save yourself, you need a savior." I can't explain why it connected that night as opposed to another, but it did. He simply articulated what I was beginning to understand—I was lost—and he explained what I needed—a redeemer. From that night on, my heart belonged to Jesus.

Many would argue that a ten-year-old is too young for such a decision. And they may be right. All I know is that I never made a more earnest decision in my life. I didn't know much about God, but what I knew was enough. I knew I wanted to go to heaven. And I knew I couldn't do it alone.

No one had to tell me to be happy. No one had to tell me to tell others. They couldn't keep me quiet. I told all my friends at school. I put a bumper sticker on my bicycle. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 114.

Life LESSONS

Exodus 13:1—15:21

SITUATION
The Israelites left Egypt. As they journeyed toward Israel, God chose to lead them through a longer route—a route that protected, trained, and tested them.

OBSERVATION
God can see needs and hazards we can't. He works to meet our needs and protect us. We must trust that His way is best.

INSPIRATION
A man and his dog are in the same car. The dog howls bright-moon-in-the-middle-of-the-night caterwauling howls. The man pleads, promising a daily delivery of dog biscuit bouquets if only the hound will hush. After all, it's only a car wash.

Never occurred to him—ahem, to me—that the car wash would scare my dog. But it did. Placing myself in her paws, I can see why. A huge, noisy machine presses toward us, pounding our window with water, banging against the door with brushes. *Duck! We're under attack.*

"Don't panic. The car wash was my idea." "I've done this before." "It's for our own good." Ever tried to explain a car wash to a canine? Dog dictionaries are minus the words *brush* and *detail job.* My words fell on fallen flaps. Nothing helped. She just did what dogs do; she wailed.

Actually, she did what *we* do. Don't we howl? Not at car washes perhaps but at hospital stays and job transfers. Let the economy go south or the kids move north, and we have a wail

of a time. And when our Master explains what's happening, we react as if He's speaking Yalunka. We don't understand a word He says.

Is your world wet and wild?

God's greatest blessings often come costumed as disasters. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you get impatient with God when He takes you the longer route? Accept the path He has placed you on. Be content with God's purpose in your life. Encourage others who are dissatisfied in their own circumstances to do the same—even if it all seems wet and wild right now!

EXPLORATION

Guidance—Psalm 48:14; 139:9, 10; Isaiah 30:21; 42:16; John 16:13.

hand the Lord brought you out of this *place.* No leavened bread shall be eaten. 4On this day you are going out, in the month Abib. 5And it shall be, when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, that you shall keep this service in this month. 6Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day *there shall be* a feast to the Lord. 7Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters. 8And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, '*This is done* because of what the Lord did for me when I came up from Egypt.' 9It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the Lord's law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt. 10You shall therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year.

The Law of the Firstborn

11"And it shall be, when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and your fathers, and gives it to you, 12that you shall set apart to the Lord all that open the womb, that is, every firstborn that comes from an animal which you have; the males *shall be* the Lord's. 13But every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb; and if you will not redeem *it,* then you shall break its neck. And all the firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. 14So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What *is* this?' that you shall say to him, 'By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 15And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.' 16It shall be as a sign on your hand and as frontlets between your eyes, for by strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt."

The Wilderness Way

17Then it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them *by* way of the land of the Philistines, although that *was* near; for God said, "Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt." 18So God led the people around *by* way of the wilderness of the Red Sea. And the children of Israel went up in orderly ranks out of the land of Egypt.

19And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had placed the children of Israel under solemn oath, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here with you."[a]

20So they took their journey from Succoth and camped in Etham at the edge of the wilderness. 21And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. 22He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night *from* before the people.

13:19 [a]Genesis 50:25

The Red Sea Crossing

14 Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2"Speak to the children of Israel, that they turn and camp before Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal Zephon; you shall camp before it by the sea. 3For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, 'They *are* bewildered by the land; the wilderness has closed them in.' 4Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I *am* the Lord." And they did so.

5Now it was told the king of Egypt that the people had fled, and the heart of Pharaoh and his servants was turned against the people; and they said, "Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?" 6So he made ready his chariot and took his people with him. 7Also, he took six hundred choice chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt with captains over every one of them. 8And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the children of Israel; and the children of Israel went out with boldness. 9So the Egyptians pursued them, all the horses *and* chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and overtook them camping by the sea beside Pi Hahiroth, before Baal Zephon.

10And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord. 11Then they said to Moses, "Because *there were* no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? 12*Is* this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For *it would have been* better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness."

13And Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. 14The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace."

15And the Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward. 16But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry *ground* through the midst of the sea. 17And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. 18Then the Egyptians shall know that I *am* the Lord, when I have gained honor for Myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."

19And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them. 20So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness *to the one,* and it gave light by night *to the other,* so that the one did not come near the other all that night.

21Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go *back* by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry *land,* and the waters were divided. 22So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry *ground,* and the waters *were* a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. 23And the Egyptians pursued and went after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.

24Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that the Lord looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians. 25And He took off[a] their chariot wheels, so that they drove them with difficulty; and the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians."

26Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians, on their chariots, and on their horsemen." 27And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and when the morning appeared, the sea returned to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it. So the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. 28Then the waters

14:25 [a]Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, and Syriac read *bound.*

returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, *and* all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained. 29 But the children of Israel had walked on dry *land* in the midst of the sea, and the waters *were* a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

30 So the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 31 Thus Israel saw the great work which the Lord had done in Egypt; so the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and His servant Moses.

The Song of Moses

15 Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the Lord, and spoke, saying:

"I will sing to the Lord,
For He has triumphed gloriously!
The horse and its rider
He has thrown into the sea!
2 The Lord *is* my strength and song,
And He has become my salvation;
He *is* my God, and I will praise Him;
My father's God, and I will exalt Him.
3 The Lord *is* a man of war;
The Lord *is* His name.
4 Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea;
His chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea.
5 The depths have covered them;
They sank to the bottom like a stone.

6 "Your right hand, O Lord, has become glorious in power;
Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed the enemy in pieces.
7 And in the greatness of Your excellence
You have overthrown those who rose against You;
You sent forth Your wrath;
It consumed them like stubble.
8 And with the blast of Your nostrils
The waters were gathered together;
The floods stood upright like a heap;
The depths congealed in the heart of the sea.
9 The enemy said, 'I will pursue,
I will overtake,
I will divide the spoil;
My desire shall be satisfied on them.
I will draw my sword,
My hand shall destroy them.'
10 You blew with Your wind,
The sea covered them;
They sank like lead in the mighty waters.

11 "Who *is* like You, O Lord, among the gods?
Who *is* like You, glorious in holiness,
Fearful in praises, doing wonders?
12 You stretched out Your right hand;
The earth swallowed them.
13 You in Your mercy have led forth
The people whom You have redeemed;
You have guided *them* in Your strength
To Your holy habitation.

14 "The people will hear *and* be afraid;
Sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants of Philistia.
15 Then the chiefs of Edom will be dismayed;
The mighty men of Moab,
Trembling will take hold of them;
All the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away.
16 Fear and dread will fall on them;
By the greatness of Your arm
They will be *as* still as a stone,
Till Your people pass over, O Lord,
Till the people pass over
Whom You have purchased.
17 You will bring them in and plant them
In the mountain of Your inheritance,
In the place, O Lord, *which* You have made
For Your own dwelling,
The sanctuary, O Lord, *which* Your hands have established.
18 "The Lord shall reign forever and ever."

19 For the horses of Pharaoh went with his chariots and his horsemen into the sea, and the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them. But the children of Israel went on dry *land* in the midst of the sea.

The Song of Miriam

20 Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. 21 And Miriam answered them:

"Sing to the Lord,
For He has triumphed gloriously!
The horse and its rider
He has thrown into the sea!"

Bitter Waters Made Sweet

22 So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; then they went out
into the Wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilder-
ness and found no water. 23 Now when they came to Marah, they could
not drink the waters of Marah, for they *were* bitter. Therefore the name
of it was called Marah.[a] 24 And the people complained against Moses,
saying, "What shall we drink?" 25 So he cried out to the Lord, and the
Lord showed him a tree. When he cast *it* into the waters, the waters
were made sweet.

There He made a statute and an ordinance for them, and there He
tested them, 26 and said, "If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord
your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His command-
ments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you
which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I *am* the Lord who heals
you."

27 Then they came to Elim, where there *were* twelve wells of water
and seventy palm trees; so they camped there by the waters.

Bread from Heaven

16 And they journeyed from Elim, and all the congregation of the
children of Israel came to the Wilderness of Sin, which is be-
tween Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after
they departed from the land of Egypt. 2 Then the whole congregation
of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the
wilderness. 3 And the children of Israel said to them, "Oh, that we had
died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the
pots of meat *and* when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought
us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

4 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from
heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota
every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or
not. 5 And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they
bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily."

6 Then Moses and Aaron said to all the children of Israel, "At evening
you shall know that the Lord has brought you out of the land of Egypt.
7 And in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord; for He hears
your complaints against the Lord. But what *are* we, that you complain
against us?" 8 Also Moses said, "*This shall be seen* when the Lord gives
you meat to eat in the evening, and in the morning bread to the full;
for the Lord hears your complaints which you make against Him. And
what *are* we? Your complaints *are* not against us but against the Lord."

9 Then Moses spoke to Aaron, "Say to all the congregation of the
children of Israel, 'Come near before the Lord, for He has heard your
complaints.' " 10 Now it came to pass, as Aaron spoke to the whole

15:23 [a] Literally *Bitter*

Life Lessons

Exodus 15:22—17:7

SITUATION

For centuries the Israelites had lived on fertile farm land in Goshen. What a contrast the desert was to this previous comfort. With no way to provide for themselves, the Israelites complained to God. He performed daily miracles to provide water and food for them. Manna appeared in flake form with the morning dew. The Israelites ground it like grain and cooked with it.

OBSERVATION

The Israelites focused on physical needs, but God focused on their need to learn to trust Him. The Israelites could not conquer the desert, but climate was not a problem for God. He sustained, tested, and encouraged them in a perfect way.

INSPIRATION

This simple sentence unveils God's provision plan: *live one day at a time*. God disclosed the strategy to Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness. Heaven knew they needed it. The freed slaves had taken anxiety to a new art form. You'd think they would have given seminars on faith. They had witnessed the plagues, walked on dry ground through the Red Sea, and watched the Egyptian soldiers drown. They had beheld one miracle after another, but still they worried: "Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the children of Israel said to them, 'Oh, that we had died

by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat *and* when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger'" (Exodus 16:2, 3). . . .

Forgetfulness sires fretfulness. . . .

Note the details of God's provision plan.

He meets daily needs daily. Quail covered the compound in the evenings; manna glistened like fine frost in the mornings. Meat for dinner. Bread for breakfast. The food fell every day. Not annually, monthly, or hourly, but daily. And there is more.

He meets daily needs miraculously. When the people first saw the wafers on the ground, "they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, 'This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat'" (v. 15).

The stunned people named the wafers *man-hu*, Hebrew for "What in the world is this?" God had resources they knew nothing about, solutions outside their reality, provisions outside their possibility. They saw the scorched earth; God saw heaven's breadbasket. They saw dry land; God saw a covey of quail behind every bush. They saw problems; God saw provision.

Anxiety fades as our memory of God's goodness doesn't. (From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What needs prompt you to pray today? Give these needs specifically to God. Pray about each one and don't worry. Trust that God, who created you, knows how to meet your needs.

congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud.

11 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 12 "I have heard the complaints of the children of Israel. Speak to them, saying, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. And you shall know that I *am* the Lord your God.' "

13 So it was that quails came up at evening and covered the camp, and in the morning the dew lay all around the camp. 14 And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, *as* fine as frost on the ground. 15 So when the children of Israel saw *it,* they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it *was.*

And Moses said to them, "This *is* the bread which the Lord has given you to eat. 16 This is the thing which the Lord has commanded: 'Let every man gather it according to each one's need, one omer for each person, *according to the* number of persons; let every man take for *those* who *are* in his tent.' "

17 Then the children of Israel did so and gathered, some more, some less. 18 So when they measured *it* by omers, he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack. Every man had gathered according to each one's need. 19 And Moses said, "Let no one leave any of it till morning." 20 Notwithstanding they did not heed Moses. But some of them left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them. 21 So they gathered it every morning, every man according to his need. And when the sun became hot, it melted.

22 And so it was, on the sixth day, *that* they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. And all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. 23 Then he said to them, "This *is what* the Lord has said: 'Tomorrow *is* a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord. Bake what you will bake *today,* and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.' " 24 So they laid it up till morning, as Moses commanded; and it did not stink, nor were there any worms in it. 25 Then Moses said, "Eat that today, for today *is* a Sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. 26 Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none."

27 Now it happened *that some* of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none. 28 And the Lord said to Moses, "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? 29 See! For the Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day." 30 So the people rested on the seventh day.

31 And the house of Israel called its name Manna.[a] And it *was* like white coriander seed, and the taste of it *was* like wafers *made* with honey.

32 Then Moses said, "This *is* the thing which the Lord has commanded: 'Fill an omer with it, to be kept for your generations, that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when

16:31 [a]Literally *What?* (compare Exodus 16:15)

I brought you out of the land of Egypt.' " 33And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a pot and put an omer of manna in it, and lay it up before the Lord, to be kept for your generations." 34As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron laid it up before the Testimony, to be kept. 35And the children of Israel ate manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan. 36Now an omer *is* one-tenth of an ephah.

Water from the Rock

17 Then all the congregation of the children of Israel set out on their journey from the Wilderness of Sin, according to the commandment of the Lord, and camped in Rephidim; but *there was* no water for the people to drink. 2Therefore the people contended with Moses, and said, "Give us water, that we may drink."

So Moses said to them, "Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the Lord?"

3And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, "Why *is* it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"

4So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!"

5And the Lord said to Moses, "Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. 6Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink."

And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7So he called the name of the place Massah[a] and Meribah,[b] because of the contention of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

Victory over the Amalekites

8Now Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim. 9And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose us some men and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand." 10So Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. 11And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. 12But Moses' hands *became* heavy; so they took a stone and put *it* under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. 13So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

14Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write this *for* a memorial in the book and recount *it* in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." 15And Moses built an altar and called its name, The-Lord-Is-My-Banner;[a] 16for he said, "Because the Lord has sworn: the Lord *will have* war with Amalek from generation to generation."

17:7 [a]Literally *Tempted* [b]Literally *Contention* **17:15** [a]Hebrew *YHWH Nissi*

EXPLORATION
God Provides—Matthew 6:25; 14:18–21; Luke 12:22–31; 1 Corinthians 1:9; Philippians 4:19; 1 Peter 5:7.

Life Lessons

Exodus 17:8—18:27

SITUATION
The Amalekites, descendants from Esau, hated the Israelites. God gave Moses victory against this enemy. After the victory, Moses was visited by his father-in-law, Jethro.

OBSERVATION
Moses knew that the Israelites required God's help if they were going to survive the Amalekites' attack. Moses relied on God's power and gave Him credit for victory. Both large and small challenges are opportunities to rely on God for strength.

INSPIRATION
He is also Jehovah-nissi, the Lord my banner. In the heat of battle, soldiers feared getting separated from their army. For that reason a banner was carried into the conflict, and if a fighter found himself alone, the raised flag would signal safety. When the Amalekites (the big bad guys) attacked the Israelites (the little good guys), Moses went up on the mountain and prayed. As long as his hands were up, the Israelites prevailed. But when his hands were down, the Amalekites won. Moses was no dummy—he kept his hands up. The Israelites won, the Amalekites ran, and Moses built an altar for God and chiseled a new name on a stone—Jehovah-nissi—the

Lord my banner (see Exodus 17:8–16).

There are just a few of the names of God, which describe His character. Study them, for in a given day, you may need each one of them. Let me show you what I mean.

When you are confused about the future, go to your Jehovah-raah, your caring shepherd. When you are anxious about provision, talk to Jehovah-jireh, the Lord who provides. Are your challenges too great? Seek the help of Jehovah-shalom, the Lord is peace. Is your body sick? Are your emotions weak? Jehovah-rophe, the Lord who heals you, will see you now. Do you feel like a soldier stranded behind enemy lines? Take refuge in Jehovah-nissi, the Lord my banner.

Meditating on the names of God reminds you of the character of God. Take these names and bury them in your heart. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Meditate on the character of God by reviewing the names of God. Think about how each characteristic can provide you with ongoing strength and power.

EXPLORATION

Names of God—Genesis 22:8; 48:15; Exodus 15:26; 17:8–16; Judges 6:24.

Jethro's Advice

18 And Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people—that the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt. 2Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her back, 3with her two sons, of whom the name of one *was* Gershom (for he said, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land")[a] 4and the name of the other *was* Eliezer[a] (for *he said,* "The God of my father *was* my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh"); 5and Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness, where he was encamped at the mountain of God. 6Now he had said to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her."

7So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, bowed down, and kissed him. And they asked each other about *their* well-being, and they went into the tent. 8And Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had come upon them on the way, and *how* the LORD had delivered them. 9Then Jethro rejoiced for all the good which the LORD had done for Israel, whom He had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians. 10And Jethro said, "Blessed *be* the LORD, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh, *and* who has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. 11Now I know that the LORD *is* greater than all the gods; for in the very thing in which they behaved proudly, *He was* above them." 12Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took[a] a burnt offering and *other* sacrifices *to offer* to God. And Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God.

13And so it was, on the next day, that Moses sat to judge the people; and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening. 14So when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, "What *is* this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?"

15And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. 16When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws."

17So Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you do *is* not good. 18Both you and these people who *are* with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing *is* too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself. 19Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. 20And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. 21Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place *such* over them *to be* rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. 22And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be *that* every great matter they shall

18:3 [a]Compare Exodus 2:22 **18:4** [a]Literally *My God Is Help* **18:12** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Septuagint; Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate read *offered.*

bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear *the burden* with you. 23If you do this thing, and God *so* commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace."

24So Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. 25And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people: rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. 26So they judged the people at all times; the hard cases they brought to Moses, but they judged every small case themselves.

27Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went his way to his own land.

Israel at Mount Sinai

19 In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came *to* the Wilderness of Sinai. 2For they had departed from Rephidim, had come *to* the Wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness. So Israel camped there before the mountain.

3And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 4'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. 5Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth *is* Mine. 6And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These *are* the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

7So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the Lord commanded him. 8Then all the people answered together and said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do." So Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord. 9And the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever."

So Moses told the words of the people to the Lord.

10Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. 11And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. 12You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Take heed to yourselves *that* you do *not* go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. 13Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot *with an arrow;* whether man or beast, he shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain."

14So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and sanctified the people, and they washed their clothes. 15And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not come near *your* wives."

16Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who

Life LESSONS

Exodus 19:1–25

SITUATION

After God rescued the Israelites from the Egyptians, He led them into the Sinai Desert. Only God was able to keep them alive. He fed them and took care of them. Then God called for a huge prayer meeting, where He would come down to Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.

OBSERVATION

When they needed Him the most, God revealed His presence.

INSPIRATION

Endless cotton crops had sucked the nutrients out of Southern soil. Post–Civil War farmers faced scorched land and scrawny crops. George Washington Carver, a professor at Alabama's Tuskegee Institute, offered a solution. Change crops and restore nitrogen and fertility to the soil. Grow sweet potatoes, cowpeas, soybeans, and, most of all, peanuts. But Carver couldn't convince the farmers.

It took a boll weevil to do that.

Out of Mexico they swarmed, through Texas, into Louisiana and Mississippi. By 1915 the cotton-consuming bug had reached Alabama. Carver saw the plague as an opportunity. "Burn off your infested cotton," he pleaded, "and plant peanuts."

But who would buy them?

An elderly widow knocked on Carver's door. After planting and harvesting peanuts, she had hundreds of pounds left over. She was not alone.

Carver discovered barns and storehouses piled high with peanuts. They were rotting in the fields for lack of a market. . . .

Working day and night, Carver tore apart the peanut and unlocked the chemical magic that would turn loss into profit. In less than five years, peanut production turned his Alabama county into one of the wealthiest sections of the state. During his lifetime, Carver extracted more than three hundred products from the peanut.

Ask God to help you "find your peanut"—the tailor-made task that honors God, helps others, and thrills you. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Over what situation in your life do you feel you have lost control? When you stop trying to run your life in your own strength, you are ready to witness God's power. Watch how He comes through for you.

EXPLORATION

God Provides—Genesis 22:8, 14; Psalm 68:10; Isaiah 43:20; Jonah 1:17; 4:6–8.

Rebellion results in thorns.

—Max Lucado (He Chose the Nails)

were in the camp trembled. 17And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18Now Mount Sinai *was* completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain[a] quaked greatly. 19And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice. 20Then the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

21And the Lord said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to gaze at the Lord, and many of them perish. 22Also let the priests who come near the Lord consecrate themselves, lest the Lord break out against them."

23But Moses said to the Lord, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for You warned us, saying, 'Set bounds around the mountain and consecrate it.' "

24Then the Lord said to him, "Away! Get down and then come up, you and Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest He break out against them." 25So Moses went down to the people and spoke to them.

The Ten Commandments

20 And God spoke all these words, saying:

2"I *am* the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

3"You shall have no other gods before Me.

4"You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness *of anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth; 5you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me, 6but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

7"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold *him* guiltless who takes His name in vain.

8"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the Lord your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates. 11For *in* six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

12"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

13"You shall not murder.

14"You shall not commit adultery.

15"You shall not steal.

16"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

17"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet

19:18 [a]Septuagint reads *all the people.*

your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that *is* your neighbor's."

The People Afraid of God's Presence

18 Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning
flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and
when the people saw *it,* they trembled and stood afar off. 19 Then they
said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God
speak with us, lest we die."

20 And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to
test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin."
21 So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness
where God *was.*

The Law of the Altar

22 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children
of Israel: 'You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven.
23 You shall not make *anything to be* with Me—gods of silver or gods
of gold you shall not make for yourselves. 24 An altar of earth you shall
make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and
your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where
I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you. 25 And if you
make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if
you use your tool on it, you have profaned it. 26 Nor shall you go up by
steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it.'

The Law Concerning Servants

21 "Now these *are* the judgments which you shall set before them:
2 If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in
the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. 3 If he comes in by
himself, he shall go out by himself; if he *comes in* married, then his
wife shall go out with him. 4 If his master has given him a wife, and she
has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be
her master's, and he shall go out by himself. 5 But if the servant plainly
says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,'
6 then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him
to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with
an awl; and he shall serve him forever.

7 "And if a man sells his daughter to be a female slave, she shall not
go out as the male slaves do. 8 If she does not please her master, who
has betrothed her to himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He
shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has dealt de-
ceitfully with her. 9 And if he has betrothed her to his son, he shall deal
with her according to the custom of daughters. 10 If he takes another
wife, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, and her marriage
rights. 11 And if he does not do these three for her, then she shall go out
free, without *paying* money.

The Law Concerning Violence

12 "He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death.
13 However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered *him* into his
hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee.

Life Lessons

Exodus 20:1–26

SITUATION
God formed a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. The Ten Commandments changed history, giving us timeless truths and clear moral standards.

OBSERVATION
God demands total devotion. The Ten Commandments govern the relationship between God and those who love Him.

INSPIRATION
Measure your life against these four standards from the Ten Commandments. Heaven's applicants should score well on God's basic laws, wouldn't you agree?

1. "You shall not steal" (Exodus 20:15). Have you ever stolen anything? A paper clip, parking place? Thief.

2. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (v. 16). Those who say they haven't just did.

3. "You shall not commit adultery" (v. 14). Jesus said if you look at a woman with lust, you've committed adultery in your heart (Matthew 5:28).

4. "You shall not murder" (v. 13). Before you claim innocence, remember, Jesus equates murder with anger. "Anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder" (Matthew 5:22 MSG). We assassinate a dozen drivers on the morning commute.

Bad news from the Cardiologist. Your test score indicts you as a thieving, lying, adulterous murderer.

Contrast your heart with Christ's. When you list the claims that qualify Him as

either crazy or kingly, don't omit this one: He asserted to have the only sinless heart in all of history. He invited, "Can any one of you convict me of a single misleading word, a single sinful act?" (John 8:46 MSG). Issue that challenge to my friends, and hands will wave like stalks in a Kansas wheat field. In response to Jesus' challenge, however, no one could convict Him of sin. His enemies drummed up false charges in order to arrest Him. Pilate, the highest-ranking official in the region, found no guilt in Jesus. Peter, who walked in Jesus' shadow for three years, recorded: "He never did one thing wrong, not once said anything amiss" (1 Peter 2:22 MSG).

Jesus' standard mutes all boasting. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Who has kept the Ten Commandments perfectly? To seek forgiveness, the Israelites offered animal sacrifices. But God provided a better way through Jesus Christ's sacrifice.

EXPLORATION

God's Law—Psalm 119:12–24; Matthew 5:17–19; Luke 16:16, 17; 1 John 3:19–24.

14 "But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor, to kill
him by treachery, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die.
15 "And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put
to death.
16 "He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his
hand, shall surely be put to death.
17 "And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put
to death.
18 "If men contend with each other, and one strikes the other with
a stone or with *his* fist, and he does not die but is confined to *his* bed,
19 if he rises again and walks about outside with his staff, then he who
struck *him* shall be acquitted. He shall only pay *for* the loss of his time,
and shall provide *for him* to be thoroughly healed.
20 "And if a man beats his male or female servant with a rod, so that
he dies under his hand, he shall surely be punished. 21 Notwithstanding, if he remains alive a day or two, he shall not be punished; for he
is his property.
22 "If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth
prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman's husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the
judges *determine*. 23 But if *any* harm follows, then you shall give life for
life, 24 eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, 25 burn
for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.
26 "If a man strikes the eye of his male or female servant, and destroys it, he shall let him go free for the sake of his eye. 27 And if he
knocks out the tooth of his male or female servant, he shall let him go
free for the sake of his tooth.

Animal Control Laws

28 "If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, then the ox shall
surely be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the
ox *shall be* acquitted. 29 But if the ox tended to thrust with its horn in
times past, and it has been made known to his owner, and he has not
kept it confined, so that it has killed a man or a woman, the ox shall be
stoned and its owner also shall be put to death. 30 If there is imposed
on him a sum of money, then he shall pay to redeem his life, whatever
is imposed on him. 31 Whether it has gored a son or gored a daughter,
according to this judgment it shall be done to him. 32 If the ox gores a
male or female servant, he shall give to their master thirty shekels of
silver, and the ox shall be stoned.
33 "And if a man opens a pit, or if a man digs a pit and does not cover
it, and an ox or a donkey falls in it, 34 the owner of the pit shall make
it good; he shall give money to their owner, but the dead *animal* shall
be his.
35 "If one man's ox hurts another's, so that it dies, then they shall sell
the live ox and divide the money from it; and the dead *ox* they shall
also divide. 36 Or if it was known that the ox tended to thrust in time
past, and its owner has not kept it confined, he shall surely pay ox for
ox, and the dead animal shall be his own.

Responsibility for Property

22 "If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it,
he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep.

2 If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, *there shall be* no guilt for his bloodshed. 3 If the sun has risen on him, *there shall be* guilt for his bloodshed. He should make full restitution; if he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. 4 If the theft is certainly found alive in his hand, whether it is an ox or donkey or sheep, he shall restore double.

5 "If a man causes a field or vineyard to be grazed, and lets loose his animal, and it feeds in another man's field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard.

6 "If fire breaks out and catches in thorns, so that stacked grain, standing grain, or the field is consumed, he who kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.

7 "If a man delivers to his neighbor money or articles to keep, and it is stolen out of the man's house, if the thief is found, he shall pay double. 8 If the thief is not found, then the master of the house shall be brought to the judges *to see* whether he has put his hand into his neighbor's goods.

9 "For any kind of trespass, *whether it concerns* an ox, a donkey, a sheep, or clothing, *or* for any kind of lost thing which *another* claims to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; *and* whomever the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor. 10 If a man delivers to his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep, and it dies, is hurt, or driven away, no one seeing *it,* 11 *then* an oath of the Lord shall be between them both, that he has not put his hand into his neighbor's goods; and the owner of it shall accept *that,* and he shall not make *it* good. 12 But if, in fact, it is stolen from him, he shall make restitution to the owner of it. 13 If it is torn to pieces *by a beast, then* he shall bring it as evidence, *and* he shall not make good what was torn.

14 "And if a man borrows *anything* from his neighbor, and it becomes injured or dies, the owner of it not *being* with it, he shall surely make *it* good. 15 If its owner *was* with it, he shall not make *it* good; if it *was* hired, it came for its hire.

Moral and Ceremonial Principles

16 "If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price for her *to be* his wife. 17 If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money according to the bride-price of virgins.

18 "You shall not permit a sorceress to live.

19 "Whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death.

20 "He who sacrifices to *any* god, except to the Lord only, he shall be utterly destroyed.

21 "You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

22 "You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. 23 If you afflict them in any way, *and* they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry; 24 and My wrath will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.

25 "If you lend money to *any of* My people *who are* poor among you, you shall not be like a moneylender to him; you shall not charge him interest. 26 If you ever take your neighbor's garment as a pledge, you

Life Lessons

Exodus 21:1—22:31

SITUATION
After giving the Ten Commandments, God showed His people how to apply them in everyday matters. This section talks about worship, the care of servants and those physically injured, slaves, thieves, property and morality.

OBSERVATION
God provides guidelines for His people so their moral life will be pleasing to Him.

INSPIRATION
Holiness doesn't seek to be odd. Holiness seeks to be like God.

You want to make a difference in your world? Live a holy life: Be faithful to your spouse. Be the one at the office who refuses to cheat. Be the neighbor who acts neighborly. Be the employee who does the work and doesn't complain. Pay your bills. Do your part and enjoy life. Don't speak one message and live another.

Note the last line of Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 4:11, 12: "Aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing."

A peaceful life leads nonbelievers to respect believers. What if John [the Baptist's] life had not matched his words? What if he'd preached repentance and lived in immorality? What if he'd called for holiness and yet had a reputation for dishonesty? If John's life had not matched

his words, his message would have fallen on deaf ears.

So will ours.

People are watching the way we act more than they are listening to what we say.

Saint Francis of Assisi once invited a young monk to accompany him to town to preach. The novice was honored at the opportunity. The two set out for the city, then walked up and down the main street, then several side streets. They chatted with peddlers and greeted the citizens. After some time they returned by another route to the abbey.

The younger man reminded Francis of his original intent. "You have forgotten, Father, that we went to town to preach."

"My son," he replied, "we have preached. We have been seen by many. Our behavior was closely watched. Our attitudes were closely measured. Our words have been overheard. It was by thus that we preached our morning sermon." (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do a self-examination: Do the moral guidelines that God gives you make a difference in your behavior? In your relationships with friends and acquaintances? Does your life match your words?

EXPLORATION

Righteousness—Psalm 1; Matthew 5:17–20; 15:1–11; Romans 13:10; James 1:19–27.

shall return it to him before the sun goes down. 27 For that *is* his only covering, it *is* his garment for his skin. What will he sleep in? And it will be that when he cries to Me, I will hear, for I *am* gracious.

28 "You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.

29 "You shall not delay *to offer* the first of your ripe produce and your juices. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me. 30 Likewise you shall do with your oxen *and* your sheep. It shall be with its mother seven days; on the eighth day you shall give it to Me.

31 "And you shall be holy men to Me: you shall not eat meat torn *by beasts* in the field; you shall throw it to the dogs.

Justice for All

23 "You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. 2 You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert *justice.* 3 You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute.

4 "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. 5 If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it.

6 "You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute. 7 Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked. 8 And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous.

9 "Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

The Law of Sabbaths

10 "Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce, 11 but the seventh *year* you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat. In like manner you shall do with your vineyard *and* your olive grove. 12 Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed.

13 "And in all that I have said to you, be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth.

Three Annual Feasts

14 "Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year: 15 You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty); 16 and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in *the fruit of* your labors from the field.

17 "Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord God. [a]

23:17 [a] Hebrew *YHWH,* usually translated *Lord*

18 "You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread;
nor shall the fat of My sacrifice remain until morning. 19 The first of the
firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the Lord your
God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.

The Angel and the Promises

20 "Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and
to bring you into the place which I have prepared. 21 Beware of Him
and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your
transgressions; for My name *is* in Him. 22 But if you indeed obey His
voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies
and an adversary to your adversaries. 23 For My Angel will go before
you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will
cut them off. 24 You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them,
nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them
and completely break down their *sacred* pillars.

25 "So you shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your
bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of
you. 26 No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I will
fulfill the number of your days.

27 "I will send My fear before you, I will cause confusion among all
the people to whom you come, and will make all your enemies turn
their backs to you. 28 And I will send hornets before you, which shall
drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite from before you.
29 I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land
become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for
you. 30 Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you
have increased, and you inherit the land. 31 And I will set your bounds
from the Red Sea to the sea, Philistia, and from the desert to the River.[a]
For I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you
shall drive them out before you. 32 You shall make no covenant with
them, nor with their gods. 33 They shall not dwell in your land, lest they
make you sin against Me. For *if* you serve their gods, it will surely be
a snare to you."

Israel Affirms the Covenant

24 Now He said to Moses, "Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron,
Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. 2 And Moses alone shall come near the Lord, but they
shall not come near; nor shall the people go up with him."

3 So Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and
all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and
said, "All the words which the Lord has said we will do." 4 And Moses
wrote all the words of the Lord. And he rose early in the morning, and
built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according
to the twelve tribes of Israel. 5 Then he sent young men of the children
of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of
oxen to the Lord. 6 And Moses took half the blood and put *it* in basins,
and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. 7 Then he took the Book

23:31 [a]Hebrew *Nahar,* the Euphrates

Life LESSONS

Exodus 23:1—24:18

SITUATION

God gave the Israelites guidelines for their relationships with each other (even their enemies) and with Him. These guidelines set Israel apart from the other nations. God also gave a special ceremony that confirmed the agreement between God and His people. In the ceremony blood from animals symbolized forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to God.

OBSERVATION

God's people ought to obey the standards that God lays out. One part of this is remembering their special relationship with Him. Another is to treat others well, even those who might be considered one's "enemies."

INSPIRATION

Some years ago a Rottweiler attacked our golden retriever puppy at a kennel. The worthless animal climbed out of its run and into Molly's and nearly killed her. He left her with dozens of gashes and a dangling ear. My feelings toward that mutt were less than Davidic. Leave the two of us in a cave, and only one would have exited. I wrote a letter to the dog's owner, urging him to put the dog to sleep.

But when I showed the letter to the kennel owner, she begged me to reconsider. "What that dog did was horrible, but I'm still training him. I'm not finished with him yet."

God would say the same about the Rottweiler who attacked you. "What

he did was unthinkable, unacceptable, inexcusable, but I'm not finished yet."

Your enemies still figure into God's plan. Their pulse is proof: God hasn't given up on them. They may be out of God's will, but not out of His reach. You honor God when you see them, not as His failures, but as His projects. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God makes several agreements with His people throughout the Bible, concluding with a new covenant in Christ. Because He makes us new people from the inside out, He expects us to live like new people with the guidance of His Holy Spirit.

EXPLORATION

Guidance of Holy Spirit—1 Kings 18:12; Psalm 143:10; Isaiah 48:16; 63:14; John 16:13; Acts 16:6, 7; Romans 8:14.

The blood of Christ does not cover your sins, conceal your sins, postpone your sins, or diminish your sins. It takes away your sins, once and for all time.

—Max Lucado (He Chose the Nails)

of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient." 8And Moses took the blood, sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words."

On the Mountain with God

9Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, 10and they saw the God of Israel. And *there was* under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in *its* clarity. 11But on the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand. So they saw God, and they ate and drank.

12Then the Lord said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and be there; and I will give you tablets of stone, and the law and commandments which I have written, that you may teach them."

13So Moses arose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up to the mountain of God. 14And he said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we come back to you. Indeed, Aaron and Hur *are* with you. If any man has a difficulty, let him go to them." 15Then Moses went up into the mountain, and a cloud covered the mountain.

16Now the glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. 17The sight of the glory of the Lord *was* like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel. 18So Moses went into the midst of the cloud and went up into the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

Offerings for the Sanctuary

25 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2"Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering. From everyone who gives it willingly with his heart you shall take My offering. 3And this *is* the offering which you shall take from them: gold, silver, and bronze; 4blue, purple, and scarlet *thread,* fine linen, and goats' *hair;* 5ram skins dyed red, badger skins, and acacia wood; 6oil for the light, and spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense; 7onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate. 8And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. 9According to all that I show you, *that is,* the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make *it.*

The Ark of the Testimony

10"And they shall make an ark of acacia wood; two and a half cubits *shall be* its length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height. 11And you shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and shall make on it a molding of gold all around. 12You shall cast four rings of gold for it, and put *them* in its four corners; two rings *shall be* on one side, and two rings on the other side. 13And you shall make poles *of* acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. 14You shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, that the ark may be carried by them. 15The poles shall be in the rings

of the ark; they shall not be taken from it. 16And you shall put into the ark the Testimony which I will give you.

17"You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold; two and a half cubits *shall be* its length and a cubit and a half its width. 18And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat. 19Make one cherub at one end, and the other cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim at the two ends of it *of one piece* with the mercy seat. 20And the cherubim shall stretch out *their* wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim *shall be* toward the mercy seat. 21You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the Testimony that I will give you. 22And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which *are* on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel.

The Table for the Showbread

23"You shall also make a table of acacia wood; two cubits *shall be* its length, a cubit its width, and a cubit and a half its height. 24And you shall overlay it with pure gold, and make a molding of gold all around. 25You shall make for it a frame of a handbreadth all around, and you shall make a gold molding for the frame all around. 26And you shall make for it four rings of gold, and put the rings on the four corners that *are* at its four legs. 27The rings shall be close to the frame, as holders for the poles to bear the table. 28And you shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold, that the table may be carried with them. 29You shall make its dishes, its pans, its pitchers, and its bowls for pouring. You shall make them of pure gold. 30And you shall set the showbread on the table before Me always.

The Gold Lampstand

31"You shall also make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand shall be of hammered work. Its shaft, its branches, its bowls, its *ornamental* knobs, and flowers shall be *of one piece.* 32And six branches shall come out of its sides: three branches of the lampstand out of one side, and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side. 33Three bowls *shall be* made like almond *blossoms* on one branch, *with* an *ornamental* knob and a flower, and three bowls made like almond *blossoms* on the other branch, *with* an *ornamental* knob and a flower—and so for the six branches that come out of the lampstand. 34On the lampstand itself four bowls *shall be* made like almond *blossoms, each with* its *ornamental* knob and flower. 35And *there shall be* a knob under the *first* two branches of the same, a knob under the *second* two branches of the same, and a knob under the *third* two branches of the same, according to the six branches that extend from the lampstand. 36Their knobs and their branches *shall be of one piece;* all of it *shall be* one hammered piece of pure gold. 37You shall make seven lamps for it, and they shall arrange its lamps so that they give light in front of it. 38And its wick-trimmers and their trays *shall be* of pure gold. 39It shall be made of a talent of pure gold, with all these utensils. 40And see to it

Life LESSONS

Exodus 25:1—27:21

SITUATION
God provided precise instructions for building the tent of meeting. Detailed instructions for making the ark, the table, and the lampstand demonstrated His transcendence above the common everyday features of the world. The ark's portable nature represented God's desire to be with the Israelites wherever they traveled.

OBSERVATION
Throughout the Bible, God provides ways for His people to have fellowship with Him.

INSPIRATION
The ark of the covenant [was] a rectangular box commissioned by Moses. The chest was not large: three feet, nine inches tall and two feet, three inches wide. A trio of the most precious Hebrew artifacts indwelt the ark: a gold jar of unspoiled manna, Aaron's walking stick that had budded long after it was cut, and the precious stone tablets that had felt the engraving finger of God. A heavy golden plate, called the mercy seat, served as a lid to the chest. Two cherubim of gold, with outstretched wings, faced each other and looked down on the golden lid. They represented the majesty of Jehovah watching over the law and the needs of the people. The ark symbolized God's provision (the manna), God's power (the staff), God's precepts (the commandments), and, most of all, God's presence.

During the temple era, the high priest would be

granted a once-a-year audience with the ark. After offering personal sacrifices of repentance, he would enter the holy of holies with, according to legend, a rope tied to his ankle lest he perish from the presence of God and need to be pulled out.

Could one overstate the significance of the ark? Hardly. How precious to us would be the manger in which Jesus was born? And the Cross? If we had the very cross on which He was crucified, would we cherish it? You'd think so. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

The diligence and care with which the Israelites built the tent of meeting demonstrated their reverence for God. How do you show your reverence for Him? Make your life a pure temple of faith that honors God in every action. What can you do today to tell God, "I want to honor You in all my plans"?

EXPLORATION

Reverence—Psalm 34:9; Proverbs 1:7; 8:13; Ecclesiastes 12:13; 1 Peter 1:17.

that you make *them* according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.

The Tabernacle

26 "Moreover you shall make the tabernacle *with* ten curtains *of* fine woven linen and blue, purple, and scarlet *thread;* with artistic designs of cherubim you shall weave them. 2The length of each curtain *shall be* twenty-eight cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits. And every one of the curtains shall have the same measurements. 3Five curtains shall be coupled to one another, and *the other* five curtains *shall be* coupled to one another. 4And you shall make loops of blue *yarn* on the edge of the curtain on the selvedge of *one* set, and likewise you shall do on the outer edge of *the other* curtain of the second set. 5Fifty loops you shall make in the one curtain, and fifty loops you shall make on the edge of the curtain that *is* on the end of the second set, that the loops may be clasped to one another. 6And you shall make fifty clasps of gold, and couple the curtains together with the clasps, so that it may be one tabernacle.

7"You shall also make curtains of goats' *hair,* to be a tent over the tabernacle. You shall make eleven curtains. 8The length of each curtain *shall be* thirty cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits; and the eleven curtains shall all have the same measurements. 9And you shall couple five curtains by themselves and six curtains by themselves, and you shall double over the sixth curtain at the forefront of the tent. 10You shall make fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in *one* set, and fifty loops on the edge of the curtain of the second set. 11And you shall make fifty bronze clasps, put the clasps into the loops, and couple the tent together, that it may be one. 12The remnant that remains of the curtains of the tent, the half curtain that remains, shall hang over the back of the tabernacle. 13And a cubit on one side and a cubit on the other side, of what remains of the length of the curtains of the tent, shall hang over the sides of the tabernacle, on this side and on that side, to cover it.

14"You shall also make a covering of ram skins dyed red for the tent, and a covering of badger skins above that.

15"And for the tabernacle you shall make the boards of acacia wood, standing upright. 16Ten cubits *shall be* the length of a board, and a cubit and a half *shall be* the width of each board. 17Two tenons *shall be* in each board for binding one to another. Thus you shall make for all the boards of the tabernacle. 18And you shall make the boards for the tabernacle, twenty boards for the south side. 19You shall make forty sockets of silver under the twenty boards: two sockets under each of the boards for its two tenons. 20And for the second side of the tabernacle, the north side, *there shall be* twenty boards 21and their forty sockets of silver: two sockets under each of the boards. 22For the far side of the tabernacle, westward, you shall make six boards. 23And you shall also make two boards for the two back corners of the tabernacle. 24They shall be coupled together at the bottom and they shall be coupled together at the top by one ring. Thus it shall be for both of them. They shall be for the two corners. 25So there shall be eight boards with their sockets of silver—sixteen sockets—two sockets under each of the boards.

26 "And you shall make bars of acacia wood:
five for the boards on one side of the taberna-
cle, 27 five bars for the boards on the other side
of the tabernacle, and five bars for the boards
of the side of the tabernacle, for the far side
westward. 28 The middle bar shall pass through
the midst of the boards from end to end. 29 You
shall overlay the boards with gold, make their
rings of gold *as* holders for the bars, and over-
lay the bars with gold. 30 And you shall raise up
the tabernacle according to its pattern which
you were shown on the mountain.

31 "You shall make a veil woven of blue,
purple, and scarlet *thread,* and fine woven
linen. It shall be woven with an artistic design
of cherubim. 32 You shall hang it upon the four
pillars of acacia *wood* overlaid with gold. Their
hooks *shall be* gold, upon four sockets of silver.
33 And you shall hang the veil from the clasps.
Then you shall bring the ark of the Testimony
in there, behind the veil. The veil shall be a di-
vider for you between the holy *place* and the
Most Holy. 34 You shall put the mercy seat upon
the ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy.
35 You shall set the table outside the veil, and
the lampstand across from the table on the
side of the tabernacle toward the south; and
you shall put the table on the north side.

36 "You shall make a screen for the door of
the tabernacle, *woven of* blue, purple, and
scarlet *thread,* and fine woven linen, made by
a weaver. 37 And you shall make for the screen
five pillars of acacia *wood,* and overlay them
with gold; their hooks *shall be* gold, and you
shall cast five sockets of bronze for them.

The Altar of Burnt Offering

27 "You shall make an altar of acacia wood,
five cubits long and five cubits wide—
the altar shall be square—and its height *shall
be* three cubits. 2 You shall make its horns on
its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece
with it. And you shall overlay it with bronze.
3 Also you shall make its pans to receive its
ashes, and its shovels and its basins and its
forks and its firepans; you shall make all its
utensils of bronze. 4 You shall make a grate for
it, a network of bronze; and on the network
you shall make four bronze rings at its four
corners. 5 You shall put it under the rim of the
altar beneath, that the network may be mid-
way up the altar. 6 And you shall make poles
for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and over-
lay them with bronze. 7 The poles shall be put
in the rings, and the poles shall be on the two
sides of the altar to bear it. 8 You shall make it
hollow with boards; as it was shown you on the
mountain, so shall they make *it.*

The Court of the Tabernacle

9 "You shall also make the court of the
tabernacle. For the south side *there shall be*
hangings for the court *made of* fine woven
linen, one hundred cubits long for one side.
10 And its twenty pillars and their twenty
sockets *shall be* bronze. The hooks of the pil-
lars and their bands *shall be* silver. 11 Likewise
along the length of the north side *there shall
be* hangings one hundred *cubits* long, with
its twenty pillars and their twenty sockets of
bronze, and the hooks of the pillars and their
bands of silver.

12 "And along the width of the court on the
west side *shall be* hangings of fifty cubits, with
their ten pillars and their ten sockets. 13 The
width of the court on the east side *shall be* fifty
cubits. 14 The hangings on *one* side *of the gate
shall be* fifteen cubits, *with* their three pillars
and their three sockets. 15 And on the other
side *shall be* hangings of fifteen *cubits, with*
their three pillars and their three sockets.

16 "For the gate of the court *there shall be* a
screen twenty cubits long, *woven of* blue, pur-
ple, and scarlet *thread,* and fine woven linen,
made by a weaver. It *shall have* four pillars and
four sockets. 17 All the pillars around the court
shall have bands of silver; their hooks *shall
be* of silver and their sockets of bronze. 18 The
length of the court *shall be* one hundred cu-
bits, the width fifty throughout, and the height
five cubits, *made of* fine woven linen, and its
sockets of bronze. 19 All the utensils of the tab-
ernacle for all its service, all its pegs, and all
the pegs of the court, *shall be* of bronze.

The Care of the Lampstand

20 "And you shall command the children of
Israel that they bring you pure oil of pressed
olives for the light, to cause the lamp to burn
continually. 21 In the tabernacle of meeting,
outside the veil which *is* before the Testimony,
Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening
until morning before the Lord. *It shall be* a
statute forever to their generations on behalf
of the children of Israel.

Life Lessons

Exodus 28:1—29:46

SITUATION
God instructed Aaron and his sons to become the first temple priests. These priests ministered to the people's spiritual needs and represented them before God.

OBSERVATION
Priests became mediators between God and the people. The priest carried God's wisdom to the people and the people's needs to God.

INSPIRATION
In the early pages of my childhood memory, I see this picture. My father and I sit side by side in a chapel. We both wear our only suits. The shirt collar rubs my neck; the pew feels hard to my bottom; the sight of my dead uncle leaves us all silent. This is my first funeral. My nine years of life have not prepared me for death. What I see unnerves me. Aunts, typically jovial and talkative, weep loudly. Uncles, commonly quick with a word and joke, stare wide eyed at the casket. And Buck, my big uncle with meaty hands, big belly, and booming voice, lies whitish and waxy in the coffin.

I remember my palms moistening and my heart bouncing in my chest like tennis sneakers in a clothes dryer. Fear had me in her talons. What other emotion could I feel? Where do I look? The weeping ladies frighten me. Glassy-eyed men puzzle me. My dead uncle spooks me. But then I look up. I see my father.

He turns his face toward me and smiles softly. "It's

Garments for the Priesthood

28 "Now take Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister to Me as priest, Aaron *and* Aaron's sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. 2 And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. 3 So you shall speak to all *who are* gifted artisans, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments, to consecrate him, that he may minister to Me as priest. 4 And these *are* the garments which they shall make: a breastplate, an ephod,[a] a robe, a skillfully woven tunic, a turban, and a sash. So they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons, that he may minister to Me as priest.

The Ephod

5 "They shall take the gold, blue, purple, and scarlet *thread,* and the fine linen, 6 and they shall make the ephod of gold, blue, purple, *and* scarlet *thread,* and fine woven linen, artistically worked. 7 It shall have two shoulder straps joined at its two edges, and *so* it shall be joined together. 8 And the intricately woven band of the ephod, which *is* on it, shall be of the same workmanship, *made of* gold, blue, purple, and scarlet *thread,* and fine woven linen.

9 "Then you shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel: 10 six of their names on one stone and six names on the other stone, in order of their birth. 11 With the work of an engraver in stone, *like* the engravings of a signet, you shall engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel. You shall set them in settings of gold. 12 And you shall put the two stones on the shoulders of the ephod *as* memorial stones for the sons of Israel. So Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord on his two shoulders as a memorial. 13 You shall also make settings of gold, 14 and you shall make two chains of pure gold like braided cords, and fasten the braided chains to the settings.

The Breastplate

15 "You shall make the breastplate of judgment. Artistically woven according to the workmanship of the ephod you shall make it: of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet *thread,* and fine woven linen, you shall make it. 16 It shall be doubled into a square: a span *shall be* its length, and a span *shall be* its width. 17 And you shall put settings of stones in it, four rows of stones: *The first* row *shall be* a sardius, a topaz, and an emerald; *this shall be* the first row; 18 the second row *shall be* a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond; 19 the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; 20 and the fourth row, a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. They shall be set in gold settings. 21 And the stones shall have the names of the sons of Israel, twelve according to their names, *like* the engravings of a signet, each one with its own name; they shall be according to the twelve tribes.

22 "You shall make chains for the breastplate at the end, like braided cords of pure gold. 23 And you shall make two rings of gold for the breastplate, and put the two rings on the two ends of the breastplate.

28:4 [a] That is, an ornamented vest

24 Then you shall put the two braided *chains* of gold in the two rings
which are on the ends of the breastplate; 25 and the *other* two ends of
the two braided *chains* you shall fasten to the two settings, and put
them on the shoulder straps of the ephod in the front.
26 "You shall make two rings of gold, and put them on the two ends
of the breastplate, on the edge of it, which is on the inner side of the
ephod. 27 And two *other* rings of gold you shall make, and put them
on the two shoulder straps, underneath the ephod toward its front,
right at the seam above the intricately woven band of the ephod.
28 They shall bind the breastplate by means of its rings to the rings of
the ephod, using a blue cord, so that it is above the intricately woven
band of the ephod, and so that the breastplate does not come loose
from the ephod.
29 "So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel on the breast-
plate of judgment over his heart, when he goes into the holy *place*,
as a memorial before the Lord continually. 30 And you shall put in the
breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim,[a] and they shall
be over Aaron's heart when he goes in before the Lord. So Aaron shall
bear the judgment of the children of Israel over his heart before the
Lord continually.

Other Priestly Garments

31 "You shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. 32 There shall
be an opening for his head in the middle of it; it shall have a woven
binding all around its opening, like the opening in a coat of mail, so
that it does not tear.
33 "And upon its hem you shall make pomegranates of blue, pur-
ple, and scarlet, all around its hem, and bells of gold between them
all around: 34 a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a
pomegranate, upon the hem of the robe all around. 35 And it shall be
upon Aaron when he ministers, and its sound will be heard when he
goes into the holy *place* before the Lord and when he comes out, that
he may not die.
36 "You shall also make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it, *like*
the engraving of a signet:
HOLINESS TO THE LORD.
37 "And you shall put it on a blue cord, that it may be on the turban; it
shall be on the front of the turban. 38 So it shall be on Aaron's forehead,
that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things which the children
of Israel hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his fore-
head, that they may be accepted before the Lord.
39 "You shall skillfully weave the tunic of fine linen *thread,* you shall
make the turban of fine linen, and you shall make the sash of woven
work.
40 "For Aaron's sons you shall make tunics, and you shall make
sashes for them. And you shall make hats for them, for glory and
beauty. 41 So you shall put them on Aaron your brother and on his
sons with him. You shall anoint them, consecrate them, and sanctify
them, that they may minister to Me as priests. 42 And you shall make
for them linen trousers to cover their nakedness; they shall reach

28:30 [a] Literally *the Lights and the Perfections* (compare Leviticus 8:8)

okay, son," he assures, laying a large hand on my leg. Somehow I know it is. Why it is, I don't know. My family still wails. Uncle Buck is still dead. But if Dad, in the midst of it all, says it's okay, then that's enough.

At that moment I realized something. I could look around and find fear, or look at my father and find faith.

I chose my father's face.

So did Moses.

So can you. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Because of Christ, we are all priests. How are you ministering to others? Pray with someone, find a way to encourage them. Be on the alert should God bring someone along your path today. Don't get so caught up in your agenda that you miss the needs in front of you. Look in your Father's face and take from Him what you need to serve in your world today.

EXPLORATION

Priests—Exodus 19:4–6; 1 Chronicles 23:28–32; John 16:23–27.

The question is not, "How dare a loving God be angry?" but rather, "How could a loving God feel anything less?"

—Max Lucado (In the Grip of Grace)

from the waist to the thighs. 43They shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they come into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister in the holy *place,* that they do not incur iniquity and die. *It shall be* a statute forever to him and his descendants after him.

Aaron and His Sons Consecrated

29 "And this is what you shall do to them to hallow them for ministering to Me as priests: Take one young bull and two rams without blemish, 2and unleavened bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers anointed with oil (you shall make them of wheat flour). 3You shall put them in one basket and bring them in the basket, with the bull and the two rams.

4"And Aaron and his sons you shall bring to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and you shall wash them with water. 5Then you shall take the garments, put the tunic on Aaron, and the robe of the ephod, the ephod, and the breastplate, and gird him with the intricately woven band of the ephod. 6You shall put the turban on his head, and put the holy crown on the turban. 7And you shall take the anointing oil, pour *it* on his head, and anoint him. 8Then you shall bring his sons and put tunics on them. 9And you shall gird them with sashes, Aaron and his sons, and put the hats on them. The priesthood shall be theirs for a perpetual statute. So you shall consecrate Aaron and his sons.

10"You shall also have the bull brought before the tabernacle of meeting, and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands on the head of the bull. 11Then you shall kill the bull before the Lord, *by* the door of the tabernacle of meeting. 12You shall take *some* of the blood of the bull and put *it* on the horns of the altar with your finger, and pour all the blood beside the base of the altar. 13And you shall take all the fat that covers the entrails, the fatty lobe *attached* to the liver, and the two kidneys and the fat that *is* on them, and burn *them* on the altar. 14But the flesh of the bull, with its skin and its offal, you shall burn with fire outside the camp. It *is* a sin offering.

15"You shall also take one ram, and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands on the head of the ram; 16and you shall kill the ram, and you shall take its blood and sprinkle *it* all around on the altar. 17Then you shall cut the ram in pieces, wash its entrails and its legs, and put *them* with its pieces and with its head. 18And you shall burn the whole ram on the altar. It *is* a burnt offering to the Lord; it *is* a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the Lord.

19"You shall also take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands on the head of the ram. 20Then you shall kill the ram, and take some of its blood and put *it* on the tip of the right ear of Aaron and on the tip of the right ear of his sons, on the thumb of their right hand and on the big toe of their right foot, and sprinkle the blood all around on the altar. 21And you shall take some of the blood that is on the altar, and some of the anointing oil, and sprinkle *it* on Aaron and on his garments, on his sons and on the garments of his sons with him; and he and his garments shall be hallowed, and his sons and his sons' garments with him.

22"Also you shall take the fat of the ram, the fat tail, the fat that covers the entrails, the fatty lobe *attached to* the liver, the two kidneys and the fat on them, the right thigh (for it *is* a ram of consecration), 23one loaf of bread, one cake *made with* oil, and one wafer from the basket of the unleavened bread that *is* before the Lord; 24and you shall put all these in the hands of Aaron and in the hands of his sons, and you shall wave them *as* a wave offering before the Lord. 25You shall receive them back from their hands and burn *them* on the altar as a burnt offering, as a sweet aroma before the Lord. It *is* an offering made by fire to the Lord.

26"Then you shall take the breast of the ram of Aaron's consecration and wave it *as* a wave offering before the Lord; and it shall be your portion. 27And from the ram of the consecration you shall consecrate the breast of the wave offering which is waved, and the thigh of the heave offering which is raised, of *that* which *is* for Aaron and of *that* which is for his sons. 28It shall be from the children of Israel *for* Aaron and his sons by a statute forever. For it is a heave offering; it shall be a heave offering from the children of Israel from the sacrifices of their peace offerings, *that is,* their heave offering to the Lord.

29"And the holy garments of Aaron shall be his sons' after him, to be anointed in them and

to be consecrated in them. 30That son who becomes priest in his place
shall put them on for seven days, when he enters the tabernacle of
meeting to minister in the holy *place.*

31"And you shall take the ram of the consecration and boil its flesh
in the holy place. 32Then Aaron and his sons shall eat the flesh of the
ram, and the bread that *is* in the basket, *by* the door of the tabernacle
of meeting. 33They shall eat those things with which the atonement
was made, to consecrate *and* to sanctify them; but an outsider shall
not eat *them,* because they *are* holy. 34And if any of the flesh of the
consecration offerings, or of the bread, remains until the morning,
then you shall burn the remainder with fire. It shall not be eaten, be-
cause it *is* holy.

35"Thus you shall do to Aaron and his sons, according to all that I
have commanded you. Seven days you shall consecrate them. 36And
you shall offer a bull every day *as* a sin offering for atonement. You
shall cleanse the altar when you make atonement for it, and you shall
anoint it to sanctify it. 37Seven days you shall make atonement for
the altar and sanctify it. And the altar shall be most holy. Whatever
touches the altar must be holy.[a]

The Daily Offerings

38"Now this *is* what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs of the
first year, day by day continually. 39One lamb you shall offer in the
morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight. 40With the
one lamb shall be one-tenth *of an ephah* of flour mixed with one-
fourth of a hin of pressed oil, and one-fourth of a hin of wine *as* a
drink offering. 41And the other lamb you shall offer at twilight; and
you shall offer with it the grain offering and the drink offering, as in
the morning, for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the Lord.
42*This shall be* a continual burnt offering throughout your genera-
tions *at* the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the Lord, where
I will meet you to speak with you. 43And there I will meet with the
children of Israel, and *the tabernacle* shall be sanctified by My glory.
44So I will consecrate the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. I will
also consecrate both Aaron and his sons to minister to Me as priests.
45I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God. 46And
they shall know that I *am* the Lord their God, who brought them up
out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them. I *am* the Lord
their God.

The Altar of Incense

30 "You shall make an altar to burn incense on; you shall make
it of acacia wood. 2A cubit *shall be* its length and a cubit its
width—it shall be square—and two cubits *shall be* its height. Its horns
shall be of one piece with it. 3And you shall overlay its top, its sides all
around, and its horns with pure gold; and you shall make for it a mold-
ing of gold all around. 4Two gold rings you shall make for it, under
the molding on both its sides. You shall place *them* on its two sides,
and they will be holders for the poles with which to bear it. 5You shall
make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. 6And you

29:37 [a]Compare Numbers 4:15 and Haggai 2:11–13

Life Lessons

Exodus 30:1–38

SITUATION
God instructed Moses about the rituals of the tent of meeting, including burning incense, sacrificing, and anointing with oil.

OBSERVATION
God's specific instructions to Moses reminded the people of their pact with God. God demands faithfulness from His people.

INSPIRATION
We worship God because we need to.

But our need runs a turtle-paced distant second to the thoroughbred reason for worship.

The chief reason for applauding God? He deserves it. If singing did nothing but weary your voice, if giving only emptied your wallet—if worship did nothing for you—it would still be right to do. God warrants our worship.

How else do you respond to a Being of blazing, blistering, unadulterated, unending holiness? No mark. Nor freckle. Not a bad thought, bad day, or bad decision. Ever! What do you do with such holiness if not adore it?

And His power. He churns forces that launch meteors, orbit planets, and ignite stars. Commanding whales to spout salty air, petunias to perfume the night, and songbirds to chirp joy into spring. Above the earth, flotillas of clouds endlessly shape and reshape; within the earth, strata of groaning rocks shift and turn. Who are we to sojourn on a trembling, wonderful orb so shot through with wonder?

God would die for your

sin before He'd let you die in your sin.

And tenderness? God has never taken his eyes off you. Not for a millisecond. He's always near. He lives to hear your heartbeat. He loves to hear your prayers. He'd die for your sin before He'd let you die in your sin, so He did.

What do you do with such a Savior? Don't you sing to Him? Don't you celebrate Him in baptism, elevate Him in Communion? Don't you bow a knee, lower a head, hammer a nail, feed the poor, and lift up your gift in worship? Of course you do.

Worship God. Applaud Him loud and often. For your sake, you need it.

And for heaven's sake, He deserves it. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Rituals can be symbols of our relationship to God. We follow these practices to show our reverence for God, but they are never more important than faith.

EXPLORATION

Faithfulness—Numbers 12:7; 14:24; 1 Kings 19:18; Nehemiah 7:2; 1 Corinthians 4:17; Colossians 1:7.

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: The One Who Gave Himself for Us

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

A twenty-five-word parade of hope: beginning with God, ending with life, and urging us to do the same. Brief enough to write on a napkin or memorize in a moment, yet solid enough to weather two thousand years of storms and questions. If you know nothing of the Bible, start here. If you know everything in the Bible, return here. We all need the reminder. The heart of the human problem is the heart of the human. And God's treatment is prescribed in John 3:16.

He loves. He gave. We believe. We live.

The words are to Scripture what the Mississippi River is to America—an entryway into the heartland. Believe or dismiss them, embrace or reject them, any serious consideration of Christ must include them. Would a British historian dismiss the Magna Carta? Egyptologists overlook the Rosetta stone? Could you ponder the words of Christ and never immerse yourself into John 3:16?

The verse is an alphabet of grace, a table of contents to the Christian hope, each word a safe-deposit box of jewels. Read it again, slowly and aloud, and note the word that snatches your attention. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

"God so *loved* the world . . ." We'd expect an anger-fueled God. One who punishes the world, recycles the world, forsakes the world . . . but loves the world?

The *world*? This world? Heartbreakers, hope-snatchers, and dream-dousers prowl this orb. Dictators rage. Abusers inflict. Reverends think they deserve the title. But God loves. And He loves the world so much He gave His:

Declarations? Rules? Dicta? Edicts?

No. The heart-stilling, mind-bending, deal-making-or-breaking claim of John 3:16 is this: *God gave His Son . . . His only Son.* No abstract ideas but a flesh-wrapped divinity. Scripture equates Jesus with God. God, then, gave Himself. Why? So that "*whoever* believes in Him should not perish." (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 119.

shall put it before the veil that *is* before the ark of the Testimony, before the mercy seat that *is* over the Testimony, where I will meet with you.

7 "Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. 8 And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations. 9 You shall not offer strange incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; nor shall you pour a drink offering on it. 10 And Aaron shall make atonement upon its horns once a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonement; once a year he shall make atonement upon it throughout your generations. It *is* most holy to the Lord."

The Ransom Money

11 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 12 "When you take the census of the children of Israel for their number, then every man shall give a ransom for himself to the Lord, when you number them, that there may be no plague among them when *you* number them. 13 This is what everyone among those who are numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (a shekel *is* twenty gerahs). The half-shekel *shall be* an offering to the Lord. 14 Everyone included among those who are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering to the Lord. 15 The rich shall not give more and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when *you* give an offering to the Lord, to make atonement for yourselves. 16 And you shall take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shall appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of meeting, that it may be a memorial for the children of Israel before the Lord, to make atonement for yourselves."

The Bronze Laver

17 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 18 "You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base also of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. And you shall put water in it, 19 for Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet in water from it. 20 When they go into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn an offering made by fire to the Lord, they shall wash with water, lest they die. 21 So they shall wash their hands and their feet, lest they die. And it shall be a statute forever to them—to him and his descendants throughout their generations."

The Holy Anointing Oil

22 Moreover the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 23 "Also take for yourself quality spices—five hundred *shekels* of liquid myrrh, half as much sweet-smelling cinnamon (two hundred and fifty *shekels*), two hundred and fifty *shekels* of sweet-smelling cane, 24 five hundred *shekels* of cassia, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and a hin of olive oil. 25 And you shall make from these a holy anointing oil, an ointment compounded according to the art of the perfumer. It shall be a holy anointing oil. 26 With it you shall anoint the tabernacle of meeting and the ark of the Testimony; 27 the table and all its utensils, the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense; 28 the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the laver and its base. 29 You shall consecrate them, that they may be most holy; whatever touches them must be holy.[a] 30 And you shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that *they* may minister to Me as priests.

31 "And you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'This shall be a holy anointing oil to Me throughout your generations. 32 It shall not be poured on man's flesh; nor shall you make *any other* like it, according to its composition. It *is* holy, *and* it shall be holy to you. 33 Whoever compounds *any* like it, or whoever puts *any* of it on an outsider, shall be cut off from his people.' "

The Incense

34 And the Lord said to Moses: "Take sweet spices, stacte and onycha and galbanum, and pure frankincense with *these* sweet spices; there shall be equal amounts of each. 35 You shall make of these an incense, a compound according to the art of the perfumer, salted, pure, *and* holy. 36 And you shall beat *some* of it very fine, and put some of it before the

30:29 [a] Compare Numbers 4:15 and Haggai 2:11–13

Life LESSONS

Exodus 31:1—32:35

SITUATION
The people began to fear that Moses would not come down from the mountain, that they had lost their leader, that they would die in the wilderness. So they asked Aaron to fashion an idol for them.

OBSERVATION
Fear can lead people to do things they know are wrong, things they know they shouldn't do.

INSPIRATION
"I look at this people—oh! what a stubborn, hard-headed people!" (Exodus 32:9 MSG). God spoke these words to Moses on Mount Sinai. The disloyalty of the calf-worshiping Hebrews stunned God. He had given them a mayor's-seat perch at His Exodus extravaganza. They saw water transform into blood, high noon change to a midnight sky, the Red Sea turn into a red carpet, and the Egyptian army become fish bait. God gave manna with the morning dew, quail with the evening sun. He earned their trust. The former slaves had witnessed a millennium of miracles in a matter of days.

And yet, when God called Moses to a summit meeting, the people panicked like henless chicks. "They rallied around Aaron and said, 'Do something. Make gods for us who will lead us. That Moses, the man who got us out of Egypt—who knows what's happened to him?'" (Exodus 32:1 MSG).

The scurvy of fear infected everyone in the camp. They crafted a metal cow and talked to it. God,

Testimony in the tabernacle of meeting where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you. 37But *as for* the incense which you shall make, you shall not make any for yourselves, according to its composition. It shall be to you holy for the Lord. 38Whoever makes *any* like it, to smell it, he shall be cut off from his people."

Artisans for Building the Tabernacle

31 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2"See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. 3And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all *manner of* workmanship, 4to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, 5in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all *manner of* workmanship.

6"And I, indeed I, have appointed with him Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have put wisdom in the hearts of all the gifted artisans, that they may make all that I have commanded you: 7the tabernacle of meeting, the ark of the Testimony and the mercy seat that *is* on it, and all the furniture of the tabernacle— 8the table and its utensils, the pure *gold* lampstand with all its utensils, the altar of incense, 9the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the laver and its base— 10the garments of ministry,[a] the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as priests, 11and the anointing oil and sweet incense for the holy *place.* According to all that I have commanded you they shall do."

The Sabbath Law

12And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 13"Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: 'Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it *is* a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that *you* may know that I *am* the Lord who sanctifies you. 14You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for *it is* holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does *any* work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. 15Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh *is* the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does *any* work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. 16Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations *as* a perpetual covenant. 17It *is* a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for *in* six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.' "

18And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

The Gold Calf

32 Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for *as*

31:10 [a]Or *woven garments*

for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."

2 And Aaron said to them, "Break off the golden earrings which *are* in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me." 3 So all the people broke off the golden earrings which *were* in their ears, and brought *them* to Aaron. 4 And he received *the gold* from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf.

Then they said, "This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!"

5 So when Aaron saw *it,* he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow *is* a feast to the Lord." 6 Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

7 And the Lord said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted *themselves.* 8 They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!' " 9 And the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it *is* a stiff-necked people! 10 Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation."

11 Then Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, and said: "Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. 13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit *it* forever.' "[a] 14 So the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.

15 And Moses turned and went down from the mountain, and the two tablets of the Testimony *were* in his hand. The tablets *were* written on both sides; on the one *side* and on the other they were written. 16 Now the tablets *were* the work of God, and the writing *was* the writing of God engraved on the tablets.

17 And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "*There is* a noise of war in the camp."

18 But he said:

"*It is* not the noise of the shout of victory,
Nor the noise of the cry of defeat,
But the sound of singing I hear."

19 So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf *and* the dancing. So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets

32:13 [a]Genesis 13:15 and 22:17

shocked at the calf-praising service, commanded Moses, "Go! Get down there! . . . They've turned away from the way I commanded them. . . . Oh! what a stubborn, hard-headed people!" (vv. 7–9 MSG). . . .

Our hearts harden in an unhealthy reaction to fear. Note: the presence of fear in the Hebrews didn't bother God; their response to it did. Nothing persuaded the people to trust Him. Plagues didn't. Liberation from slavery didn't. God shed light on their path and dropped food in their laps, and still they didn't believe Him. Nothing penetrated their hearts. They were flinty. Stiff. Mount Rushmore is more pliable, an anvil more tender. The people were as responsive as the gold statue they worshiped.

More than three thousand years removed, we understand God's frustration. Turn to a statue for help? How stupid. Face your fears by facing a cow? *Udderly* foolish!

We opt for more sophisticated therapies: belly-stretching food binges or budget-busting shopping sprees. We bow before a whiskey bottle or lose ourselves in an eighty-hour work week. Progress? Hardly. We still face fears without facing God. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you dealing with fears in unhealthy, unhelpful, even sinful ways? God says turn away from that and look to Him.

EXPLORATION

God Hears Us—Psalm 18:6; Isaiah 41:10; Hebrews 13:6.

out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. 20Then he took the calf which they had made, burned *it* in the fire, and ground *it* to powder; and he scattered *it* on the water and made the children of Israel drink *it.* 21And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought *so* great a sin upon them?"

22So Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people, that they *are set* on evil. 23For they said to me, 'Make us gods that shall go before us; *as for* this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' 24And I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them break *it* off.' So they gave *it* to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out."

25Now when Moses saw that the people *were* unrestrained (for Aaron had not restrained them, to *their* shame among their enemies), 26then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, "Whoever *is* on the Lord's side—*come* to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. 27And he said to them, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.' " 28So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day. 29Then Moses said, "Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord, that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother."

30Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." 31Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! 32Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written." 33And the Lord said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. 34Now therefore, go, lead the people to *the place* of which I have spoken to you. Behold, My Angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin."

35So the Lord plagued the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made.

The Command to Leave Sinai

33 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Depart *and* go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your descendants I will give it.' 2And I will send *My* Angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanite and the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. 3*Go up* to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you *are* a stiff-necked people."

4And when the people heard this bad news, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. 5For the Lord had said to Moses, "Say to the children of Israel, 'You *are* a stiff-necked people. I could come up into your midst in one moment and consume you. Now therefore, take off

Life Lessons

Exodus 33:1–23

SITUATION

God wrote the Ten Commandments, gave them to Moses, and revealed His glory to Moses. Because Moses took so long to come down from the mountain, the people grew weary and built a new god for themselves made of gold.

OBSERVATION

We will never be able to see all of God's glory on this earth.

INSPIRATION

Read carefully, very carefully, the following verses. Read to answer this question—what did Moses do in order to see God? . . .

Moses said, "Please, show me Your glory."

"And the Lord said, 'Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen'" (Exodus 33:21–23).

Did you see what Moses was to do? Neither did I. Did you note who did the work? So did I.

God did! God is active. God gave Moses a place to stand. God placed Moses in the crevice. God covered Moses with His hand. God passed by. And God revealed Himself. . . .

All Moses did was ask. But, oh, how he asked. All we can do is ask. But, oh, we must ask. For only in asking do we receive. And only in seeking do we find.

And (need I make the application?) God is the one

your ornaments, that I may know what to do to you.' " [6]So the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by Mount Horeb.

Moses Meets with the Lord

[7]Moses took his tent and pitched it outside the camp, far from the camp, and called it the tabernacle of meeting. And it came to pass *that* everyone who sought the Lord went out to the tabernacle of meeting which *was* outside the camp. [8]So it was, whenever Moses went out to the tabernacle, *that* all the people rose, and each man stood *at* his tent door and watched Moses until he had gone into the tabernacle. [9]And it came to pass, when Moses entered the tabernacle, that the pillar of

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: A Personal Shepherd Provides His Presence and Rest

Years after David wrote [Psalm 23], another Bethlehem Shepherd would say: "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2, 3).

Note the promises of Jesus. "I will come again and receive you to Myself." He pledges to take us home. He does not delegate this task. He may send missionaries to teach you, angels to protect you, teachers to guide you, singers to inspire you, and physicians to heal you, but He sends no one to take you. He reserves this job for Himself. "I will come back and take you home." He is your personal Shepherd. And He is personally responsible to lead you home. And because He is present when any of His sheep dies, you can say what David said, "I will fear no evil" [Psalm 23:4].

. . . And when God calls us into the deep valley of death, He will be with us. Dare we think that He would abandon us in the moment of death? Would a father force his child to swim the deep alone? Would the shepherd require his sheep to journey to the highlands alone? Of course not. Would God require His child to journey to eternity alone? Absolutely not! He is with you!

What God said to Moses, He says to you: "My Presence will go with you" (Exodus 33:14). (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 134.

who will equip us for our eternal moment in the Son. Hasn't He given us a rock, the Lord Jesus? Hasn't He given us a cleft, His grace? And hasn't He covered us with His hand, His pierced hand? (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you know someone who rebels against God? Classmates? Colleagues? Neighbors? Intercede on behalf of these people today. Ask God to reveal Himself to them and bring them into a relationship with Him.

EXPLORATION

God's Judgment—Exodus 22:24; Numbers 16:21; Deuteronomy 9:19, 20; 1 Samuel 2:25; Psalm 106:23; Jeremiah 14:20, 21.

Worship is the act of magnifying God. Enlarging our vision of Him. Stepping into the cockpit to see where He sits and observe how He works.

—Max Lucado (Just Like Jesus)

Life Lessons

Exodus 34:1—38:31

SITUATION
Moses gave the Israelites instructions on how to build the tent of meeting. God designed each detail.

OBSERVATION
God, Master Architect, designed His house. Skilled people, such as Bezalel, worked to accomplish God's plans. They wanted to honor and please God by their efforts.

INSPIRATION
Live so that "he'll get all the credit as the One mighty in everything—encores to the end of time. Oh, yes!" (1 Peter 4:11 MSG). Exhibit God with your uniqueness. When you magnify your Maker with your strengths, when your contribution enriches God's reputation, your days grow suddenly sweet. And to really dulcify your world, use your uniqueness to make a big deal about God . . .

every day of your life.

Heaven's calendar has seven Sundays a week. God sanctifies each day. He conducts holy business at all hours and in all places. He uncommons the common by turning kitchen sinks into shrines, cafés into convents, and nine-to-five workdays into spiritual adventures.

Workdays? Yes, workdays. He ordained your work as something good. Before He gave Adam a wife or a child, even before He gave Adam britches, God gave Adam a job. "Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). Innocence, not indolence, characterized the first family.

cloud descended and stood *at* the door of the tabernacle, and *the* Lord talked with Moses. 10All the people saw the pillar of cloud standing *at* the tabernacle door, and all the people rose and worshiped, each man *in* his tent door. 11So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. And he would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle.

The Promise of God's Presence

12Then Moses said to the Lord, "See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people.' But You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found grace in My sight.' 13Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation *is* Your people."

14And He said, "My Presence will go *with you,* and I will give you rest."

15Then he said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go *with us,* do not bring us up from here. 16For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who *are* upon the face of the earth."

17So the Lord said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name."

18And he said, "Please, show me Your glory."

19Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." 20But He said, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live." 21And the Lord said, "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. 22So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. 23Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen."

Moses Makes New Tablets

34 And the Lord said to Moses, "Cut two tablets of stone like the first *ones,* and I will write on *these* tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke. 2So be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself to Me there on the top of the mountain. 3And no man shall come up with you, and let no man be seen throughout all the mountain; let neither flocks nor herds feed before that mountain."

4So he cut two tablets of stone like the first *ones.* Then Moses rose early in the morning and went up Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him; and he took in his hand the two tablets of stone.

5Now the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. 6And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, 7keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no

means clearing *the guilty,* visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

8 So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped. 9 Then he said, "If now I have found grace in Your sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray, go among us, even though we *are* a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your inheritance."

The Covenant Renewed

10 And He said: "Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation; and all the people among whom you *are* shall see the work of the Lord. For it *is* an awesome thing that I will do with you. 11 Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I am driving out from before you the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. 12 Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. 13 But you shall destroy their altars, break their *sacred* pillars, and cut down their wooden images 14 (for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name *is* Jealous, *is* a jealous God), 15 lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and *one of them* invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, 16 and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods.

17 "You shall make no molded gods for yourselves.

18 "The Feast of Unleavened Bread you shall keep. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, in the appointed time of the month of Abib; for in the month of Abib you came out from Egypt.

19 "All that open the womb *are* Mine, and every male firstborn among your livestock, *whether* ox or sheep. 20 But the firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb. And if you will not redeem *him,* then you shall break his neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem.

"And none shall appear before Me empty-handed.

21 "Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest.

22 "And you shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end.

23 "Three times in the year all your men shall appear before the Lord, the Lord God of Israel. 24 For I will cast out the nations before you and enlarge your borders; neither will any man covet your land when you go up to appear before the Lord your God three times in the year.

25 "You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leaven, nor shall the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover be left until morning.

26 "The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring to the house of the Lord your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk."

God views work worthy of its own engraved commandment: "Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest" (Exodus 34:21).We like the second half of that verse. But emphasis on the day of rest might cause us to miss the command to work: "Six days you *shall* work." Whether you work at home or in the marketplace, your work matters to God. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God honors your work and will bless your efforts when you use your work to bring honor to Him.

EXPLORATION

God's Workmanship—Genesis 1:31; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:8–10, 19–22; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:11. Godly Action—Colossians 3:17, 23, 24.

27 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write these
words, for according to the tenor of these
words I have made a covenant with you and
with Israel." 28 So he was there with the Lord
forty days and forty nights; he neither ate
bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the
tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten
Commandments.[a]

The Shining Face of Moses

29 Now it was so, when Moses came down
from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the
Testimony *were* in Moses' hand when he came
down from the mountain), that Moses did not
know that the skin of his face shone while he
talked with Him. 30 So when Aaron and all the
children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin
of his face shone, and they were afraid to come
near him. 31 Then Moses called to them, and
Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation
returned to him; and Moses talked with them.
32 Afterward all the children of Israel came
near, and he gave them as commandments all
that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount
Sinai. 33 And when Moses had finished speak-
ing with them, he put a veil on his face. 34 But
whenever Moses went in before the Lord to
speak with Him, he would take the veil off un-
til he came out; and he would come out and
speak to the children of Israel whatever he had
been commanded. 35 And whenever the chil-
dren of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the
skin of Moses' face shone, then Moses would
put the veil on his face again, until he went in
to speak with Him.

Sabbath Regulations

35 Then Moses gathered all the congrega-
tion of the children of Israel together,
and said to them, "These *are* the words which
the Lord has commanded *you* to do: 2 Work
shall be done for six days, but the seventh day
shall be a holy day for you, a Sabbath of rest to
the Lord. Whoever does any work on it shall be
put to death. 3 You shall kindle no fire through-
out your dwellings on the Sabbath day."

Offerings for the Tabernacle

4 And Moses spoke to all the congregation of
the children of Israel, saying, "This *is* the thing
which the Lord commanded, saying: 5 'Take
from among you an offering to the Lord. Who-
ever *is* of a willing heart, let him bring it as an
offering to the Lord: gold, silver, and bronze;
6 blue, purple, and scarlet *thread,* fine linen,
and goats' *hair;* 7 ram skins dyed red, badger
skins, and acacia wood; 8 oil for the light, and
spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet
incense; 9 onyx stones, and stones to be set in
the ephod and in the breastplate.

Articles of the Tabernacle

10 'All *who are* gifted artisans among you
shall come and make all that the Lord has
commanded: 11 the tabernacle, its tent, its cov-
ering, its clasps, its boards, its bars, its pillars,
and its sockets; 12 the ark and its poles, *with*
the mercy seat, and the veil of the covering;
13 the table and its poles, all its utensils, and
the showbread; 14 also the lampstand for the
light, its utensils, its lamps, and the oil for the
light; 15 the incense altar, its poles, the anoint-
ing oil, the sweet incense, and the screen for
the door at the entrance of the tabernacle;
16 the altar of burnt offering with its bronze
grating, its poles, all its utensils, *and* the la-
ver and its base; 17 the hangings of the court,
its pillars, their sockets, and the screen for the
gate of the court; 18 the pegs of the tabernacle,
the pegs of the court, and their cords; 19 the
garments of ministry,[a] for ministering in the
holy *place*—the holy garments for Aaron the
priest and the garments of his sons, to minis-
ter as priests.' "

The Tabernacle Offerings Presented

20 And all the congregation of the children
of Israel departed from the presence of Mo-
ses. 21 Then everyone came whose heart was
stirred, and everyone whose spirit was will-
ing, *and* they brought the Lord's offering for
the work of the tabernacle of meeting, for all
its service, and for the holy garments. 22 They
came, both men and women, as many as had
a willing heart, *and* brought earrings and nose
rings, rings and necklaces, all jewelry of gold,
that is, every man who *made* an offering of
gold to the Lord. 23 And every man, with whom
was found blue, purple, and scarlet *thread,*

34:28 [a]Literally *Ten Words* **35:19** [a]Or *woven garments*

fine linen, goats' *hair,* red skins of rams, and badger skins, brought *them.* 24Everyone who offered an offering of silver or bronze brought the Lord's offering. And everyone with whom was found acacia wood for any work of the service, brought *it.* 25All the women *who were* gifted artisans spun yarn with their hands, and brought what they had spun, of blue, purple, *and* scarlet, and fine linen. 26And all the women whose hearts stirred with wisdom spun yarn of goats' *hair.* 27The rulers brought onyx stones, and the stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate, 28and spices and oil for the light, for the anointing oil, and for the sweet incense. 29The children of Israel brought a freewill offering to the Lord, all the men and women whose hearts were willing to bring *material* for all kinds of work which the Lord, by the hand of Moses, had commanded to be done.

The Artisans Called by God

30And Moses said to the children of Israel, "See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; 31and He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom and understanding, in knowledge and all manner of workmanship, 32to design artistic works, to work in gold and silver and bronze, 33in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of artistic workmanship.

34"And He has put in his heart the ability to teach, *in* him and Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. 35He has filled them with skill to do all manner of work of the engraver and the designer and the tapestry maker, in blue, purple, and scarlet *thread,* and fine linen, and of the weaver—those who do every work and those who design artistic works.

36 "And Bezalel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan in whom the Lord has put wisdom and understanding, to know how to do all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, shall do according to all that the Lord has commanded."

The People Give More than Enough

2Then Moses called Bezalel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan in whose heart the Lord had put wisdom, everyone whose heart was stirred, to come and do the work. 3And they received from Moses all the offering which the children of Israel had brought for the work of the service of making the sanctuary. So they continued bringing to him freewill offerings every morning. 4Then all the craftsmen who were doing all the work of the sanctuary came, each from the work he was doing, 5and they spoke to Moses, saying, "The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work which the Lord commanded *us* to do."

6So Moses gave a commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, "Let neither man nor woman do any more work for the offering of the sanctuary." And the people were restrained from bringing, 7for the material they had was sufficient for all the work to be done—indeed too much.

Building the Tabernacle

8Then all the gifted artisans among them who worked on the tabernacle made ten curtains woven of fine linen, and of blue, purple, and scarlet *thread; with* artistic designs of cherubim they made them. 9The length of each curtain *was* twenty-eight cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits; the curtains *were* all the same size. 10And he coupled five curtains to one another, and *the other* five curtains he coupled to one another. 11He made loops of blue *yarn* on the edge of the curtain on the selvedge of one set; likewise he did on the outer edge of *the other* curtain of the second set. 12Fifty loops he made on one curtain, and fifty loops he made on the edge of the curtain on the end of the second set; the loops held one *curtain* to another. 13And he made fifty clasps of gold, and coupled the curtains to one another with the clasps, that it might be one tabernacle.

14He made curtains of goats' *hair* for the tent over the tabernacle; he made eleven curtains. 15The length of each curtain *was* thirty cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits; the eleven curtains *were* the same size. 16He coupled five curtains by themselves and six curtains by themselves. 17And he made fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in one set, and fifty loops he made on the edge of the curtain of the second set. 18He also made fifty bronze clasps to couple the tent

together, that it might be one. 19Then he made
a covering for the tent of ram skins dyed red,
and a covering of badger skins above *that.*

20For the tabernacle he made boards of
acacia wood, standing upright. 21The length
of each board *was* ten cubits, and the width of
each board a cubit and a half. 22Each board had
two tenons for binding one to another. Thus he
made for all the boards of the tabernacle. 23And
he made boards for the tabernacle, twenty
boards for the south side. 24Forty sockets of
silver he made to go under the twenty boards:
two sockets under each of the boards for its
two tenons. 25And for the other side of the tab-
ernacle, the north side, he made twenty boards
26and their forty sockets of silver: two sockets
under each of the boards. 27For the west side
of the tabernacle he made six boards. 28He also
made two boards for the two back corners of
the tabernacle. 29And they were coupled at the
bottom and coupled together at the top by one
ring. Thus he made both of them for the two
corners. 30So there were eight boards and their
sockets—sixteen sockets of silver—two sockets
under each of the boards.

31And he made bars of acacia wood: five
for the boards on one side of the tabernacle,
32five bars for the boards on the other side of
the tabernacle, and five bars for the boards of
the tabernacle on the far side westward. 33And
he made the middle bar to pass through the
boards from one end to the other. 34He over-
laid the boards with gold, made their rings of
gold *to be* holders for the bars, and overlaid the
bars with gold.

35And he made a veil of blue, purple, and
scarlet *thread,* and fine woven linen; it was
worked *with* an artistic design of cherubim.
36He made for it four pillars of acacia *wood,*
and overlaid them with gold, with their hooks
of gold; and he cast four sockets of silver for
them.

37He also made a screen for the tabernacle
door, of blue, purple, and scarlet *thread,* and
fine woven linen, made by a weaver, 38and its
five pillars with their hooks. And he overlaid
their capitals and their rings with gold, but
their five sockets *were* bronze.

Making the Ark of the Testimony

37 Then Bezalel made the ark of acacia
wood; two and a half cubits *was* its
length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit
and a half its height. 2He overlaid it with pure
gold inside and outside, and made a molding
of gold all around it. 3And he cast for it four
rings of gold *to be set* in its four corners: two
rings on one side, and two rings on the other
side of it. 4He made poles of acacia wood, and
overlaid them with gold. 5And he put the poles
into the rings at the sides of the ark, to bear the
ark. 6He also made the mercy seat of pure gold;
two and a half cubits *was* its length and a cubit
and a half its width. 7He made two cherubim
of beaten gold; he made them of one piece at
the two ends of the mercy seat: 8one cherub
at one end on this side, and the other cherub
at the *other* end on that side. He made the
cherubim at the two ends *of one piece* with the
mercy seat. 9The cherubim spread out *their*
wings above, *and* covered the mercy seat with
their wings. They faced one another; the faces
of the cherubim were toward the mercy seat.

Making the Table for the Showbread

10He made the table of acacia wood; two
cubits *was* its length, a cubit its width, and a
cubit and a half its height. 11And he overlaid it
with pure gold, and made a molding of gold all
around it. 12Also he made a frame of a hand-
breadth all around it, and made a molding
of gold for the frame all around it. 13And he
cast for it four rings of gold, and put the rings
on the four corners that *were* at its four legs.
14The rings were close to the frame, as holders
for the poles to bear the table. 15And he made
the poles of acacia wood to bear the table, and
overlaid them with gold. 16He made of pure
gold the utensils which were on the table: its
dishes, its cups, its bowls, and its pitchers for
pouring.

Making the Gold Lampstand

17He also made the lampstand of pure gold;
of hammered work he made the lampstand.
Its shaft, its branches, its bowls, its *ornamen-*
tal knobs, and its flowers were of the same
piece. 18And six branches came out of its
sides: three branches of the lampstand out of
one side, and three branches of the lampstand
out of the other side. 19There were three bowls
made like almond *blossoms* on one branch,
with an *ornamental* knob and a flower, and

three bowls made like almond *blossoms* on the other branch, with an *ornamental* knob and a flower—and so for the six branches coming out of the lampstand. 20And on the lampstand itself *were* four bowls made like almond *blossoms, each with* its *ornamental* knob and flower. 21*There was* a knob under the *first* two branches of the same, a knob under the *second* two branches of the same, and a knob under the *third* two branches of the same, according to the six branches extending from it. 22Their knobs and their branches were of one piece; all of it *was* one hammered piece of pure gold. 23And he made its seven lamps, its wick-trimmers, and its trays of pure gold. 24Of a talent of pure gold he made it, with all its utensils.

Making the Altar of Incense

25He made the incense altar of acacia wood. Its length *was* a cubit and its width a cubit—*it was* square—and two cubits *was* its height. Its horns were *of one piece* with it. 26And he overlaid it with pure gold: its top, its sides all around, and its horns. He also made for it a molding of gold all around it. 27He made two rings of gold for it under its molding, by its two corners on both sides, as holders for the poles with which to bear it. 28And he made the poles of acacia wood, and overlaid them with gold.

Making the Anointing Oil and the Incense

29He also made the holy anointing oil and the pure incense of sweet spices, according to the work of the perfumer.

Making the Altar of Burnt Offering

38 He made the altar of burnt offering of acacia wood; five cubits *was* its length and five cubits its width—*it was* square—and its height *was* three cubits. 2He made its horns on its four corners; the horns were *of one piece* with it. And he overlaid it with bronze. 3He made all the utensils for the altar: the pans, the shovels, the basins, the forks, and the firepans; all its utensils he made of bronze. 4And he made a grate of bronze network for the altar, under its rim, midway from the bottom. 5He cast four rings for the four corners of the bronze grating, *as* holders for the poles. 6And he made the poles of acacia wood, and overlaid them with bronze. 7Then he put the poles into the rings on the sides of the altar, with which to bear it. He made the altar hollow with boards.

Making the Bronze Laver

8He made the laver of bronze and its base of bronze, from the bronze mirrors of the serving women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

Making the Court of the Tabernacle

9Then he made the court on the south side; the hangings of the court *were of* fine woven linen, one hundred cubits long. 10There *were* twenty pillars for them, with twenty bronze sockets. The hooks of the pillars and their bands *were* silver. 11On the north side *the hangings were* one hundred cubits *long,* with twenty pillars and their twenty bronze sockets. The hooks of the pillars and their bands *were* silver. 12And on the west side *there were* hangings of fifty cubits, with ten pillars and their ten sockets. The hooks of the pillars and their bands *were* silver. 13For the east side *the hangings were* fifty cubits. 14The hangings of one side *of the gate were* fifteen cubits *long, with* their three pillars and their three sockets, 15and the same for the other side of the court gate; on this side and that *were* hangings of fifteen cubits, *with* their three pillars and their three sockets. 16All the hangings of the court all around *were of* fine woven linen. 17The sockets for the pillars *were* bronze, the hooks of the pillars and their bands *were* silver, and the overlay of their capitals *was* silver; and all the pillars of the court had bands of silver. 18The screen for the gate of the court *was* woven of blue, purple, and scarlet *thread,* and of fine woven linen. The length *was* twenty cubits, and the height along its width *was* five cubits, corresponding to the hangings of the court. 19And *there were* four pillars *with* their four sockets of bronze; their hooks *were* silver, and the overlay of their capitals and their bands *was* silver. 20All the pegs of the tabernacle, and of the court all around, *were* bronze.

Materials of the Tabernacle

21This is the inventory of the tabernacle, the tabernacle of the Testimony, which was counted according to the commandment of

Life LESSONS

Exodus 39:1—40:38

SITUATION
Moses provided instructions about the priestly garments and other matters pertaining to worship and the tent of meeting.

OBSERVATION
Some people believe that outward appearance determines inner quality. With God, it is the other way around: outward appearance should reflect inner reality. The priestly garments reflected the holy character of the priests as they were in communion with a holy God.

INSPIRATION
"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts" (Romans 13:14).

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:26, 27).

This clothing has nothing to do with dresses and jeans and suits. God's concern is with our spiritual garment. He offers a heavenly robe that only heaven can see and only heaven can give. Listen to the words of Isaiah: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Isaiah 61:10).

Remember the words of the father when the prodigal son returned? He wanted his son to have new sandals, a new ring, and what else? New clothes. "Bring out the best robe

Moses, for the service of the Levites, by the hand of Ithamar, son of Aaron the priest.

22 Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, made
all that the Lord had commanded Moses. 23 And with him *was* Aholiab
the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, an engraver and designer, a
weaver of blue, purple, and scarlet *thread,* and of fine linen.

24 All the gold that was used in all the work of the holy *place,* that is,
the gold of the offering, was twenty-nine talents and seven hundred
and thirty shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary. 25 And the
silver from those who were numbered of the congregation *was* one
hundred talents and one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five
shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary: 26 a bekah for each
man (*that is,* half a shekel, according to the shekel of the sanctuary),
for everyone included in the numbering from twenty years old and
above, for six hundred and three thousand, five hundred and fifty
men. 27 And from the hundred talents of silver were cast the sockets
of the sanctuary and the bases of the veil: one hundred sockets from
the hundred talents, one talent for each socket. 28 Then from the one
thousand seven hundred and seventy-five *shekels* he made hooks for
the pillars, overlaid their capitals, and made bands for them.

29 The offering of bronze *was* seventy talents and two thousand four
hundred shekels. 30 And with it he made the sockets for the door of the
tabernacle of meeting, the bronze altar, the bronze grating for it, and
all the utensils for the altar, 31 the sockets for the court all around, the
bases for the court gate, all the pegs for the tabernacle, and all the pegs
for the court all around.

Making the Garments of the Priesthood

39 Of the blue, purple, and scarlet *thread* they made garments of
ministry,[a] for ministering in the holy *place,* and made the holy
garments for Aaron, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Making the Ephod

2 He made the ephod of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet *thread,* and
of fine woven linen. 3 And they beat the gold into thin sheets and cut
it into threads, to work *it* in *with* the blue, purple, and scarlet *thread,*
and the fine linen, *into* artistic designs. 4 They made shoulder straps
for it to couple *it* together; it was coupled together at its two edges.
5 And the intricately woven band of his ephod that *was* on it *was* of the
same workmanship, *woven of* gold, blue, purple, and scarlet *thread,*
and *of* fine woven linen, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

6 And they set onyx stones, enclosed in settings of gold; they were
engraved, as signets are engraved, with the names of the sons of Israel.
7 He put them on the shoulders of the ephod *as* memorial stones for
the sons of Israel, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Making the Breastplate

8 And he made the breastplate, artistically woven like the workman-
ship of the ephod, of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet *thread,* and of fine
woven linen. 9 They made the breastplate square by doubling it; a span

39:1 [a] Or *woven garments*

was its length and a span its width when doubled. 10And they set in it four rows of stones: a row with a sardius, a topaz, and an emerald was the first row; 11the second row, a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond; 12the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; 13the fourth row, a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. *They were* enclosed in settings of gold in their mountings. 14*There were* twelve stones according to the names of the sons of Israel: according to their names, *engraved like* a signet, each one with its own name according to the twelve tribes. 15And they made chains for the breastplate at the ends, like braided cords of pure gold. 16They also made two settings of gold and two gold rings, and put the two rings on the two ends of the breastplate. 17And they put the two braided *chains* of gold in the two rings on the ends of the breastplate. 18The two ends of the two braided *chains* they fastened in the two settings, and put them on the shoulder straps of the ephod in the front. 19And they made two rings of gold and put *them* on the two ends of the breastplate, on the edge of it, which *was* on the inward side of the ephod. 20They made two *other* gold rings and put them on the two shoulder straps, underneath the ephod toward its front, right at the seam above the intricately woven band of the ephod. 21And they bound the breastplate by means of its rings to the rings of the ephod with a blue cord, so that it would be above the intricately woven band of the ephod, and that the breastplate would not come loose from the ephod, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Making the Other Priestly Garments

22He made the robe of the ephod of woven work, all of blue. 23And *there was* an opening in the middle of the robe, like the opening in a coat of mail, *with* a woven binding all around the opening, so that it would not tear. 24They made on the hem of the robe pomegranates of blue, purple, and scarlet, and of fine woven *linen.* 25And they made bells of pure gold, and put the bells between the pomegranates on the hem of the robe all around between the pomegranates: 26a bell and a pomegranate, a bell and a pomegranate, all around the hem of the robe to minister in, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

27They made tunics, artistically woven of fine linen, for Aaron and his sons, 28a turban of fine linen, exquisite hats of fine linen, short trousers of fine woven linen, 29and a sash of fine woven linen with blue, purple, and scarlet *thread,* made by a weaver, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

30Then they made the plate of the holy crown of pure gold, and wrote on it an inscription *like* the engraving of a signet:

HOLINESS TO THE LORD.

31And they tied to it a blue cord, to fasten *it* above on the turban, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

The Work Completed

32Thus all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was finished. And the children of Israel did according to all that the Lord had commanded Moses; so they did. 33And they brought the tabernacle to Moses, the tent and all its furnishings: its clasps, its boards, its bars, its pillars, and its sockets; 34the covering of ram skins dyed red, the covering of badger skins, and the veil of the covering; 35the ark of the

and put it on him" (Luke 15:22). No son of his was going to be seen in shabby, muddy rags. The father wanted the son to have the best clothing available.

Your Father wants you to have the same.

Again, this discussion of clothing has nothing to do with what the store sells you. It has everything to do with what God gives you when you give your life to Him. (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How much time do you take each day to make yourself look good? How much time do you take each day to develop your inner character? Knowing that God cares about your inner character, get up early and start your day in prayer.

EXPLORATION

God and Clothes—Matthew 6:28–30; Romans 13:14; Galatians 3:26–29; 1 Timothy 6:6–8.

Let God be God. Let Him bathe you in His glory so that both your breath and your troubles are sucked from your soul.

—Max Lucado (The Great House of God)

Testimony with its poles, and the mercy seat;
36 the table, all its utensils, and the showbread;
37 the pure *gold* lampstand with its lamps (the
lamps set in order), all its utensils, and the oil
for light; 38 the gold altar, the anointing oil,
and the sweet incense; the screen for the tab-
ernacle door; 39 the bronze altar, its grate of
bronze, its poles, and all its utensils; the laver
with its base; 40 the hangings of the court, its
pillars and its sockets, the screen for the court
gate, its cords, and its pegs; all the utensils for
the service of the tabernacle, for the tent of
meeting; 41 and the garments of ministry,[a] to
minister in the holy *place:* the holy garments
for Aaron the priest, and his sons' garments, to
minister as priests.

42 According to all that the Lord had com-
manded Moses, so the children of Israel did
all the work. 43 Then Moses looked over all the
work, and indeed they had done it; as the Lord
had commanded, just so they had done it. And
Moses blessed them.

The Tabernacle Erected and Arranged

40 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:
2 "On the first day of the first month
you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of
meeting. 3 You shall put in it the ark of the
Testimony, and partition off the ark with the
veil. 4 You shall bring in the table and arrange
the things that are to be set in order on it; and
you shall bring in the lampstand and light its
lamps. 5 You shall also set the altar of gold for
the incense before the ark of the Testimony,
and put up the screen for the door of the tab-
ernacle. 6 Then you shall set the altar of the
burnt offering before the door of the taber-
nacle of the tent of meeting. 7 And you shall set
the laver between the tabernacle of meeting
and the altar, and put water in it. 8 You shall
set up the court all around, and hang up the
screen at the court gate.

9 "And you shall take the anointing oil, and
anoint the tabernacle and all that *is* in it; and
you shall hallow it and all its utensils, and it
shall be holy. 10 You shall anoint the altar of
the burnt offering and all its utensils, and con-
secrate the altar. The altar shall be most holy.
11 And you shall anoint the laver and its base,
and consecrate it.

12 "Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons
to the door of the tabernacle of meeting and
wash them with water. 13 You shall put the
holy garments on Aaron, and anoint him and
consecrate him, that he may minister to Me
as priest. 14 And you shall bring his sons and
clothe them with tunics. 15 You shall anoint
them, as you anointed their father, that they
may minister to Me as priests; for their anoint-
ing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood
throughout their generations."

16 Thus Moses did; according to all that the
Lord had commanded him, so he did.

17 And it came to pass in the first month of
the second year, on the first *day* of the month,
that the tabernacle was raised up. 18 So Moses
raised up the tabernacle, fastened its sockets,
set up its boards, put in its bars, and raised up
its pillars. 19 And he spread out the tent over
the tabernacle and put the covering of the tent
on top of it, as the Lord had commanded Mo-
ses. 20 He took the Testimony and put *it* into
the ark, inserted the poles through the rings of
the ark, and put the mercy seat on top of the
ark. 21 And he brought the ark into the taber-
nacle, hung up the veil of the covering, and
partitioned off the ark of the Testimony, as the
Lord had commanded Moses.

22 He put the table in the tabernacle of
meeting, on the north side of the tabernacle,
outside the veil; 23 and he set the bread in order
upon it before the Lord, as the Lord had com-
manded Moses. 24 He put the lampstand in the
tabernacle of meeting, across from the table,
on the south side of the tabernacle; 25 and he
lit the lamps before the Lord, as the Lord had
commanded Moses. 26 He put the gold altar in
the tabernacle of meeting in front of the veil;
27 and he burned sweet incense on it, as the
Lord had commanded Moses. 28 He hung up
the screen *at* the door of the tabernacle. 29 And
he put the altar of burnt offering *before* the
door of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting,
and offered upon it the burnt offering and the
grain offering, as the Lord had commanded
Moses. 30 He set the laver between the taber-
nacle of meeting and the altar, and put water
there for washing; 31 and Moses, Aaron, and

39:41 [a]Or *woven garments*

his sons would wash their hands and their feet *with water* from it. 32Whenever they went into the tabernacle of meeting, and when they came near the altar, they washed, as the Lord had commanded Moses. 33And he raised up the court all around the tabernacle and the altar, and hung up the screen of the court gate. So Moses finished the work.

The Cloud and the Glory

34Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 35And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 36Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. 37But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up. 38For the cloud of the Lord *was* above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.

THE BOOK OF

LEVITICUS INTRODUCTION

Suppose your father grants you a piece of land. Free. You can farm it and make a living.

There is only one condition. You first have to get the rocks out. And so you work. For hours and days you work. With time, you see the task is too great. There's just no way you can do it.

You give up.

Then your father says you've done enough. "I have another plot of land for you," he explains. "This time the stones are gone."

"Who removed them?"

"I did."

You go to the acreage and find his promise to be true. The stones are gone, and you are left to farm. And so you sow in gratitude.

Nice story, Max, but what does this have to do with Leviticus?

The Book of Leviticus is the deed to the farm. A rocky farm given by God to His children . . . laden with stones. Heavied with tasks. Loaded with rocky rules and regulations.

Three months after their deliverance, the children of Israel spent a year at the base of Mount Sinai. They were nomadic people in a barren land. Suddenly forced to live together, suddenly forced to travel together, they needed guidelines for hygiene and health. They needed rules for worship and community. For that reason, God gave them Leviticus. A practical guide for community and worship. But for us, it serves a still higher purpose. Leviticus reminds us that God takes holiness seriously.

Any person who tries to be holy is soon convinced he can't. There are too many rules. Too many rocks to remove. We need help. We need a Savior. "Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24).

Holiness is what God desires. But holiness is what we cannot achieve. Just like the son couldn't remove the rocks, so we can't remove our sins.

But just like the father surprised the son, so our Father surprises us. He removed the rocks for us.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Moses

Date Written: 1500–1450 B.C.

Key Themes:

- God gave instructions for the offerings and sacrifices and the priests who will administrate them.
- Through Moses, God gave the people guidelines for keeping their camps safe, sanitary, and functional.
- God taught the people about various feasts that will remind them of His provision and goodness.

Key Verse:

"Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 20:7).

Contents:

I. The Priests and the Sacrifices 1:1—10:20

II. Sanitation and Health 11:1—15:33

III. Ceremonial, Civil, and Moral Laws 16:1—22:33

IV. Feasts, Festivals, and Tithes 23:1—27:34

The Burnt Offering

Now the Lord called to Moses, and spoke to him from the tabernacle of meeting, saying, 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When any one of you brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of the livestock—of the herd and of the flock.

3 'If his offering *is* a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the Lord. 4 Then he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him. 5 He shall kill the bull before the Lord; and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood and sprinkle the blood all around on the altar that *is by* the door of the tabernacle of meeting. 6 And he shall skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces. 7 The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar, and lay the wood in order on the fire. 8 Then the priests, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head, and the fat in order on the wood that *is* on the fire upon the altar; 9 but he shall wash its entrails and its legs with water. And the priest shall burn all on the altar as a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord.

10 'If his offering *is* of the flocks—of the sheep or of the goats—as a burnt sacrifice, he shall bring a male without blemish. 11 He shall kill it on the north side of the altar before the Lord; and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall sprinkle its blood all around on the altar. 12 And he shall cut it into its pieces, with its head and its fat; and the priest shall lay them in order on the wood that *is* on the fire upon the altar; 13 but he shall wash the entrails and the legs with water. Then the priest shall bring *it* all and burn *it* on the altar; it *is* a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord.

14 'And if the burnt sacrifice of his offering to the Lord *is* of birds, then he shall bring his offering of turtledoves or young pigeons. 15 The priest shall bring it to the altar, wring off its head, and burn *it* on the altar; its blood shall be drained out at the side of the altar. 16 And he shall remove its crop with its feathers and cast it beside the altar on the east side, into the place for ashes. 17 Then he shall split it at its wings, *but* shall not divide *it* completely; and the priest shall burn it on the altar, on the wood that *is* on the fire. It *is* a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord.

The Grain Offering

2 'When anyone offers a grain offering to the Lord, his offering shall be *of* fine flour. And he shall pour oil on it, and put frankincense on it. 2 He shall bring it to Aaron's sons, the priests, one of whom shall take from it his handful of fine flour and oil with all the frankincense. And the priest shall burn *it as* a memorial on the altar, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord. 3 The rest of the grain offering *shall be* Aaron's and his sons'. *It is* most holy of the offerings to the Lord made by fire.

4 'And if you bring as an offering a grain offering baked in the oven, *it shall be* unleavened cakes of fine flour mixed with oil, or unleavened wafers anointed with oil. 5 But if your offering *is* a grain offering *baked* in a pan, *it shall be of* fine flour, unleavened, mixed with oil. 6 You shall break it in pieces and pour oil on it; it *is* a grain offering.

Life Lessons

Leviticus 1:1—6:7

SITUATION
Blood sacrifices had great significance. Blood offered an atonement for sin, but its incompleteness required the perfect sacrifice, Jesus Christ. The sacrifices in these chapters taught the Israelites how to worship God through personal commitment.

OBSERVATION
God's people must revere Him, commit themselves to His laws, and show sincere dedication to Him.

INSPIRATION
Martin and Gracia Burnham . . . served God in the Philippines. With three children born on the mission field and valuable skills in the ministry's aviation program, they were acclimated and essential to the work. He, single-minded. She, gracious and convicted.

Then why didn't God block the bullets? Why did He let her get shot? And why did God let him die?

On May 27, 2001, while celebrating their eighteenth wedding anniversary at a beachside resort, Martin and Gracia were taken hostage by a militant terrorist organization with ties to Osama bin Laden. Captors chained the couple to guards, marched them through jungles, and rationed their food. They endured seventeen firefights and for over four hundred days were either running for their lives or bored. Their health deteriorated, but their faith remained sturdy. "We might not leave this jungle alive," said Martin, "but at least we

can leave this world serving the Lord with gladness." A premonition led Martin to write a farewell letter to his children.

The premonition proved accurate. On June 7, 2002, Philippine Rangers attacked the terrorist camp, catching Martin and Gracia in the cross-fire. One bullet entered her leg. Another took his life. She was left a widow, and we are left to wonder why. Is this how God honors His chosen? How do you explain such a tragedy?

And as you're thinking of theirs, how do you explain yours? The tension at home. The demands at work. The bills on your desk or the tumor in your body. You aren't taken hostage, but aren't you occasionally taken aback by God's silence? He knows what you are facing. How do we explain this? . . .

Don't blame suffering in the world on the anger of God. He's not mad; He didn't mess up. Follow our troubles to their headwaters, and you won't find an angry or befuddled God. But you will find a sovereign God. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What difficult decisions could you face this week because of your faith? In what areas will you face ridicule? temptation? persecution? hard times? Ask God to give you courage and wisdom to face upcoming trials.

EXPLORATION

Commitment—Genesis 22:1–8; Joshua 24:15; 2 Chronicles 15:14, 15; Matthew 16:24, 25.

7 'If your offering *is* a grain offering *baked* in a covered pan, it shall
be made *of* fine flour with oil. 8 You shall bring the grain offering that
is made of these things to the Lord. And when it is presented to the
priest, he shall bring it to the altar. 9 Then the priest shall take from
the grain offering a memorial portion, and burn *it* on the altar. *It is* an
offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord. 10 And what is left of
the grain offering *shall be* Aaron's and his sons'. *It is* most holy of the
offerings to the Lord made by fire.

11 'No grain offering which you bring to the Lord shall be made with
leaven, for you shall burn no leaven nor any honey in any offering to
the Lord made by fire. 12 As for the offering of the firstfruits, you shall
offer them to the Lord, but they shall not be burned on the altar for
a sweet aroma. 13 And every offering of your grain offering you shall
season with salt; you shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your
God to be lacking from your grain offering. With all your offerings you
shall offer salt.

14 'If you offer a grain offering of your firstfruits to the Lord, you
shall offer for the grain offering of your firstfruits green heads of grain
roasted on the fire, grain beaten from full heads. 15 And you shall put
oil on it, and lay frankincense on it. It *is* a grain offering. 16 Then the
priest shall burn the memorial portion: *part* of its beaten grain and
part of its oil, with all the frankincense, as an offering made by fire to
the Lord.

The Peace Offering

3 'When his offering *is* a sacrifice of a peace offering, if he offers *it* of
the herd, whether male or female, he shall offer it without blemish
before the Lord. 2 And he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering,
and kill it *at* the door of the tabernacle of meeting; and Aaron's sons,
the priests, shall sprinkle the blood all around on the altar. 3 Then he
shall offer from the sacrifice of the peace offering an offering made
by fire to the Lord. The fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that
is on the entrails, 4 the two kidneys and the fat that *is* on them by the
flanks, and the fatty lobe *attached* to the liver above the kidneys, he
shall remove; 5 and Aaron's sons shall burn it on the altar upon the
burnt sacrifice, which *is* on the wood that *is* on the fire, *as* an offering
made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord.

6 'If his offering as a sacrifice of a peace offering to the Lord *is* of
the flock, *whether* male or female, he shall offer it without blemish. 7 If
he offers a lamb as his offering, then he shall offer it before the Lord.
8 And he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering, and kill it before
the tabernacle of meeting; and Aaron's sons shall sprinkle its blood all
around on the altar.

9 'Then he shall offer from the sacrifice of the peace offering, as an
offering made by fire to the Lord, its fat *and* the whole fat tail which
he shall remove close to the backbone. And the fat that covers the
entrails and all the fat that *is* on the entrails, 10 the two kidneys and the
fat that *is* on them by the flanks, and the fatty lobe *attached* to the liver
above the kidneys, he shall remove; 11 and the priest shall burn *them*
on the altar *as* food, an offering made by fire to the Lord.

12 'And if his offering *is* a goat, then he shall offer it before the Lord.
13 He shall lay his hand on its head and kill it before the tabernacle of

meeting; and the sons of Aaron shall sprinkle its blood all around on the altar. 14Then he shall offer from it his offering, as an offering made by fire to the Lord. The fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that *is* on the entrails, 15the two kidneys and the fat that *is* on them by the flanks, and the fatty lobe *attached* to the liver above the kidneys, he shall remove; 16and the priest shall burn them on the altar *as* food, an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma; all the fat *is* the Lord's.

17'*This shall be* a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwellings: you shall eat neither fat nor blood.'"

The Sin Offering

4 Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2"Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If a person sins unintentionally against any of the commandments of the Lord *in anything* which ought not to be done, and does any of them, 3if the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, then let him offer to the Lord for his sin which he has sinned a young bull without blemish as a sin offering. 4He shall bring the bull to the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the Lord, lay his hand on the bull's head, and kill the bull before the Lord. 5Then the anointed priest shall take some of the bull's blood and bring it to the tabernacle of meeting. 6The priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle some of the blood seven times before the Lord, in front of the veil of the sanctuary. 7And the priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the Lord, which is in the tabernacle of meeting; and he shall pour the remaining blood of the bull at the base of the altar of the burnt offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. 8He shall take from it all the fat of the bull as the sin offering. The fat that covers the entrails and all the fat which *is* on the entrails, 9the two kidneys and the fat that *is* on them by the flanks, and the fatty lobe *attached* to the liver above the kidneys, he shall remove, 10as it was taken from the bull of the sacrifice of the peace offering; and the priest shall burn them on the altar of the burnt offering. 11But the bull's hide and all its flesh, with its head and legs, its entrails and offal— 12the whole bull he shall carry outside the camp to a clean place, where the ashes are poured out, and burn it on wood with fire; where the ashes are poured out it shall be burned.

13'Now if the whole congregation of Israel sins unintentionally, and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done *something against* any of the commandments of the Lord *in anything* which should not be done, and are guilty; 14when the sin which they have committed becomes known, then the assembly shall offer a young bull for the sin, and bring it before the tabernacle of meeting. 15And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands on the head of the bull before the Lord. Then the bull shall be killed before the Lord. 16The anointed priest shall bring some of the bull's blood to the tabernacle of meeting. 17Then the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle *it* seven times before the Lord, in front of the veil. 18And he shall put *some* of the blood on the horns of the altar which *is* before the Lord, which *is* in the tabernacle of meeting; and he shall pour the remaining blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. 19He shall take all the fat from it and burn *it* on the altar. 20And he shall do with the bull as he did with the bull as a sin offering; thus he shall do with it. So the priest shall make atonement for them, and it shall be forgiven them. 21Then he shall carry the bull outside the camp, and burn it as he burned the first bull. It *is* a sin offering for the assembly.

22'When a ruler has sinned, and done *something* unintentionally *against* any of the commandments of the Lord his God *in anything* which should not be done, and is guilty, 23or if his sin which he has committed comes to his knowledge, he shall bring as his offering a kid of the goats, a male without blemish. 24And he shall lay his hand on the head of the goat, and kill it at the place where they kill the burnt offering before the Lord. It *is* a sin offering. 25The priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, put *it* on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour its blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering. 26And he shall burn all its fat on the altar, like the fat of the sacrifice of the peace offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin, and it shall be forgiven him.

27 'If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally by doing *something against* any of the commandments of the Lord *in anything* which ought not to be done, and is guilty, 28 or if his sin which he has committed comes to his knowledge, then he shall bring as his offering a kid of the goats, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed. 29 And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering, and kill the sin offering at the place of the burnt offering. 30 Then the priest shall take *some* of its blood with his finger, put *it* on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour all *the remaining* blood at the base of the altar. 31 He shall remove all its fat, as fat is removed from the sacrifice of the peace offering; and the priest shall burn it on the altar for a sweet aroma to the Lord. So the priest shall make atonement for him, and it shall be forgiven him.

32 'If he brings a lamb as his sin offering, he shall bring a female without blemish. 33 Then he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering, and kill it as a sin offering at the place where they kill the burnt offering. 34 The priest shall take *some* of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, put *it* on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour all *the*

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: The Lamb of God

The annual event always drew a crowd. The priest would solemnly ascend the temple steps, cradling in his arms a lamb. As the people waited outside, he would pass through the great curtain and enter the Holy of Holies. He would kill the lamb upon the altar and pray that the blood would appease God. The sins would be rolled back. And the people would sigh with relief.

A great curtain hung as a reminder of the distance between God and man. It was like a deep chasm that no one could breach. Man on his island . . . quarantined because of sin.

God could have left it like that. He could have left the people isolated. He could have washed His hands of the whole mess. He could have turned back, tossed in the towel, and started over on another planet. He *could* have, you know.

But He didn't.

God Himself breached the chasm. In the darkness of an eclipsed sun, He and a Lamb stood in the Holy of Holies. He laid the Lamb on the altar. Not the lamb of a priest or a Jew or a shepherd, but the Lamb of God. The angels hushed as the blood of the Sufficient Sacrifice began to fall on the golden altar. Where had dripped the blood of lambs, now dripped the blood of life.

"Behold the Lamb of God."

And then it happened. God turned and looked one last time at the curtain.

"No more." And it was torn . . . from top to bottom. Ripped in two.

"No more!"

"No more lambs!"

"No more curtain!"

"No more sacrifices!"

"No more separation!"

And the sun came out. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 139.

remaining blood at the base of the altar. 35 He shall remove all its fat, as the fat of the lamb is removed from the sacrifice of the peace offering. Then the priest shall burn it on the altar, according to the offerings made by fire to the Lord. So the priest shall make atonement for his sin that he has committed, and it shall be forgiven him.

The Trespass Offering

5 'If a person sins in hearing the utterance of an oath, and *is* a witness, whether he has seen or known *of the matter*—if he does not tell *it,* he bears guilt.

2 'Or if a person touches any unclean thing, whether *it is* the carcass of an unclean beast, or the carcass of unclean livestock, or the carcass of unclean creeping things, and he is unaware of it, he also shall be unclean and guilty. 3 Or if he touches human uncleanness—whatever uncleanness with which a man may be defiled, and he is unaware of it—when he realizes *it,* then he shall be guilty.

4 'Or if a person swears, speaking thoughtlessly with *his* lips to do evil or to do good, whatever *it is* that a man may pronounce by an oath, and he is unaware of it—when he realizes *it,* then he shall be guilty in any of these *matters.*

5 'And it shall be, when he is guilty in any of these *matters,* that he shall confess that he has sinned in that *thing;* 6 and he shall bring his trespass offering to the Lord for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid of the goats as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin.

7 'If he is not able to bring a lamb, then he shall bring to the Lord, for his trespass which he has committed, two turtledoves or two young pigeons: one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering. 8 And he shall bring them to the priest, who shall offer *that* which *is* for the sin offering first, and wring off its head from its neck, but shall not divide *it* completely. 9 Then he shall sprinkle *some* of the blood of the sin offering on the side of the altar, and the rest of the blood shall be drained out at the base of the altar. It *is* a sin offering. 10 And he shall offer the second *as* a burnt offering according to the prescribed manner. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin which he has committed, and it shall be forgiven him.

11 'But if he is not able to bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons, then he who sinned shall bring for his offering one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a sin offering. He shall put no oil on it, nor shall he put frankincense on it, for it *is* a sin offering. 12 Then he shall bring it to the priest, and the priest shall take his handful of it as a memorial portion, and burn *it* on the altar according to the offerings made by fire to the Lord. It *is* a sin offering. 13 The priest shall make atonement for him, for his sin that he has committed in any of these matters; and it shall be forgiven him. *The rest* shall be the priest's as a grain offering.' "

Offerings with Restitution

14 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 15 "If a person commits a trespass, and sins unintentionally in regard to the holy things of the Lord, then he shall bring to the Lord as his trespass offering a ram without blemish from the flocks, with your valuation in shekels of silver according to the shekel of the sanctuary, as a trespass offering. 16 And he shall make restitution for the harm that he has done in regard to the holy thing, and shall add one-fifth to it and give it to the priest. So the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering, and it shall be forgiven him.

17 "If a person sins, and commits any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord, though he does not know *it,* yet he is guilty and shall bear his iniquity. 18 And he shall bring to the priest a ram without blemish from the flock, with your valuation, as a trespass offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him regarding his ignorance in which he erred and did not know *it,* and it shall be forgiven him. 19 It is a trespass offering; he has certainly trespassed against the Lord."

6 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2 "If a person sins and commits a trespass against the Lord by lying to his neighbor about what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or about a pledge, or about a robbery, or if he has extorted from his neighbor, 3 or if he has found what was lost and lies concerning it, and swears falsely—in any one of these things that a man may do in which he sins: 4 then it shall

be, because he has sinned and is guilty, that he shall restore what he has stolen, or the thing which he has extorted, or what was delivered to him for safekeeping, or the lost thing which he found, 5 or all that about which he has sworn falsely. He shall restore its full value, add one-fifth more to it, *and* give it to whomever it belongs, on the day of his trespass offering. 6 And he shall bring his trespass offering to the Lord, a ram without blemish from the flock, with your valuation, as a trespass offering, to the priest. 7 So the priest shall make atonement for him before the Lord, and he shall be forgiven for any one of these things that he may have done in which he trespasses."

The Law of the Burnt Offering

8 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 9 "Command Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This *is* the law of the burnt offering: The burnt offering *shall be* on the hearth upon the altar all night until morning, and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning on it. 10 And the priest shall put on his linen garment, and his linen trousers he shall put on his body, and take up the ashes of the burnt offering which the fire has consumed on the altar, and he shall put them beside the altar. 11 Then he shall take off his garments, put on other garments, and carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place. 12 And the fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not be put out. And the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the burnt offering in order on it; and he shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. 13 A fire shall always be burning on the altar; it shall never go out.

The Law of the Grain Offering

14 'This *is* the law of the grain offering: The sons of Aaron shall offer it on the altar before the Lord. 15 He shall take from it his handful of the fine flour of the grain offering, with its oil, and all the frankincense which *is* on the grain offering, and shall burn *it* on the altar *for* a sweet aroma, as a memorial to the Lord. 16 And the remainder of it Aaron and his sons shall eat; with unleavened bread it shall be eaten in a holy place; in the court of the tabernacle of meeting they shall eat it. 17 It shall not be baked with leaven. I have given it *as* their portion of My offerings made by fire; it *is* most holy, like the sin offering and the trespass offering. 18 All the males among the children of Aaron may eat it. *It shall be* a statute forever in your generations concerning the offerings made by fire to the Lord. Everyone who touches them must be holy.' "[a]

19 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 20 "This *is* the offering of Aaron and his sons, which they shall offer to the Lord, *beginning* on the day when he is anointed: one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a daily grain offering, half of it in the morning and half of it at night. 21 It shall be made in a pan with oil. *When it is* mixed, you shall bring it in. The baked pieces of the grain offering you shall offer *for* a sweet aroma to the Lord. 22 The priest from among his sons, who is anointed in his place, shall offer it. *It is* a statute forever to the Lord. It shall be wholly burned. 23 For every grain offering for the priest shall be wholly burned. It shall not be eaten."

6:18 [a] Compare Numbers 4:15 and Haggai 2:11–13

Life Lessons

Leviticus 6:8—10:20

SITUATION
The priests were the official communicators between God and man. God ordained priests as full-time spiritual leaders.

OBSERVATION
When God calls and ordains spiritual leaders, they have a special responsibility to live obediently as they walk close to Him.

INSPIRATION
I was on a flight . . . watch[ing] an airline attendant fumble. She couldn't do anything right. Order soda, and she'd bring juice. Ask for a pillow, and she'd bring a blanket, if she brought anything at all.

And I started to grumble. Not out loud, but in my thoughts. *What's the matter with service these days?* I suppose I was feeling a bit smug. I'd just been a guest speaker at an event. People had told me how lucky they were that I had come. I don't know what was loonier: the fact that they said it or that I believed it. So I boarded the plane feeling cocky. I had to tilt my head to enter the doorway. I took my seat knowing the flight was safe, since heaven knows, I'm essential to the work of God.

Then I asked for the soda, the pillow. . . . She blew the assignments, and I growled. Do you see what I was doing? Placing myself higher than the airline attendant. In the pecking order of the plane, she was below me. Her job was to serve, and my job was to be served.

Don't look at me like that. Haven't you felt a bit superior to someone? A

The Law of the Sin Offering

24 Also the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 25 "Speak to Aaron and to
his sons, saying, 'This *is* the law of the sin offering: In the place where
the burnt offering is killed, the sin offering shall be killed before the
Lord. It *is* most holy. 26 The priest who offers it for sin shall eat it. In
a holy place it shall be eaten, in the court of the tabernacle of meet-
ing. 27 Everyone who touches its flesh must be holy.[a] And when its
blood is sprinkled on any garment, you shall wash that on which it
was sprinkled, in a holy place. 28 But the earthen vessel in which it is
boiled shall be broken. And if it is boiled in a bronze pot, it shall be
both scoured and rinsed in water. 29 All the males among the priests
may eat it. It *is* most holy. 30 But no sin offering from which *any* of the
blood is brought into the tabernacle of meeting, to make atonement
in the holy *place,*[a] shall be eaten. It shall be burned in the fire.

The Law of the Trespass Offering

7 'Likewise this *is* the law of the trespass offering (it *is* most holy):
2 In the place where they kill the burnt offering they shall kill the
trespass offering. And its blood he shall sprinkle all around on the
altar. 3 And he shall offer from it all its fat. The fat tail and the fat that
covers the entrails, 4 the two kidneys and the fat that *is* on them by
the flanks, and the fatty lobe *attached* to the liver above the kidneys,
he shall remove; 5 and the priest shall burn them on the altar *as* an
offering made by fire to the Lord. It *is* a trespass offering. 6 Every male
among the priests may eat it. It shall be eaten in a holy place. It *is*
most holy. 7 The trespass offering *is* like the sin offering; *there is* one
law for them both: the priest who makes atonement with it shall have
it. 8 And the priest who offers anyone's burnt offering, that priest shall
have for himself the skin of the burnt offering which he has offered.
9 Also every grain offering that is baked in the oven and all that is pre-
pared in the covered pan, or in a pan, shall be the priest's who offers
it. 10 Every grain offering, *whether* mixed with oil or dry, shall belong
to all the sons of Aaron, to one *as much* as the other.

The Law of Peace Offerings

11 'This *is* the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings which he shall
offer to the Lord: 12 If he offers it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer,
with the sacrifice of thanksgiving, unleavened cakes mixed with oil,
unleavened wafers anointed with oil, or cakes of blended flour mixed
with oil. 13 Besides the cakes, *as* his offering he shall offer leavened
bread with the sacrifice of thanksgiving of his peace offering. 14 And
from it he shall offer one cake from each offering *as* a heave offering
to the Lord. It shall belong to the priest who sprinkles the blood of the
peace offering.

15 'The flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering for thanksgiv-
ing shall be eaten the same day it is offered. He shall not leave any
of it until morning. 16 But if the sacrifice of his offering *is* a vow or a
voluntary offering, it shall be eaten the same day that he offers his
sacrifice; but on the next day the remainder of it also may be eaten;

6:27 [a]Compare Numbers 4:15 and Haggai 2:11–13 **6:30** [a]The Most Holy Place when capitalized

parking lot attendant. The clerk at the grocery store. The peanut-seller at the game. The employee at the coat check. You've done what I did. And we've done what David did. We've lost our sight and hearing.

When I looked at the airline attendant, I didn't see a human being; I saw a necessary commodity. But her question changed all that.

"Mr. Lucado?" Imagine my surprise when the airline attendant knelt beside my seat. "Are you the one who writes the Christian books?"

Christian books, yes. Christian thoughts—that's another matter, I said to myself, descending the balcony stairs.

"May I talk to you?" she asked. Her eyes misted, and her heart opened, and she filled the next three or four minutes with her pain. Divorce papers had arrived that morning. Her husband wouldn't return her calls. She didn't know where she was going to live. She could hardly focus on work. Would I pray for her?

I did. But both God and I knew she was not the only one needing prayer.

Perhaps you could use a prayer too? (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Christ desires all believers to be priests and therefore spiritual leaders. He wants us to live holy and obedient lives. Which areas of your life are less than totally dependent on Him? Write down three ways you can pursue holiness before God and start practicing them.

EXPLORATION

Leadership—Numbers 27:15–17; 1 Chronicles 28:1.

17 the remainder of the flesh of the sacrifice on
the third day must be burned with fire. 18 And
if *any* of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace
offering is eaten at all on the third day, it shall
not be accepted, nor shall it be imputed to
him; it shall be an abomination *to* him who
offers it, and the person who eats of it shall
bear guilt.

19 'The flesh that touches any unclean thing
shall not be eaten. It shall be burned with
fire. And as for the *clean* flesh, all who are
clean may eat of it. 20 But the person who
eats the flesh of the sacrifice of the peace
offering that *belongs* to the Lord, while he is
unclean, that person shall be cut off from his
people. 21 Moreover the person who touches
any unclean thing, *such as* human uncleanness, *an* unclean animal, or any abominable
unclean thing,[a] and who eats the flesh of the
sacrifice of the peace offering that *belongs* to
the Lord, that person shall be cut off from his
people.' "

Fat and Blood May Not Be Eaten

22 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,
23 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'You
shall not eat any fat, of ox or sheep or goat.
24 And the fat of an animal that dies *naturally,*
and the fat of what is torn by wild beasts, may
be used in any other way; but you shall by no
means eat it. 25 For whoever eats the fat of the
animal of which men offer an offering made
by fire to the Lord, the person who eats *it* shall
be cut off from his people. 26 Moreover you
shall not eat any blood in any of your dwellings, *whether* of bird or beast. 27 Whoever eats
any blood, that person shall be cut off from
his people.' "

The Portion of Aaron and His Sons

28 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,
29 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'He
who offers the sacrifice of his peace offering
to the Lord shall bring his offering to the Lord
from the sacrifice of his peace offering. 30 His
own hands shall bring the offerings made by
fire to the Lord. The fat with the breast he shall
bring, that the breast may be waved *as* a wave
offering before the Lord. 31 And the priest shall
burn the fat on the altar, but the breast shall
be Aaron's and his sons'. 32 Also the right thigh
you shall give to the priest *as* a heave offering
from the sacrifices of your peace offerings.
33 He among the sons of Aaron, who offers the
blood of the peace offering and the fat, shall
have the right thigh for *his* part. 34 For the
breast of the wave offering and the thigh of the
heave offering I have taken from the children
of Israel, from the sacrifices of their peace
offerings, and I have given them to Aaron the
priest and to his sons from the children of
Israel by a statute forever.' "

35 This *is* the consecrated portion for Aaron
and his sons, from the offerings made by fire
to the Lord, on the day when *Moses* presented
them to minister to the Lord as priests. 36 The
Lord commanded this to be given to them
by the children of Israel, on the day that He
anointed them, *by* a statute forever throughout their generations.

37 This *is* the law of the burnt offering, the
grain offering, the sin offering, the trespass
offering, the consecrations, and the sacrifice
of the peace offering, 38 which the Lord commanded Moses on Mount Sinai, on the day
when He commanded the children of Israel
to offer their offerings to the Lord in the
Wilderness of Sinai.

Aaron and His Sons Consecrated

8 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:
2 "Take Aaron and his sons with him, and
the garments, the anointing oil, a bull as the
sin offering, two rams, and a basket of unleavened bread; 3 and gather all the congregation
together at the door of the tabernacle of meeting."

4 So Moses did as the Lord commanded him.
And the congregation was gathered together
at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. 5 And
Moses said to the congregation, "This *is* what
the Lord commanded to be done."

6 Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons
and washed them with water. 7 And he put
the tunic on him, girded him with the sash,
clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod
on him; and he girded him with the intricately
woven band of the ephod, and with it tied

7:21 [a] Following Masoretic Text, Septuagint, and Vulgate; Samaritan Pentateuch, Syriac, and Targum read *swarming thing* (compare 5:2).

the ephod on him. 8Then he put the breastplate on him, and he put the Urim and the Thummim[a] in the breastplate. 9And he put the turban on his head. Also on the turban, on its front, he put the golden plate, the holy crown, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

10Also Moses took the anointing oil, and anointed the tabernacle and all that *was* in it, and consecrated them. 11He sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times, anointed the altar and all its utensils, and the laver and its base, to consecrate them. 12And he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him, to consecrate him.

13Then Moses brought Aaron's sons and put tunics on them, girded them with sashes, and put hats on them, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

14And he brought the bull for the sin offering. Then Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the bull for the sin offering, 15and Moses killed *it*. Then he took the blood, and put *some* on the horns of the altar all around with his finger, and purified the altar. And he poured the blood at the base of the altar, and consecrated it, to make atonement for it. 16Then he took all the fat that *was* on the entrails, the fatty lobe *attached to* the liver, and the two kidneys with their fat, and Moses burned *them* on the altar. 17But the bull, its

8:8 [a]Literally *the Lights and the Perfections* (compare Exodus 28:30)

Christ Through The Bible

Christ: The Perfect Priest

When we see Christ, what will we see?

We will see the perfect priest, "clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band" (Revelation 1:13). The first readers of this message knew the significance of the robe and band. Jesus is wearing the clothing of a priest. A priest presents people to God and God to people.

You have known other priests. There have been others in your life, whether clergy or not, who sought to bring you to God. But they, too, needed a priest. Some needed a priest more than you did. They, like you, were sinful. Not so with Jesus. "For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens" (Hebrews 7:26).

Jesus is the perfect priest.

He is also pure and purifying: "His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire" (Revelation 1:14).

What would a person look like if he had never sinned? If no worry wrinkled his brow and no anger shadowed his eyes? If no bitterness snarled his lips and no selfishness bowed his smile? If a person had never sinned, how would he appear? We'll know when we see Jesus. What John saw that Sunday on Patmos was absolutely spotless. He was reminded of the virgin wool of sheep and the untouched snow of winter.

And John was also reminded of fire. Others saw the burning bush, the burning altar, the fiery furnace, or the fiery chariots, but John saw the fiery eyes. And in those eyes he saw a purging blaze which will burn the bacteria of sin and purify the soul. (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 197.

hide, its flesh, and its offal, he burned with fire outside the camp, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

18 Then he brought the ram as the burnt offering. And Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram, 19 and Moses killed *it.* Then he sprinkled the blood all around on the altar. 20 And he cut the ram into pieces; and Moses burned the head, the pieces, and the fat. 21 Then he washed the entrails and the legs in water. And Moses burned the whole ram on the altar. It *was* a burnt sacrifice for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the Lord, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

22 And he brought the second ram, the ram of consecration. Then Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram, 23 and Moses killed *it.* Also he took *some* of its blood and put it on the tip of Aaron's right ear, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot. 24 Then he brought Aaron's sons. And Moses put *some* of the blood on the tips of their right ears, on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet. And Moses sprinkled the blood all around on the altar. 25 Then he took the fat and the fat tail, all the fat that *was* on the entrails, the fatty lobe *attached to* the liver, the two kidneys and their fat, and the right thigh; 26 and from the basket of unleavened bread that was before the Lord he took one unleavened cake, a cake of bread *anointed with* oil, and one wafer, and put *them* on the fat and on the right thigh; 27 and he put all *these* in Aaron's hands and in his sons' hands, and waved them *as* a wave offering before the Lord. 28 Then Moses took them from their hands and burned *them* on the altar, on the burnt offering. They *were* consecration offerings for a sweet aroma. That *was* an offering made by fire to the Lord. 29 And Moses took the breast and waved it *as* a wave offering before the Lord. It was Moses' part of the ram of consecration, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

30 Then Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood which *was* on the altar, and sprinkled *it* on Aaron, on his garments, on his sons, and on the garments of his sons with him; and he consecrated Aaron, his garments, his sons, and the garments of his sons with him.

31 And Moses said to Aaron and his sons, "Boil the flesh *at* the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and eat it there with the bread that *is* in the basket of consecration offerings, as I commanded, saying, 'Aaron and his sons shall eat it.' 32 What remains of the flesh and of the bread you shall burn with fire. 33 And you shall not go outside the door of the tabernacle of meeting *for* seven days, until the days of your consecration are ended. For seven days he shall consecrate you. 34 As he has done this day, *so* the Lord has commanded to do, to make atonement for you. 35 Therefore you shall stay *at* the door of the tabernacle of meeting day and night for seven days, and keep the charge of the Lord, so that you may not die; for so I have been commanded." 36 So Aaron and his sons did all the things that the Lord had commanded by the hand of Moses.

The Priestly Ministry Begins

9 It came to pass on the eighth day that Moses called Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel. 2 And he said to Aaron, "Take for yourself a young bull as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt offering, without blemish, and offer *them* before the Lord. 3 And to the children of Israel you shall speak, saying, 'Take a kid of the goats as a sin offering, and a calf and a lamb, *both* of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering, 4 also a bull and a ram as peace offerings, to sacrifice before the Lord, and a grain offering mixed with oil; for today the Lord will appear to you.' "

5 So they brought what Moses commanded before the tabernacle of meeting. And all the congregation drew near and stood before the Lord. 6 Then Moses said, "This *is* the thing which the Lord commanded you to do, and the glory of the Lord will appear to you." 7 And Moses said to Aaron, "Go to the altar, offer your sin offering and your burnt offering, and make atonement for yourself and for the people. Offer the offering of the people, and make atonement for them, as the Lord commanded."

8 Aaron therefore went to the altar and killed the calf of the sin offering, which *was* for himself. 9 Then the sons of Aaron brought the blood to him. And he dipped his finger in the blood, put *it* on the horns of the altar, and poured the blood at the base of the altar. 10 But the fat, the kidneys, and the fatty lobe

from the liver of the sin offering he burned on the altar, as the Lord had commanded Moses.
11 The flesh and the hide he burned with fire outside the camp.

12 And he killed the burnt offering; and Aaron's sons presented to him the blood, which he sprinkled all around on the altar. 13 Then they presented the burnt offering to him, with its pieces and head, and he burned *them* on the altar. 14 And he washed the entrails and the legs, and burned *them* with the burnt offering on the altar.

15 Then he brought the people's offering, and took the goat, which *was* the sin offering for the people, and killed it and offered it for sin, like the first one. 16 And he brought the burnt offering and offered it according to the prescribed manner. 17 Then he brought the grain offering, took a handful of it, and burned *it* on the altar, besides the burnt sacrifice of the morning.

18 He also killed the bull and the ram *as* sacrifices of peace offerings, which *were* for the people. And Aaron's sons presented to him the blood, which he sprinkled all around on the altar, 19 and the fat from the bull and the ram—the fatty tail, what covers *the entrails* and the kidneys, and the fatty lobe *attached to* the liver; 20 and they put the fat on the breasts. Then he burned the fat on the altar; 21 but the breasts and the right thigh Aaron waved *as* a wave offering before the Lord, as Moses had commanded.

22 Then Aaron lifted his hand toward the people, blessed them, and came down from offering the sin offering, the burnt offering, and peace offerings. 23 And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of meeting, and came out and blessed the people. Then the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people, 24 and fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw *it,* they shouted and fell on their faces.

The Profane Fire of Nadab and Abihu

10 Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. 2 So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. 3 And Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord spoke, saying:

> 'By those who come near Me
> I must be regarded as holy;
> And before all the people
> I must be glorified.'"

So Aaron held his peace.

4 Then Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, "Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp." 5 So they went near and carried them by their tunics out of the camp, as Moses had said.

6 And Moses said to Aaron, and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his sons, "Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the people. But let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the Lord has kindled. 7 You shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of the Lord *is* upon you." And they did according to the word of Moses.

Conduct Prescribed for Priests

8 Then the Lord spoke to Aaron, saying:
9 "Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. *It shall be* a statute forever throughout your generations, 10 that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, 11 and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them by the hand of Moses."

12 And Moses spoke to Aaron, and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his sons who were left: "Take the grain offering that remains of the offerings made by fire to the Lord, and eat it without leaven beside the altar; for it *is* most holy. 13 You shall eat it in a holy place, because it *is* your due and your sons' due, of the sacrifices made by fire to the Lord; for so I have been commanded. 14 The breast of the wave offering and the thigh of the heave offering you shall eat in a clean place, you, your sons, and your daughters with you; for *they are* your due and your sons' due, *which* are given from the sacrifices of peace offerings of the children of

Israel. 15 The thigh of the heave offering and the breast of the wave offering they shall bring with the offerings of fat made by fire, to offer *as* a wave offering before the Lord. And it shall be yours and your sons' with you, by a statute forever, as the Lord has commanded."

16 Then Moses made careful inquiry about the goat of the sin offering, and there it was—burned up. And he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron *who were* left, saying, 17 "Why have you not eaten the sin offering in a holy place, since it *is* most holy, and *God* has given it to you to bear the guilt of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the Lord? 18 See! Its blood was not brought inside the holy *place;*[a] indeed you should have eaten it in a holy *place,* as I commanded."

19 And Aaron said to Moses, "Look, this day they have offered their sin offering and their burnt offering before the Lord, and such things have befallen me! *If* I had eaten the sin offering today, would it have been accepted in the sight of the Lord?" 20 So when Moses heard *that,* he was content.

Foods Permitted and Forbidden

11 Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying to them, 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying, 'These *are* the animals which you may eat among all the animals that *are* on the earth: 3 Among the animals, whatever divides the hoof, having cloven hooves *and* chewing the cud—that you may eat. 4 Nevertheless these you shall not eat among those that chew the cud or those that have cloven hooves: the camel, because it chews the cud but does not have cloven hooves, is unclean to you; 5 the rock hyrax, because it chews the cud but does not have cloven hooves, *is* unclean to you; 6 the hare, because it chews the cud but does not have cloven hooves, *is* unclean to you; 7 and the swine, though it divides the hoof, having cloven hooves, yet does not chew the cud, *is* unclean to you. 8 Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch. They *are* unclean to you.

9 'These you may eat of all that *are* in the water: whatever in the water has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the rivers—that you may eat. 10 But all in the seas or in the rivers that do not have fins and scales, all that move in the water or any living thing which *is* in the water, they *are* an abomination to you. 11 They shall be an abomination to you; you shall not eat their flesh, but you shall regard their carcasses as an abomination. 12 Whatever in the water does not have fins or scales—that *shall be* an abomination to you.

13 'And these you shall regard as an abomination among the birds; they shall not be eaten, they *are* an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, the buzzard, 14 the kite, and the falcon after its kind; 15 every raven after its kind, 16 the ostrich, the short-eared owl, the sea gull, and the hawk after its kind; 17 the little owl, the fisher owl, and the screech owl; 18 the white owl, the jackdaw, and the carrion vulture; 19 the stork, the heron after its kind, the hoopoe, and the bat.

20 'All flying insects that creep on *all* fours *shall be* an abomination to you. 21 Yet these you may eat of every flying insect that creeps on

10:18 [a] The Most Holy Place when capitalized

Life Lessons

Leviticus 11:1—15:33

SITUATION
God set forth his laws for purity. They included food, childbirth, skin diseases, and bodily fluids.

OBSERVATION
Failure to obey these regulations was considered sin. While following God's laws did provide good hygienic results, they also separated the pure and clean from the impure and unclean. Israel was to be distinct from the pagan nations surrounding them. We make decisions daily that may not be popular but may be proper.

INSPIRATION
Anchor your convictions to the Word of God to help present crises from occurring in your life. When facing tough decisions, employ dogged and determined prayer and thinking grounded in the Word.

Do what is right this week, whatever it is, whatever comes down the path, whatever problems and dilemmas you face—just do what's right. Maybe no one else is doing what's right, but you do what's right. You be honest. You take a stand. You be true. After all, regardless of what you do, God does what is right: He saves you with His grace.

Never let your decisions be made on the basis of the blowings of the winds of opinion and popularity.

The majority is not always right. If the majority had ruled, the children of Israel never would have left Egypt. They would have voted to stay in bondage. If the

all fours: those which have jointed legs above their feet with which to leap on the earth. 22 These you may eat: the locust after its kind, the destroying locust after its kind, the cricket after its kind, and the grasshopper after its kind. 23 But all *other* flying insects which have four feet *shall be* an abomination to you.

Unclean Animals

24 'By these you shall become unclean; whoever touches the carcass of any of them shall be unclean until evening; 25 whoever carries part of the carcass of any of them shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening: 26 *The carcass* of any animal which divides the foot, but is not cloven-hoofed or does not chew the cud, *is* unclean to you. Everyone who touches it shall be unclean. 27 And whatever goes on its paws, among all kinds of animals that go on *all* fours, those *are* unclean to you. Whoever touches any such carcass shall be unclean until evening. 28 Whoever carries *any such* carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. It *is* unclean to you.

29 'These also *shall be* unclean to you among the creeping things that creep on the earth: the mole, the mouse, and the large lizard after its kind; 30 the gecko, the monitor lizard, the sand reptile, the sand lizard, and the chameleon. 31 These *are* unclean to you among all that creep. Whoever touches them when they are dead shall be unclean until evening. 32 Anything on which *any* of them falls, when they are dead shall be unclean, whether *it is* any item of wood or clothing or skin or sack, whatever item *it is,* in which *any* work is done, it must be put in water. And it shall be unclean until evening; then it shall be clean. 33 Any earthen vessel into which *any* of them falls you shall break; and whatever *is* in it shall be unclean: 34 in such a vessel, any edible food upon which water falls becomes unclean, and any drink that may be drunk from it becomes unclean. 35 And everything on which *a part* of *any such* carcass falls shall be unclean; *whether it is* an oven or cooking stove, it shall be broken down; *for* they *are* unclean, and shall be unclean to you. 36 Nevertheless a spring or a cistern, *in which there is* plenty of water, shall be clean, but whatever touches any such carcass becomes unclean. 37 And if a part of *any such* carcass falls on any planting seed which is to be sown, it *remains* clean. 38 But if water is put on the seed, and if *a part* of *any such* carcass falls on it, it *becomes* unclean to you.

39 'And if any animal which you may eat dies, he who touches its carcass shall be unclean until evening. 40 He who eats of its carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. He also who carries its carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening.

41 'And every creeping thing that creeps on the earth *shall be* an abomination. It shall not be eaten. 42 Whatever crawls on its belly, whatever goes on *all* fours, or whatever has many feet among all creeping things that creep on the earth—these you shall not eat, for they *are* an abomination. 43 You shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping thing that creeps; nor shall you make yourselves unclean with them, lest you be defiled by them. 44 For I *am* the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I *am* holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth. 45 For I *am* the Lord who brings you

majority had ruled, David never would have fought Goliath. His brothers would have voted for him to stay with the sheep. What's the point? You must listen to your own heart.

God says you're on your way to becoming a disciple when you can keep a clear head and a pure heart.

Do you ever wonder if everything will turn out right as long as you do everything right? Do you ever try to do something right and yet nothing seems to turn out like you planned? Take heart—when people do what is right, God remembers. (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "Decisions")

APPLICATION

What decisions do you need to make today? Before you make your choice, consider which options would most honor God.

EXPLORATION

Purity—Psalm 24:4; Matthew 5:8; Philippians 4:6–8; 1 Thessalonians 4:1–8; Titus 1:15; 2:5.

Don't trust your conscience. Trust the Cross. The blood has been spilt and the veil has been split. You are welcome in God's presence.

—Max Lucado (He Chose the Nails)

up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I *am* holy.

46 ‘This *is* the law of the animals and the birds and every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps on the earth, 47 to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten.’ ”

The Ritual After Childbirth

12 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of her customary impurity she shall be unclean. 3 And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. 4 She shall then continue in the blood of *her* purification thirty-three days. She shall not touch any hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary until the days of her purification are fulfilled.

5 ‘But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her customary impurity, and she shall continue in the blood of *her* purification sixty-six days.

6 ‘When the days of her purification are fulfilled, whether for a son or a daughter, she shall bring to the priest a lamb of the first year as a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtledove as a sin offering, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. 7 Then he shall offer it before the Lord, and make atonement for her. And she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. This *is* the law for her who has borne a male or a female.

8 ‘And if she is not able to bring a lamb, then she may bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons—one as a burnt offering and the other as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean.’ ”

The Law Concerning Leprosy

13 And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: 2 “When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling, a scab, or a bright spot, and it becomes on the skin of his body *like* a leprous[a] sore, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests. 3 The priest shall examine the sore on the skin of the body; and if the hair on the sore has turned white, and the sore appears *to be* deeper than the skin of his body, it *is* a leprous sore. Then the priest shall examine him, and pronounce him unclean. 4 But if the bright spot *is* white on the skin of his body, and does not appear *to be* deeper than the skin, and its hair has not turned white, then the priest shall isolate *the one who has* the sore seven days. 5 And the priest shall examine him on the seventh day; and indeed *if* the sore appears to be as it was, *and* the sore has not spread on the skin, then the priest shall isolate him another seven days. 6 Then the priest shall examine him again on the seventh day; and indeed *if* the sore has faded, *and* the sore has not spread on the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him clean; it *is only* a scab, and he shall wash his clothes and be clean. 7 But if the scab should at all spread over the skin, after he has been seen by the priest for his cleansing, he shall be seen by the priest again. 8 And *if* the priest sees that the scab has indeed spread on the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean. It *is* leprosy.

9 “When the leprous sore is on a person, then he shall be brought to the priest. 10 And the priest shall examine *him;* and indeed *if* the swelling on the skin *is* white, and it has turned the hair white, and *there is* a spot of raw flesh in the swelling, 11 it *is* an old leprosy on the skin of his body. The priest shall pronounce him unclean, and shall not isolate him, for he *is* unclean.

12 “And if leprosy breaks out all over the skin, and the leprosy covers all the skin of *the one who has* the sore, from his head to his foot, wherever the priest looks, 13 then the priest shall consider; and indeed *if* the leprosy has covered all his body, he shall pronounce *him* clean *who has* the sore. It has all turned white. He *is* clean. 14 But when raw flesh appears on him, he shall be unclean. 15 And the priest shall examine the raw flesh and pronounce him to be unclean; *for* the raw flesh *is* unclean. It *is* leprosy. 16 Or if the raw flesh changes and turns white again, he shall come to the priest. 17 And the priest shall examine him; and indeed *if* the sore has turned white, then the priest shall pronounce *him* clean *who has* the sore. He *is* clean.

13:2 [a] Hebrew *saraath,* disfiguring skin diseases, including leprosy, and so in verses 2–46 and 14:2–32

18 "If the body develops a boil in the skin,
and it is healed, 19 and in the place of the
boil there comes a white swelling or a bright
spot, reddish-white, then it shall be shown to
the priest; 20 and *if,* when the priest sees it, it
indeed appears deeper than the skin, and its
hair has turned white, the priest shall pro-
nounce him unclean. It *is* a leprous sore which
has broken out of the boil. 21 But if the priest
examines it, and indeed *there are* no white
hairs in it, and it *is* not deeper than the skin,
but has faded, then the priest shall isolate him
seven days; 22 and if it should at all spread over
the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him
unclean. It *is* a leprous sore. 23 But if the bright
spot stays in one place, *and* has not spread,
it *is* the scar of the boil; and the priest shall
pronounce him clean.

24 "Or if the body receives a burn on its skin
by fire, and the raw *flesh* of the burn becomes
a bright spot, reddish-white or white, 25 then
the priest shall examine it; and indeed *if* the
hair of the bright spot has turned white, and it
appears deeper than the skin, it *is* leprosy bro-
ken out in the burn. Therefore the priest shall
pronounce him unclean. It *is* a leprous sore.
26 But if the priest examines it, and indeed
there are no white hairs in the bright spot, and
it *is* not deeper than the skin, but has faded,
then the priest shall isolate him seven days.
27 And the priest shall examine him on the
seventh day. If it has at all spread over the skin,
then the priest shall pronounce him unclean.
It *is* a leprous sore. 28 But if the bright spot
stays in one place, *and* has not spread on the
skin, but has faded, it *is* a swelling from the
burn. The priest shall pronounce him clean,
for it *is* the scar from the burn.

29 "If a man or woman has a sore on the head
or the beard, 30 then the priest shall examine
the sore; and indeed if it appears deeper than
the skin, *and there is* in it thin yellow hair, then
the priest shall pronounce him unclean. It *is*
a scaly leprosy of the head or beard. 31 But if
the priest examines the scaly sore, and indeed
it does not appear deeper than the skin, and
there is no black hair in it, then the priest
shall isolate *the one who has* the scale seven
days. 32 And on the seventh day the priest shall
examine the sore; and indeed *if* the scale has
not spread, and there is no yellow hair in it, and
the scale does not appear deeper than the skin,
33 he shall shave himself, but the scale he shall
not shave. And the priest shall isolate *the one
who has* the scale another seven days. 34 On the
seventh day the priest shall examine the scale;
and indeed *if* the scale has not spread over the
skin, and does not appear deeper than the skin,
then the priest shall pronounce him clean. He
shall wash his clothes and be clean. 35 But if the
scale should at all spread over the skin after
his cleansing, 36 then the priest shall examine
him; and indeed *if* the scale has spread over the
skin, the priest need not seek for yellow hair.
He *is* unclean. 37 But if the scale appears to be
at a standstill, and there is black hair grown up
in it, the scale has healed. He *is* clean, and the
priest shall pronounce him clean.

38 "If a man or a woman has bright spots on
the skin of the body, *specifically* white bright
spots, 39 then the priest shall look; and indeed
if the bright spots on the skin of the body *are*
dull white, it *is* a white spot *that* grows on the
skin. He *is* clean.

40 "As for the man whose hair has fallen
from his head, he *is* bald, *but* he *is* clean. 41 He
whose hair has fallen from his forehead, he *is*
bald on the forehead, *but* he *is* clean. 42 And
if there is on the bald head or bald forehead
a reddish-white sore, it *is* leprosy breaking
out on his bald head or his bald forehead.
43 Then the priest shall examine it; and indeed
if the swelling of the sore *is* reddish-white on
his bald head or on his bald forehead, as the
appearance of leprosy on the skin of the body,
44 he is a leprous man. He *is* unclean. The
priest shall surely pronounce him unclean; his
sore *is* on his head.

45 "Now the leper on whom the sore *is,* his
clothes shall be torn and his head bare; and
he shall cover his mustache, and cry, 'Unclean!
Unclean!' 46 He shall be unclean. All the days
he has the sore he shall be unclean. He *is*
unclean, and he shall dwell alone; his dwelling
shall be outside the camp.

The Law Concerning Leprous Garments

47 "Also, if a garment has a leprous plague[a]
in it, *whether it is* a woolen garment or a linen

13:47 [a]A mold, fungus, or similar infestation, and so in verses 47–59

garment, 48 whether *it is* in the warp or woof
of linen or wool, whether in leather or in any-
thing made of leather, 49 and if the plague is
greenish or reddish in the garment or in the
leather, whether in the warp or in the woof,
or in anything made of leather, it *is* a leprous
plague and shall be shown to the priest. 50 The
priest shall examine the plague and isolate
that which has the plague seven days. 51 And
he shall examine the plague on the seventh
day. If the plague has spread in the garment,
either in the warp or in the woof, in the leather
or in anything made of leather, the plague *is* an
active leprosy. It *is* unclean. 52 He shall there-
fore burn that garment in which is the plague,
whether warp or woof, in wool or in linen, or
anything of leather, for it *is* an active leprosy;
the garment shall be burned in the fire.

53 "But if the priest examines *it,* and indeed
the plague has not spread in the garment,
either in the warp or in the woof, or in any-
thing made of leather, 54 then the priest shall
command that they wash *the thing* in which
is the plague; and he shall isolate it another
seven days. 55 Then the priest shall examine the
plague after it has been washed; and indeed *if*
the plague has not changed its color, though
the plague has not spread, it *is* unclean, and
you shall burn it in the fire; it continues eating
away, *whether* the damage *is* outside or inside.
56 If the priest examines *it,* and indeed the
plague has faded after washing it, then he shall
tear it out of the garment, whether out of the
warp or out of the woof, or out of the leather.
57 But if it appears again in the garment, either
in the warp or in the woof, or in anything
made of leather, it *is* a spreading *plague;* you
shall burn with fire that in which is the plague.
58 And if you wash the garment, either warp
or woof, or whatever is made of leather, if the
plague has disappeared from it, then it shall
be washed a second time, and shall be clean.

59 "This *is* the law of the leprous plague in a
garment of wool or linen, either in the warp or
woof, or in anything made of leather, to pro-
nounce it clean or to pronounce it unclean."

The Ritual for Cleansing Healed Lepers

14 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,
2 "This shall be the law of the leper for
the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought
to the priest. 3 And the priest shall go out of
the camp, and the priest shall examine *him;*
and indeed, *if* the leprosy is healed in the
leper, 4 then the priest shall command to take
for him who is to be cleansed two living *and*
clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop.
5 And the priest shall command that one of
the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over
running water. 6 As for the living bird, he shall
take it, the cedar wood and the scarlet and
the hyssop, and dip them and the living bird
in the blood of the bird *that was* killed over
the running water. 7 And he shall sprinkle it
seven times on him who is to be cleansed from
the leprosy, and shall pronounce him clean,
and shall let the living bird loose in the open
field. 8 He who is to be cleansed shall wash his
clothes, shave off all his hair, and wash himself
in water, that he may be clean. After that he
shall come into the camp, and shall stay out-
side his tent seven days. 9 But on the seventh
day he shall shave all the hair off his head and
his beard and his eyebrows—all his hair he
shall shave off. He shall wash his clothes and
wash his body in water, and he shall be clean.

10 "And on the eighth day he shall take two
male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb
of the first year without blemish, three-tenths
of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a
grain offering, and one log of oil. 11 Then the
priest who makes *him* clean shall present
the man who is to be made clean, and those
things, before the Lord, *at* the door of the
tabernacle of meeting. 12 And the priest shall
take one male lamb and offer it as a trespass
offering, and the log of oil, and wave them *as* a
wave offering before the Lord. 13 Then he shall
kill the lamb in the place where he kills the
sin offering and the burnt offering, in a holy
place; for as the sin offering *is* the priest's, so
is the trespass offering. It *is* most holy. 14 The
priest shall take *some* of the blood of the
trespass offering, and the priest shall put *it*
on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be
cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand, and
on the big toe of his right foot. 15 And the priest
shall take *some* of the log of oil, and pour *it*
into the palm of his own left hand. 16 Then the
priest shall dip his right finger in the oil that *is*
in his left hand, and shall sprinkle some of the

oil with his finger seven times before the Lord.
17 And of the rest of the oil in his hand, the
priest shall put *some* on the tip of the right ear
of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of
his right hand, and on the big toe of his right
foot, on the blood of the trespass offering.
18 The rest of the oil that *is* in the priest's hand
he shall put on the head of him who is to be
cleansed. So the priest shall make atonement
for him before the Lord.
19 "Then the priest shall offer the sin offer-
ing, and make atonement for him who is to be
cleansed from his uncleanness. Afterward he
shall kill the burnt offering. 20 And the priest
shall offer the burnt offering and the grain
offering on the altar. So the priest shall make
atonement for him, and he shall be clean.
21 "But if he *is* poor and cannot afford it,
then he shall take one male lamb *as* a trespass
offering to be waved, to make atonement for
him, one-tenth *of an ephah* of fine flour mixed
with oil as a grain offering, a log of oil, 22 and
two turtledoves or two young pigeons, such
as he is able to afford: one shall be a sin offer-
ing and the other a burnt offering. 23 He shall
bring them to the priest on the eighth day for
his cleansing, to the door of the tabernacle of
meeting, before the Lord. 24 And the priest shall
take the lamb of the trespass offering and the
log of oil, and the priest shall wave them *as* a
wave offering before the Lord. 25 Then he shall
kill the lamb of the trespass offering, and the
priest shall take *some* of the blood of the tres-
pass offering and put *it* on the tip of the right
ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb
of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right
foot. 26 And the priest shall pour some of the oil
into the palm of his own left hand. 27 Then the
priest shall sprinkle with his right finger *some*
of the oil that *is* in his left hand seven times
before the Lord. 28 And the priest shall put
some of the oil that *is* in his hand on the tip of
the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on
the thumb of the right hand, and on the big toe
of his right foot, on the place of the blood of
the trespass offering. 29 The rest of the oil that
is in the priest's hand he shall put on the head
of him who is to be cleansed, to make atone-
ment for him before the Lord. 30 And he shall
offer one of the turtledoves or young pigeons,
such as he can afford— 31 such as he is able to
afford, the one *as* a sin offering and the other
as a burnt offering, with the grain offering. So
the priest shall make atonement for him who
is to be cleansed before the Lord. 32 This *is* the
law *for one* who had a leprous sore, who can-
not afford the usual cleansing."

The Law Concerning Leprous Houses

33 And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron,
saying: 34 "When you have come into the land
of Canaan, which I give you as a possession,
and I put the leprous plague[a] in a house in the
land of your possession, 35 and he who owns
the house comes and tells the priest, saying,
'It seems to me that *there is* some plague in
the house,' 36 then the priest shall command
that they empty the house, before the priest
goes *into it* to examine the plague, that all that
is in the house may not be made unclean; and
afterward the priest shall go in to examine the
house. 37 And he shall examine the plague;
and indeed *if* the plague *is* on the walls of
the house with ingrained streaks, greenish or
reddish, which appear to be deep in the wall,
38 then the priest shall go out of the house, to
the door of the house, and shut up the house
seven days. 39 And the priest shall come again
on the seventh day and look; and indeed *if* the
plague has spread on the walls of the house,
40 then the priest shall command that they
take away the stones in which *is* the plague,
and they shall cast them into an unclean
place outside the city. 41 And he shall cause the
house to be scraped inside, all around, and the
dust that they scrape off they shall pour out in
an unclean place outside the city. 42 Then they
shall take other stones and put *them* in the
place of *those* stones, and he shall take other
mortar and plaster the house.
43 "Now if the plague comes back and
breaks out in the house, after he has taken
away the stones, after he has scraped the
house, and after it is plastered, 44 then the
priest shall come and look; and indeed *if* the
plague has spread in the house, it *is* an active
leprosy in the house. It *is* unclean. 45 And he
shall break down the house, its stones, its
timber, and all the plaster of the house, and he

14:34 [a] Decomposition by mildew, mold, dry rot, etc., and so in verses 34–53

shall carry *them* outside the city to an unclean
place. 46 Moreover he who goes into the house
at all while it is shut up shall be unclean until
evening. 47 And he who lies down in the house
shall wash his clothes, and he who eats in the
house shall wash his clothes.

48 "But if the priest comes in and examines
it, and indeed the plague has not spread in
the house after the house was plastered, then
the priest shall pronounce the house clean,
because the plague is healed. 49 And he shall
take, to cleanse the house, two birds, cedar
wood, scarlet, and hyssop. 50 Then he shall
kill one of the birds in an earthen vessel over
running water; 51 and he shall take the cedar
wood, the hyssop, the scarlet, and the living
bird, and dip them in the blood of the slain
bird and in the running water, and sprinkle
the house seven times. 52 And he shall cleanse
the house with the blood of the bird and
the running water and the living bird, with
the cedar wood, the hyssop, and the scarlet.
53 Then he shall let the living bird loose outside
the city in the open field, and make atone-
ment for the house, and it shall be clean.

54 "This *is* the law for any leprous sore and
scale, 55 for the leprosy of a garment and of a
house, 56 for a swelling and a scab and a bright
spot, 57 to teach when *it is* unclean and when
it is clean. This *is* the law of leprosy."

The Law Concerning Bodily Discharges

15 And the Lord spoke to Moses and
Aaron, saying, 2 "Speak to the children
of Israel, and say to them: 'When any man
has a discharge from his body, his discharge
is unclean. 3 And this shall be his uncleanness
in regard to his discharge—whether his body
runs with his discharge, or his body is stopped
up by his discharge, it *is* his uncleanness.
4 Every bed is unclean on which he who has
the discharge lies, and everything on which he
sits shall be unclean. 5 And whoever touches
his bed shall wash his clothes and bathe in
water, and be unclean until evening. 6 He
who sits on anything on which he who has
the discharge sat shall wash his clothes and
bathe in water, and be unclean until evening.
7 And he who touches the body of him who
has the discharge shall wash his clothes and
bathe in water, and be unclean until evening.
8 If he who has the discharge spits on him
who is clean, then he shall wash his clothes
and bathe in water, and be unclean until eve-
ning. 9 Any saddle on which he who has the
discharge rides shall be unclean. 10 Whoever
touches anything that was under him shall be
unclean until evening. He who carries *any of*
those things shall wash his clothes and bathe
in water, and be unclean until evening. 11 And
whomever the one who has the discharge
touches, and has not rinsed his hands in
water, he shall wash his clothes and bathe in
water, and be unclean until evening. 12 The
vessel of earth that he who has the discharge
touches shall be broken, and every vessel of
wood shall be rinsed in water.

13 'And when he who has a discharge is
cleansed of his discharge, then he shall count
for himself seven days for his cleansing, wash
his clothes, and bathe his body in running
water; then he shall be clean. 14 On the eighth
day he shall take for himself two turtledoves
or two young pigeons, and come before the
Lord, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting,
and give them to the priest. 15 Then the priest
shall offer them, the one *as* a sin offering and
the other *as* a burnt offering. So the priest
shall make atonement for him before the Lord
because of his discharge.

16 'If any man has an emission of semen,
then he shall wash all his body in water, and
be unclean until evening. 17 And any garment
and any leather on which there is semen, it
shall be washed with water, and be unclean
until evening. 18 Also, when a woman lies with
a man, and *there is* an emission of semen,
they shall bathe in water, and be unclean until
evening.

19 'If a woman has a discharge, *and* the
discharge from her body is blood, she shall be
set apart seven days; and whoever touches her
shall be unclean until evening. 20 Everything
that she lies on during her impurity shall
be unclean; also everything that she sits on
shall be unclean. 21 Whoever touches her bed
shall wash his clothes and bathe in water,
and be unclean until evening. 22 And whoever
touches anything that she sat on shall wash
his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean
until evening. 23 If *anything* is on *her* bed or on
anything on which she sits, when he touches
it, he shall be unclean until evening. 24 And if

any man lies with her at all, so that her impurity is on him, he shall be unclean seven days; and every bed on which he lies shall be unclean.

25 'If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, other than at the time of her *customary* impurity, or if it runs beyond her *usual time of* impurity, all the days of her unclean discharge shall be as the days of her *customary* impurity. She *shall be* unclean. 26 Every bed on which she lies all the days of her discharge shall be to her as the bed of her impurity; and whatever she sits on shall be unclean, as the uncleanness of her impurity. 27 Whoever touches those things shall be unclean; he shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and be unclean until evening.

28 'But if she is cleansed of her discharge, then she shall count for herself seven days, and after that she shall be clean. 29 And on the eighth day she shall take for herself two turtledoves or two young pigeons, and bring them to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. 30 Then the priest shall offer the one *as* a sin offering and the other *as* a burnt offering, and the priest shall make atonement for her before the Lord for the discharge of her uncleanness.

31 'Thus you shall separate the children of Israel from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness when they defile My tabernacle that *is* among them. 32 This *is* the law for one who has a discharge, and *for him* who emits semen and is unclean thereby, 33 and for her who is indisposed because of her *customary* impurity, and for one who has a discharge, either man or woman, and for him who lies with her who is unclean.' "

The Day of Atonement

16 Now the Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they offered *profane fire* before the Lord, and died; 2 and the Lord said to Moses: "Tell Aaron your brother not to come at *just* any time into the Holy *Place* inside the veil, before the mercy seat which *is* on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat.

3 "Thus Aaron shall come into the Holy *Place:* with *the blood of* a young bull as a sin offering, and *of* a ram as a burnt offering. 4 He shall put the holy linen tunic and the linen trousers on his body; he shall be girded with a linen sash, and with the linen turban he shall be attired. These *are* holy garments. Therefore he shall wash his body in water, and put them on. 5 And he shall take from the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats as a sin offering, and one ram as a burnt offering.

6 "Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering, which *is* for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his house. 7 He shall take the two goats and present them before the Lord *at* the door of the tabernacle of meeting. 8 Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot for the Lord and the other lot for the scapegoat. 9 And Aaron shall bring the goat on which the Lord's lot fell, and offer it *as* a sin offering. 10 But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make atonement upon it, *and* to let it go as the scapegoat into the wilderness.

11 "And Aaron shall bring the bull of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his house, and

Life Lessons

Leviticus 16:1—17:16

SITUATION

The Day of Atonement was the holiest day for the Israelites. The ceremonies included the sin offering of a bull for the high priest and his household, the sin offering of two goats for the people, and the ritual of sending a goat into the wilderness.

OBSERVATION

The number of sins atoned for by the Day of Atonement is staggering. The sin offering cleansed the place of God's dwelling from the pollution of the people's sins.

INSPIRATION

What prevents people from being rightly related to God? Sin. And if heaven promises a right relationship with God, what is missing in heaven? You got it, baby. Sin. Heaven will be sin-free. Both death and sin will be things of the past.

Is this a big deal? I think so. . . . Can you imagine a world minus sin? Have you done anything recently because of sin?

At the very least, you've complained. You've worried. You've grumbled. You've hoarded when you should have shared. You've turned away when you should have helped. You've second-guessed, and you've covered up. But you won't do that in heaven.

Because of sin, you've snapped at the ones you love and argued with the ones you cherish. You have felt ashamed, guilty, bitter. You have ulcers, sleepless nights, cloudy days, and a pain in the neck. But you won't have those in heaven.

Because of sin, the young are abused and the elderly forgotten. Because of sin, God is cursed and drugs are worshiped. Because of sin, the poor have less and the affluent want more. Because of sin, babies have no daddies and husbands have no wives. But in heaven, sin will have no power; in fact, sin will have no presence. There will be no sin.

Sin has sired a thousand heartaches and broken a million promises. Your addiction can be traced back to sin. Your mistrust can be traced back to sin. Bigotry, robbery, adultery—all because of sin. But in heaven, all of this will end.

Can you imagine a world without sin? If so, you can imagine heaven. (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Don't let sin get you down. If you've repented of your sins, you can accept God's forgiveness. So thank Him for His mercy and move on.

EXPLORATION

Christ's Death for Sin—Romans 4:25; 1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 John 2:2; 3:5.

shall kill the bull as the sin offering which *is* for himself. 12 Then he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, with his hands full of sweet incense beaten fine, and bring *it* inside the veil. 13 And he shall put the incense on the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that *is* on the Testimony, lest he die. 14 He shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle *it* with his finger on the mercy seat on the east *side;* and before the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.

15 "Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which *is* for the people, bring its blood inside the veil, do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat. 16 So he shall make atonement for the Holy *Place,* because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins; and so he shall do for the tabernacle of meeting which remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness. 17 There shall be no man in the tabernacle of meeting when he goes in to make atonement in the Holy *Place,* until he comes out, that he may make atonement for himself, for his household, and for all the assembly of Israel. 18 And he shall go out to the altar that *is* before the Lord, and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and some of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar all around. 19 Then he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, cleanse it, and consecrate it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.

20 "And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy *Place,* the tabernacle of meeting, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat. 21 Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send *it* away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man. 22 The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness.

23 "Then Aaron shall come into the tabernacle of meeting, shall take off the linen garments which he put on when he went into the Holy *Place,* and shall leave them there. 24 And he shall wash his body with water in a holy place, put on his garments, come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people, and make atonement for himself and for the people. 25 The fat of the sin offering he shall burn on the altar. 26 And he who released the goat as the scapegoat shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp. 27 The bull *for* the sin offering and the goat *for* the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the Holy *Place,* shall be carried outside the camp. And they shall burn in the fire their skins, their flesh, and their offal. 28 Then he who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp.

29 "*This* shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth *day* of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, *whether* a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you. 30 For on that day *the priest* shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, *that* you may be clean from all your sins

before the Lord. 31 It *is* a sabbath of solemn
rest for you, and you shall afflict your souls.
It is a statute forever. 32 And the priest, who
is anointed and consecrated to minister as
priest in his father's place, shall make atone-
ment, and put on the linen clothes, the holy
garments; 33 then he shall make atonement for
the Holy Sanctuary,[a] and he shall make atone-
ment for the tabernacle of meeting and for
the altar, and he shall make atonement for the
priests and for all the people of the assembly.
34 This shall be an everlasting statute for you,
to make atonement for the children of Israel,
for all their sins, once a year." And he did as
the Lord commanded Moses.

The Sanctity of Blood

17 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,
2 "Speak to Aaron, to his sons, and to all
the children of Israel, and say to them, 'This
is the thing which the Lord has commanded,
saying: 3 "Whatever man of the house of Israel
who kills an ox or lamb or goat in the camp,
or who kills *it* outside the camp, 4 and does
not bring it to the door of the tabernacle
of meeting to offer an offering to the Lord
before the tabernacle of the Lord, the guilt of
bloodshed shall be imputed to that man. He
has shed blood; and that man shall be cut off
from among his people, 5 to the end that the
children of Israel may bring their sacrifices
which they offer in the open field, that they
may bring them to the Lord at the door of the
tabernacle of meeting, to the priest, and offer
them *as* peace offerings to the Lord. 6 And the
priest shall sprinkle the blood on the altar of
the Lord *at* the door of the tabernacle of meet-
ing, and burn the fat for a sweet aroma to the
Lord. 7 They shall no more offer their sacrifices
to demons, after whom they have played the
harlot. This shall be a statute forever for them
throughout their generations." '

8 "Also you shall say to them: 'Whatever
man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers
who dwell among you, who offers a burnt
offering or sacrifice, 9 and does not bring it to
the door of the tabernacle of meeting, to offer
it to the Lord, that man shall be cut off from
among his people.

10 'And whatever man of the house of Israel,
or of the strangers who dwell among you, who
eats any blood, I will set My face against that
person who eats blood, and will cut him off
from among his people. 11 For the life of the
flesh *is* in the blood, and I have given it to you
upon the altar to make atonement for your
souls; for it *is* the blood *that* makes atonement
for the soul.' 12 Therefore I said to the children
of Israel, 'No one among you shall eat blood,
nor shall any stranger who dwells among you
eat blood.'

13 "Whatever man of the children of Israel,
or of the strangers who dwell among you, who
hunts and catches any animal or bird that may
be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover
it with dust; 14 for *it is* the life of all flesh. Its
blood sustains its life. Therefore I said to the
children of Israel, 'You shall not eat the blood
of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood.
Whoever eats it shall be cut off.'

15 "And every person who eats what died
naturally or what was torn *by beasts, whether
he is* a native of your own country or a stran-
ger, he shall both wash his clothes and bathe
in water, and be unclean until evening. Then
he shall be clean. 16 But if he does not wash
them or bathe his body, then he shall bear his
guilt."

Laws of Sexual Morality

18 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,
2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and
say to them: 'I am the Lord your God. 3 Accord-
ing to the doings of the land of Egypt, where
you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to
the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am
bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you
walk in their ordinances. 4 You shall observe
My judgments and keep My ordinances, to
walk in them: I *am* the Lord your God. 5 You
shall therefore keep My statutes and My judg-
ments, which if a man does, he shall live by
them: I *am* the Lord.

6 'None of you shall approach anyone who
is near of kin to him, to uncover his nakedness:
I *am* the Lord. 7 The nakedness of your father
or the nakedness of your mother you shall
not uncover. She *is* your mother; you shall not
uncover her nakedness. 8 The nakedness of
your father's wife you shall not uncover; it *is*

16:33 [a] That is, the Most Holy Place

your father's nakedness. 9 The nakedness of your sister, the daughter of your father, or the daughter of your mother, *whether* born at home or elsewhere, their nakedness you shall not uncover. 10 The nakedness of your son's daughter or your daughter's daughter, their nakedness you shall not uncover; for theirs *is* your own nakedness. 11 The nakedness of your father's wife's daughter, begotten by your father—she *is* your sister—you shall not uncover her nakedness. 12 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's sister; she *is* near of kin to your father. 13 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, for she *is* near of kin to your mother. 14 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother. You shall not approach his wife; she *is* your aunt. 15 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law—she *is* your son's wife—you shall not uncover her nakedness. 16 You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it *is* your brother's nakedness. 17 You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter, nor shall you take her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter, to uncover her nakedness. They *are* near of kin to her. It *is* wickedness. 18 Nor shall you take a woman as a rival to her sister, to uncover her nakedness while the other is alive.

19 'Also you shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness as long as she is in her *customary* impurity. 20 Moreover you shall not lie carnally with your neighbor's wife, to defile yourself with her. 21 And you shall not let any of your descendants pass through *the fire* to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I *am* the Lord. 22 You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It *is* an abomination. 23 Nor shall you mate with any animal, to defile yourself with it. Nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it. It *is* perversion.

24 'Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you. 25 For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants. 26 You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit *any* of these abominations, *either* any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you 27 (for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who *were* before you, and thus the land is defiled), 28 lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that *were* before you. 29 For whoever commits any of these abominations, the persons who commit *them* shall be cut off from among their people.

30 'Therefore you shall keep My ordinance, so that *you* do not commit *any* of these abominable customs which were committed before you, and that you do not defile yourselves by them: I *am* the Lord your God.'"

Moral and Ceremonial Laws

19 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God *am* holy.

3 'Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths: I *am* the Lord your God.

Life Lessons

Leviticus 18:1—20:27

SITUATION
God was leading the Israelites from one pagan culture (Egypt) to another (Canaan). God wanted the people to follow His guidelines for sexual practices. He wanted them to abhor the sexual sins of the pagan cultures.

OBSERVATION
To obey God means fulfilling our sexual desires only with our spouse, as God intends.

INSPIRATION
You're acquainted with house-sitters. You've possibly used one. Not wanting to leave your house vacant, you ask someone to stay in your home until you return. Let me describe two of your nightmares.

The house-sitter redecorates your house. White paint is changed to pink. Berber carpet to shag. An abstract plastic chair sits in the place of your cozy love seat. His justification? "The house didn't express me accurately. I needed a house that communicated who I am."

Your response? "It's not yours! My residence does not exist to reflect you! I asked you to take care of the house, not take over the house!" Would you want a sitter like this?

You might choose him over nightmare number two. She didn't redecorate; she neglected. Never washed a dish, made a bed, or took out the trash. "My time here was temporary. I knew you wouldn't mind," she explains.

Of course you'd mind! Does she know what this abode cost you?

4 'Do not turn to idols, nor make for yourselves molded gods: I *am* the Lord your God.

5 'And if you offer a sacrifice of a peace offering to the Lord, you shall offer it of your own free will. 6 It shall be eaten the same day you offer *it,* and on the next day. And if any remains until the third day, it shall be burned in the fire. 7 And if it is eaten at all on the third day, it *is* an abomination. It shall not be accepted. 8 Therefore *everyone* who eats it shall bear his iniquity, because he has profaned the hallowed *offering* of the Lord; and that person shall be cut off from his people.

9 'When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather *every* grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I *am* the Lord your God.

11 'You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. 12 And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I *am* the Lord.

13 'You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob *him.* The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning. 14 You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I *am* the Lord.

15 'You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor. 16 You shall not go about *as* a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I *am* the Lord.

17 'You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. 18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I *am* the Lord.

19 'You shall keep My statutes. You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind. You shall not sow your field with mixed seed. Nor shall a garment of mixed linen and wool come upon you.

20 'Whoever lies carnally with a woman who *is* betrothed to a man as a concubine, and who has not at all been redeemed nor given her freedom, for this there shall be scourging; *but* they shall not be put to death, because she was not free. 21 And he shall bring his trespass offering to the Lord, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, a ram as a trespass offering. 22 The priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering before the Lord for his sin which he has committed. And the sin which he has committed shall be forgiven him.

23 'When you come into the land, and have planted all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised. Three years it shall be as uncircumcised to you. *It* shall not be eaten. 24 But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, a praise to the Lord. 25 And in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase: I *am* the Lord your God.

26 'You shall not eat *anything* with the blood, nor shall you practice divination or soothsaying. 27 You shall not shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard. 28 You shall

Both house-sitters made the same mistake. They acted as if the dwelling were theirs. How could they?

Or, better asked, how could we? When it comes to our bodies, the Bible declares that we don't own them. "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20).

Use your body to indulge your passions? To grab attention? To express your opinions? No. Use your body to honor God. "Do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (Romans 6:13).Your body is God's instrument, intended for His work and for His glory. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

The world promotes sex without restrictions as the key to happiness. Avoid that lie. Eliminate its deceitful influence. Build solid friendships and an active social life on a foundation of sexual purity. If you are married, renew your commitment to your spouse.

EXPLORATION

Sexual Purity—Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 23:17; Proverbs 23:26–28; Romans 13:13, 14; 1 Corinthians 6:15–20; 1 Thessalonians 4:3–5.

not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I *am* the Lord.

29 'Do not prostitute your daughter, to cause her to be a harlot, lest the land fall into harlotry, and the land become full of wickedness.

30 'You shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary: I *am* the Lord.

31 'Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I *am* the Lord your God.

32 'You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I *am* the Lord.

33 'And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. 34 The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I *am* the Lord your God.

35 'You shall do no injustice in judgment, in measurement of length, weight, or volume. 36 You shall have honest scales, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I *am* the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

37 'Therefore you shall observe all My statutes and all My judgments, and perform them: I *am* the Lord.' "

Penalties for Breaking the Law

20 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Again, you shall say to the children of Israel: 'Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who gives *any* of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones. 3 I will set My face against that man, and will cut him off from his people, because he has given *some* of his descendants to Molech, to defile My sanctuary and profane My holy name. 4 And if the people of the land should in any way hide their eyes from the man, when he gives *some* of his descendants to Molech, and they do not kill him, 5 then I will set My face against that man and against his family; and I will cut him off from his people, and all who prostitute themselves with him to commit harlotry with Molech.

6 'And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people. 7 Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I *am* the Lord your God. 8 And you shall keep My statutes, and perform them: I *am* the Lord who sanctifies you.

9 'For everyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother. His blood *shall be* upon him.

10 'The man who commits adultery with *another* man's wife, *he* who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death. 11 The man who lies with his father's wife has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death. Their blood *shall be* upon them. 12 If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death. They have committed perversion. Their blood *shall be* upon them. 13 If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood *shall be* upon them. 14 If a man marries a woman and her mother, it *is* wickedness. They shall be burned with fire, both he and they, that there may be no wickedness among you. 15 If a man mates with an animal, he shall surely be put to death, and you shall kill the animal. 16 If a woman approaches any animal and mates with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood *is* upon them.

17 'If a man takes his sister, his father's daughter or his mother's daughter, and sees her nakedness and she sees his nakedness, it *is* a wicked thing. And they shall be cut off in the sight of their people. He has uncovered his sister's nakedness. He shall bear his guilt. 18 If a man lies with a woman during her sickness and uncovers her nakedness, he has exposed her flow, and she has uncovered the flow of her blood. Both of them shall be cut off from their people.

19 'You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister nor of your father's sister, for that would uncover his near of kin. They shall bear their guilt. 20 If a man lies with his uncle's wife, he has uncovered his uncle's nakedness. They shall bear their sin; they shall die childless. 21 If a man takes his brother's wife, it *is* an unclean thing. He has

uncovered his brother's nakedness. They shall be childless.

22 'You shall therefore keep all My statutes and all My judgments, and perform them, that the land where I am bringing you to dwell may not vomit you out. 23 And you shall not walk in the statutes of the nation which I am casting out before you; for they commit all these things, and therefore I abhor them. 24 But I have said to you, "You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey." I *am* the Lord your God, who has separated you from the peoples. 25 You shall therefore distinguish between clean animals and unclean, between unclean birds and clean, and you shall not make yourselves abominable by beast or by bird, or by any kind of living thing that creeps on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean. 26 And you shall be holy to Me, for I the Lord *am* holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.

27 'A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones. Their blood *shall be* upon them.' "

Regulations for Conduct of Priests

21 And the Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: 'None shall defile himself for the dead among his people, 2 except for his relatives who are nearest to him: his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, and his brother; 3 also his virgin sister who is near to him, who has had no husband, for her he may defile

New Life In Christ

Be holy, for I am the Lord your God. —Leviticus 20:7

The Lord Is Holy

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name . . ." [Matthew 6:9].

This phrase is a petition, not a proclamation. A request, not an announcement. Hallowed *be* your name. We enter the chapel and beseech, "Be hallowed, Lord." Do whatever it takes to be holy in my life. Take Your rightful place on the throne. Exalt Yourself. Magnify Yourself. Glorify Yourself. You be Lord, and I'll be quiet.

The word "hallowed" comes from the word "holy," and the word "holy" means "to separate." The ancestry of the term can be traced back to an ancient word which means "to cut." To be holy, then, is to be a cut above the norm, superior, extraordinary. . . . The Holy One dwells on a different level from the rest of us. What frightens us does not frighten Him. What troubles us does not trouble Him.

I'm more a landlubber than a sailor, but I've puttered around in a bass boat enough to know the secret for finding land in a storm. . . . You don't aim at another boat. You certainly don't stare at the waves. You set your sights on an object unaffected by the wind—a light on the shore—and go straight toward it. The light is unaffected by the storm.

By seeking God . . . you do the same. When you set your eyes on our God, you focus on one "a cut above" any storm life may bring. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Question: How can you focus your eyes on the holiness of the Lord?

For more on "New Life in Christ," see page 200.

Life Lessons

Leviticus 21:1—22:33

SITUATION
God gave instructions to Moses about the priesthood and sacrifices, and gave a code of moral principles.

OBSERVATION
Those who serve God must be totally dedicated, because He deserves only the best.

INSPIRATION
He did for us what I did for one of my daughters in the shop at New York's La Guardia Airport. The sign above the ceramic pieces read Do Not Touch. But the wanting was stronger than the warning, and she touched. And it fell. By the time I looked up, ten-year-old Sara was holding the two pieces of a New York City skyline. Next to her was an unhappy store manager. Over them both was the written rule. Between them hung a nervous silence. My daughter had no money. He had no mercy. So I did what dads do. I stepped in. "How much do *we* owe you?" I asked.

How was it that I owed anything? Simple. She was my daughter. And since she could not pay, I did.

Since you and I cannot pay, Christ did. We've broken so much more than souvenirs. We've broken commandments, promises, and, worst of all, we've broken God's heart.

But Christ sees our plight. With the law on the wall and shattered commandments on the floor, He steps near (like a neighbor) and offers a gift (like a Savior).

What do we owe? We owe God a perfect life.

himself. 4 *Otherwise* he shall not defile himself, *being* a chief man among his people, to profane himself.

5 'They shall not make any bald *place* on their heads, nor shall they shave the edges of their beards nor make any cuttings in their flesh. 6 They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God, for they offer the offerings of the Lord made by fire, *and* the bread of their God; therefore they shall be holy. 7 They shall not take a wife *who is* a harlot or a defiled woman, nor shall they take a woman divorced from her husband; for *the priest*[a] is holy to his God. 8 Therefore you shall consecrate him, for he offers the bread of your God. He shall be holy to you, for I the Lord, who sanctify you, *am* holy. 9 The daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by playing the harlot, she profanes her father. She shall be burned with fire.

10 '*He who is* the high priest among his brethren, on whose head the anointing oil was poured and who is consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head nor tear his clothes; 11 nor shall he go near any dead body, nor defile himself for his father or his mother; 12 nor shall he go out of the sanctuary, nor profane the sanctuary of his God; for the consecration of the anointing oil of his God *is* upon him: I *am* the Lord. 13 And he shall take a wife in her virginity. 14 A widow or a divorced woman or a defiled woman *or* a harlot—these he shall not marry; but he shall take a virgin of his own people as wife. 15 Nor shall he profane his posterity among his people, for I the Lord sanctify him.' "

16 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 17 "Speak to Aaron, saying: 'No man of your descendants in *succeeding* generations, who has *any* defect, may approach to offer the bread of his God. 18 For any man who has a defect shall not approach: a man blind or lame, who has a marred *face* or any *limb* too long, 19 a man who has a broken foot or broken hand, 20 or is a hunchback or a dwarf, or *a man* who has a defect in his eye, or eczema or scab, or is a eunuch. 21 No man of the descendants of Aaron the priest, who has a defect, shall come near to offer the offerings made by fire to the Lord. He has a defect; he shall not come near to offer the bread of his God. 22 He may eat the bread of his God, *both* the most holy and the holy; 23 only he shall not go near the veil or approach the altar, because he has a defect, lest he profane My sanctuaries; for I the Lord sanctify them.' "

24 And Moses told *it* to Aaron and his sons, and to all the children of Israel.

22 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to Aaron and his sons, that they separate themselves from the holy things of the children of Israel, and that they do not profane My holy name *by* what they dedicate to Me: I *am* the Lord. 3 Say to them: 'Whoever of all your descendants throughout your generations, who goes near the holy things which the children of Israel dedicate to the Lord, while he has uncleanness upon him, that person shall be cut off from My presence: I *am* the Lord.

4 'Whatever man of the descendants of Aaron, who *is* a leper or has a discharge, shall not eat the holy offerings until he is clean. And whoever touches anything made unclean *by* a corpse, or a man who

21:7 [a] Literally *he*

has had an emission of semen, [5]or whoever touches any creeping thing by which he would be made unclean, or any person by whom he would become unclean, whatever his uncleanness may be— [6]the person who has touched any such thing shall be unclean until evening, and shall not eat the holy *offerings* unless he washes his body with water. [7]And when the sun goes down he shall be clean; and afterward he may eat the holy *offerings,* because it *is* his food. [8]Whatever dies *naturally* or is torn *by beasts* he shall not eat, to defile himself with it: I *am* the Lord.

[9]'They shall therefore keep My ordinance, lest they bear sin for it and die thereby, if they profane it: I the Lord sanctify them.

[10]'No outsider shall eat the holy *offering;* one who dwells with the priest, or a hired servant, shall not eat the holy thing. [11]But if the priest buys a person with his money, he may eat it; and one who is born in his house may eat his food. [12]If the priest's daughter is married to an outsider, she may not eat of the holy offerings. [13]But if the priest's daughter is a widow or divorced, and has no child, and has returned to her father's house as in her youth, she may eat her father's food; but no outsider shall eat it.

[14]'And if a man eats the holy *offering* unintentionally, then he shall restore a holy *offering* to the priest, and add one-fifth to it. [15]They shall not profane the holy *offerings* of the children of Israel, which they offer to the Lord, [16]or allow them to bear the guilt of trespass when they eat their holy *offerings;* for I the Lord sanctify them.' "

Offerings Accepted and Not Accepted

[17]And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, [18]"Speak to Aaron and his sons, and to all the children of Israel, and say to them: 'Whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers in Israel, who offers his sacrifice for any of his vows or for any of his freewill offerings, which they offer to the Lord as a burnt offering— [19]*you shall offer* of your own free will a male without blemish from the cattle, from the sheep, or from the goats. [20]Whatever has a defect, you shall not offer, for it shall not be acceptable on your behalf. [21]And whoever offers a sacrifice of a peace offering to the Lord, to fulfill *his* vow, or a freewill offering from the cattle or the sheep, it must be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no defect in it. [22]Those *that are* blind or broken or maimed, or have an ulcer or eczema or scabs, you shall not offer to the Lord, nor make an offering by fire of them on the altar to the Lord. [23]Either a bull or a lamb that has any limb too long or too short you may offer *as* a freewill offering, but for a vow it shall not be accepted.

[24]'You shall not offer to the Lord what is bruised or crushed, or torn or cut; nor shall you make *any offering of them* in your land. [25]Nor from a foreigner's hand shall you offer any of these as the bread of your God, because their corruption *is* in them, *and* defects *are* in them. They shall not be accepted on your behalf.' "

[26]And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: [27]"When a bull or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall be seven days with its mother; and from the eighth day and thereafter it shall be accepted as an offering made by fire to the Lord. [28]*Whether it is* a cow or ewe, do not kill both her and her young on the same day. [29]And when you offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord, offer *it* of your own free will. [30]On the same

Perfect obedience to every command. Not just the command of baptism, but the commands of humility, honesty, integrity. We can't deliver. Might as well charge us for the property of Manhattan. But Christ can and he did. His plunge into the Jordan is a picture of His plunge into our sin. His baptism announces, "Let me pay." (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

To arrive at holiness we must trust in Jesus Christ, who has become our great sacrifice. Every area of our lives must be placed in subjection to His lordship, every decision made with Him taken into account, and every word honoring to Him. Believe in Him today and so begin the adventure of faith, hope, and love.

EXPLORATION

Holiness—Leviticus 20:7, 8; Isaiah 6:3; Hebrews 7:26; 1 Peter 1:15, 16.

God invites us to see His face so He can change ours. He uses our uncovered faces to display His glory. The transformation isn't easy.

—Max Lucado (Just Like Jesus)

day it shall be eaten; you shall leave none of it until morning: I *am* the Lord.

31 "Therefore you shall keep My commandments, and perform them: I *am* the Lord. 32 You shall not profane My holy name, but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel. I *am* the Lord who sanctifies you, 33 who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I *am* the Lord."

Feasts of the Lord

23 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the Lord, which you shall proclaim *to be* holy convocations, these *are* My feasts.

The Sabbath

3 'Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day *is* a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work *on it;* it *is* the Sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings.

The Passover and Unleavened Bread

4 'These *are* the feasts of the Lord, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times. 5 On the fourteenth *day* of the first month at twilight *is* the Lord's Passover. 6 And on the fifteenth day of the same month *is* the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. 7 On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it. 8 But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord for seven days. The seventh day *shall be* a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work *on it.*' "

The Feast of Firstfruits

9 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 10 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. 11 He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. 12 And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the Lord. 13 Its grain offering *shall be* two-tenths *of an ephah* of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to the Lord, for a sweet aroma; and its drink offering *shall be* of wine, one-fourth of a hin. 14 You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; *it shall be* a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

The Feast of Weeks

15 'And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. 16 Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the Lord. 17 You shall bring from your dwellings two wave *loaves* of two-tenths *of an ephah.* They shall be of fine flour; they shall be

Life Lessons

Leviticus 23:1—25:55

SITUATION
God established several holidays that symbolized the Israelites' special relationship with Him. He also gave rules that governed interpersonal relationships.

OBSERVATION
Special holidays remind us of the past. Feasts help renew our commitment. In the New Testament, the celebration of the Lord's Supper reminds us of Christ's sacrificial death on the Cross for our sins and calls us to renewed commitment.

INSPIRATION
"Acceptable year of the Lord" [Luke 4:19] describes, perhaps more than any other words, Jesus' radical commitment to the poor. They are reminiscent of the year of Jubilee. . . . Beginning on the Day of Atonement, all the fields were allowed to rest. No farming permitted. The fallow land could recover from forty-nine years of planting and harvesting.

In addition, all the slaves were freed. Anyone who had been sold into slavery or who had sold himself into slavery to pay off debt was released. Bondage ended.

And as if the soil sabbatical and slave emancipation weren't enough, all property was returned to its original owners. In the agricultural society, land was capital. Families could lose their land through calamity, sickness, or even laziness. The Jubilee provision guaranteed that every family, at least twice a century, would have the

baked with leaven. *They are* the firstfruits to the Lord. 18 And you shall offer with the bread seven lambs of the first year, without blemish, one young bull, and two rams. They shall be *as* a burnt offering to the Lord, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to the Lord. 19 Then you shall sacrifice one kid of the goats as a sin offering, and two male lambs of the first year as a sacrifice of a peace offering. 20 The priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits *as* a wave offering before the Lord, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the Lord for the priest. 21 And you shall proclaim on the same day *that* it is a holy convocation to you. You shall do no customary work *on it. It shall be* a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.

22 'When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleaning from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I *am* the Lord your God.' "

The Feast of Trumpets

23 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 24 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'In the seventh month, on the first *day* of the month, you shall have a sabbath-*rest,* a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. 25 You shall do no customary work *on it;* and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord.' "

The Day of Atonement

26 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 27 "Also the tenth *day* of this seventh month *shall be* the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the Lord. 28 And you shall do no work on that same day, for it *is* the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the Lord your God. 29 For any person who is not afflicted *in soul* on that same day shall be cut off from his people. 30 And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people. 31 You shall do no manner of work; *it shall be* a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. 32 It *shall be* to you a sabbath of *solemn* rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth *day* of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath."

The Feast of Tabernacles

33 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 34 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'The fifteenth day of this seventh month *shall be* the Feast of Tabernacles *for* seven days to the Lord. 35 On the first day *there shall be* a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work *on it.* 36 *For* seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord. It *is* a sacred assembly, *and* you shall do no customary work *on it.*

37 'These *are* the feasts of the Lord which you shall proclaim *to be* holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire to the Lord, a burnt offering and a grain offering, a sacrifice and drink offerings, everything on its day— 38 besides the Sabbaths of the Lord, besides

opportunity to get back on its feet.

Consider the impact of this Jubilee decree. A drought destroys a farmer's crop and leaves the family impoverished. In order to survive, the farmer decides to sell his property and hire out as a day laborer. A sharp investor swoops into the region and buys the farm and also a neighbor's. Within short order the developer has a monopoly, and the farmer has nothing but a prayer.

But then comes the year of Jubilee. . . . God shakes the social Etch-A-Sketch, and everyone is given a clean slate. This injunction was intended to prevent a permanent underclass of poverty and slavery. People could still be rich, very rich, but they could not build their wealth on the backs of the very poor.

As far as we know, the people of Israel never practiced the year of Jubilee. Still, Jesus alluded to it in His inaugural address. What does this say about God's heart? At least this: He values a level playing field. In His society the Have-a-Lots and the Have-a-Littles are never to be so far apart that they can't see each other. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Approach this Sunday as a real holiday. Celebrate it with all your heart. Remember the past. Renew for the future. Jesus is risen! God has conquered death! Be glad.

EXPLORATION

Celebrations—Exodus 20:8–11; Numbers 36:4; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 16:8.

your gifts, besides all your vows, and besides all your freewill offerings which you give to the Lord.

39 'Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the Lord *for* seven days; on the first day *there shall be* a sabbath-*rest,* and on the eighth day a sabbath-*rest.* 40 And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. 41 You shall keep it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year. *It shall be* a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. 42 You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, 43 that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I *am* the Lord your God.' "

44 So Moses declared to the children of Israel the feasts of the Lord.

Care of the Tabernacle Lamps

24 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2 "Command the children of Israel that they bring to you pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to make the lamps burn continually. 3 Outside the veil of the Testimony, in the tabernacle of meeting, Aaron shall be in charge of it from evening until morning before the Lord continually; *it shall be* a statute forever in your generations. 4 He shall be in charge of the lamps on the pure *gold* lampstand before the Lord continually.

The Bread of the Tabernacle

5 "And you shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes with it. Two-tenths *of an ephah* shall be in each cake. 6 You shall set them in two rows, six in a row, on the pure *gold* table before the Lord. 7 And you shall put pure frankincense on *each* row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, an offering made by fire to the Lord. 8 Every Sabbath he shall set it in order before the Lord continually, *being taken* from the children of Israel by an everlasting covenant. 9 And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it *is* most holy to him from the offerings of the Lord made by fire, by a perpetual statute."

The Penalty for Blasphemy

10 Now the son of an Israelite woman, whose father *was* an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel; and this Israelite *woman's* son and a man of Israel fought each other in the camp. 11 And the Israelite woman's son blasphemed the name *of the Lord* and cursed; and so they brought him to Moses. (His mother's name *was* Shelomith the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan.) 12 Then they put him in custody, that the mind of the Lord might be shown to them.

13 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 14 "Take outside the camp him who has cursed; then let all who heard *him* lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him.

15 "Then you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. 16 And whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name *of the Lord,* he shall be put to death.

17 'Whoever kills any man shall surely be put to death. 18 Whoever kills an animal shall make it good, animal for animal.

19 'If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him— 20 fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him. 21 And whoever kills an animal shall restore it; but whoever kills a man shall be put to death. 22 You shall have the same law for the stranger and for one from your own country; for I *am* the Lord your God.' "

23 Then Moses spoke to the children of Israel; and they took outside the camp him who had cursed, and stoned him with stones. So the children of Israel did as the Lord commanded Moses.

The Sabbath of the Seventh Year

25 And the Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give you, then the land

shall keep a sabbath to the Lord. 3 Six years
you shall sow your field, and six years you
shall prune your vineyard, and gather its fruit;
4 but in the seventh year there shall be a sab-
bath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to
the Lord. You shall neither sow your field nor
prune your vineyard. 5 What grows of its own
accord of your harvest you shall not reap, nor
gather the grapes of your untended vine, *for*
it is a year of rest for the land. 6 And the sab-
bath *produce* of the land shall be food for you:
for you, your male and female servants, your
hired man, and the stranger who dwells with
you, 7 for your livestock and the beasts that *are*
in your land—all its produce shall be for food.

The Year of Jubilee

8 'And you shall count seven sabbaths of
years for yourself, seven times seven years;
and the time of the seven sabbaths of years
shall be to you forty-nine years. 9 Then you
shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound
on the tenth *day* of the seventh month; on the
Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet
to sound throughout all your land. 10 And you
shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim
liberty throughout *all* the land to all its inhab-
itants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of
you shall return to his possession, and each of
you shall return to his family. 11 That fiftieth
year shall be a Jubilee to you; in it you shall
neither sow nor reap what grows of its own
accord, nor gather *the grapes* of your unten-
ded vine. 12 For it *is* the Jubilee; it shall be holy
to you; you shall eat its produce from the field.

13 'In this Year of Jubilee, each of you shall
return to his possession. 14 And if you sell
anything to your neighbor or buy from your
neighbor's hand, you shall not oppress one
another. 15 According to the number of years
after the Jubilee you shall buy from your
neighbor, and according to the number of
years of crops he shall sell to you. 16 According
to the multitude of years you shall increase its
price, and according to the fewer number of
years you shall diminish its price; for he sells
to you *according* to the number *of the years* of
the crops. 17 Therefore you shall not oppress
one another, but you shall fear your God; for I
am the Lord your God.

Provisions for the Seventh Year

18 'So you shall observe My statutes and
keep My judgments, and perform them; and
you will dwell in the land in safety. 19 Then the
land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your
fill, and dwell there in safety.

20 'And if you say, "What shall we eat in the
seventh year, since we shall not sow nor gather
in our produce?" 21 Then I will command My
blessing on you in the sixth year, and it will
bring forth produce enough for three years.
22 And you shall sow in the eighth year, and eat
old produce until the ninth year; until its pro-
duce comes in, you shall eat *of* the old *harvest.*

Redemption of Property

23 'The land shall not be sold permanently,
for the land *is* Mine; for you *are* strangers and
sojourners with Me. 24 And in all the land of
your possession you shall grant redemption
of the land.

25 'If one of your brethren becomes poor,
and has sold *some* of his possession, and if his
redeeming relative comes to redeem it, then
he may redeem what his brother sold. 26 Or if
the man has no one to redeem it, but he him-
self becomes able to redeem it, 27 then let him
count the years since its sale, and restore the
remainder to the man to whom he sold it, that
he may return to his possession. 28 But if he is
not able to have *it* restored to himself, then
what was sold shall remain in the hand of him
who bought it until the Year of Jubilee; and in
the Jubilee it shall be released, and he shall
return to his possession.

29 'If a man sells a house in a walled city,
then he may redeem it within a whole year
after it is sold; *within* a full year he may
redeem it. 30 But if it is not redeemed within
the space of a full year, then the house in the
walled city shall belong permanently to him
who bought it, throughout his generations.
It shall not be released in the Jubilee. 31 How-
ever the houses of villages which have no wall
around them shall be counted as the fields of
the country. They may be redeemed, and they
shall be released in the Jubilee. 32 Neverthe-
less the cities of the Levites, *and* the houses in
the cities of their possession, the Levites may
redeem at any time. 33 And if a man purchases
a house from the Levites, then the house that
was sold in the city of his possession shall

be released in the Jubilee; for the houses in the cities of the Levites *are* their possession among the children of Israel. 34 But the field of the common-land of their cities may not be sold, for it *is* their perpetual possession.

Lending to the Poor

35 'If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you. 36 Take no usury or interest from him; but fear your God, that your brother may live with you. 37 You shall not lend him your money for usury, nor lend him your food at a profit. 38 I *am* the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan *and* to be your God.

The Law Concerning Slavery

39 'And if *one of* your brethren *who dwells* by you becomes poor, and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him to serve as a slave. 40 As a hired servant *and* a sojourner he shall be with you, *and* shall serve you until the Year of Jubilee. 41 And *then* he shall depart from you—he and his children with him—and shall return to his own family. He shall return to the possession of his fathers. 42 For they *are* My servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. 43 You shall not rule over him with rigor, but you shall fear your God. 44 And as for your male and female slaves whom you may have—from the nations that are around you, from them you may buy male and female slaves. 45 Moreover you may buy the children of the strangers who dwell among you, and their families who are with you, which they beget in your land; and they shall become your property. 46 And you may take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit *them as* a possession; they shall be your permanent slaves. But regarding your brethren, the children of Israel, you shall not rule over one another with rigor.

47 'Now if a sojourner or stranger close to you becomes rich, and *one of* your brethren *who dwells* by him becomes poor, and sells himself to the stranger *or* sojourner close to you, or to a member of the stranger's family, 48 after he is sold he may be redeemed again. One of his brothers may redeem him; 49 or his uncle or his uncle's son may redeem him; or *anyone* who is near of kin to him in his family may redeem him; or if he is able he may redeem himself. 50 Thus he shall reckon with him who bought him: The price of his release shall be according to the number of years, from the year that he was sold to him until the Year of Jubilee; *it shall be* according to the time of a hired servant for him. 51 If *there are* still many years *remaining,* according to them he shall repay the price of his redemption from the money with which he was bought. 52 And if there remain but a few years until the Year of Jubilee, then he shall reckon with him, *and* according to his years he shall repay him the price of his redemption. 53 He shall be with him as a yearly hired servant, and he shall not rule with rigor over him in your sight. 54 And if he is not redeemed in these *years,* then he shall be released in the Year of Jubilee—he and his children with him. 55 For the children of Israel *are* servants to Me; they *are* My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt: I *am* the Lord your God.

Promise of Blessing and Retribution

26 'You shall not make idols for yourselves;
neither a carved image nor a *sacred* pillar shall you rear up for yourselves;
nor shall you set up an engraved stone in your land, to bow down to it;
for I *am* the Lord your God.
2 You shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary:
I *am* the Lord.

3 'If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them,
4 then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.
5 Your threshing shall last till the time of vintage, and the vintage shall last till the time of sowing;
you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely.
6 I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make *you* afraid;
I will rid the land of evil beasts,

and the sword will not go through your land.
7 You will chase your enemies, and they shall fall by the sword
before you.
8 Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put
ten thousand to flight;
your enemies shall fall by the sword before you.

9 'For I will look on you favorably and make you fruitful, multiply
you and confirm My covenant with you.
10 You shall eat the old harvest, and clear out the old because of the
new.
11 I will set My tabernacle among you, and My soul shall not abhor
you.
12 I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My
people.
13 I *am* the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt,
that *you* should not be their slaves;
I have broken the bands of your yoke and made you walk upright.

14 'But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these
commandments,
15 and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My
judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments,
but break My covenant,
16 I also will do this to you:
I will even appoint terror over you, wasting disease and fever
which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart.
And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall
eat it.
17 I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your
enemies.
Those who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when
no one pursues you.

18 'And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you
seven times more for your sins.
19 I will break the pride of your power;
I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze.
20 And your strength shall be spent in vain;
for your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the
land yield their fruit.

21 'Then, if you walk contrary to Me, and are not willing to obey Me, I
will bring on you seven times more plagues, according to your
sins.
22 I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of
your children, destroy your livestock, and make you few in
number;
and your highways shall be desolate.

23 'And if by these things you are not reformed by Me, but walk
contrary to Me,

Life Lessons

Leviticus 26:1—27:34

SITUATION
God, through Moses, presented blessings as a reward for obedience and cursings as a punishment for habitual sin. This led the people to confess and reiterate their devotion to God with vows and tithes.

OBSERVATION
God sets boundaries for our own good. We suffer when we break them. We must respond to His love so that we will not have to face His discipline.

INSPIRATION
Short memories harden the heart. Make careful note of God's blessings. Declare with David: "[I will] daily add praise to praise. I'll write the book on your righteousness, talk up your salvation the livelong day, never run out of good things to write or say" (Psalm 71:14, 15 MSG).

Catalog God's goodnesses. Meditate on them. He has fed you, led you, and earned your trust. Remember what God has done for you. And,

Acknowledge what you have done against God. "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:10).

Sin-hoarding stiffens us. Confession softens us.

When my daughters were small, they liked to play with PlayDoh. They formed figures out of the soft clay. If they forgot to place the lid on the can, the substance hardened. When it did, they brought it to me. My hands were bigger. My fingers stronger. I could mold the stony stuff into putty.

Is your heart hard? Take it to your Father. You're only a prayer away from tenderness. You live in a hard world, but you don't have to live with a hard heart. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Consider all that God has done for you in redeeming you from sin's captivity and providing you with blessing. In what areas do you overstep God's boundaries? Consider the consequences. Stop in your tracks. Flee from tempting circumstances. Return to the Lord. Let Him soften your heart.

EXPLORATION

On Blessing and Cursing—Deuteronomy 11; Ezekiel 14:12–21.

24 then I also will walk contrary to you, and I will punish you yet
seven times for your sins.
25 And I will bring a sword against you that will execute the
vengeance of the covenant;
when you are gathered together within your cities I will send
pestilence among you;
and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy.
26 When I have cut off your supply of bread, ten women shall bake
your bread in one oven, and they shall bring back your bread
by weight, and you shall eat and not be satisfied.

27 'And after all this, if you do not obey Me, but walk contrary to Me,
28 then I also will walk contrary to you in fury;
and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins.
29 You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of
your daughters.
30 I will destroy your high places, cut down your incense altars, and
cast your carcasses on the lifeless forms of your idols;
and My soul shall abhor you.
31 I will lay your cities waste and bring your sanctuaries to desolation,
and I will not smell the fragrance of your sweet aromas.
32 I will bring the land to desolation, and your enemies who dwell in
it shall be astonished at it.
33 I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after
you;
your land shall be desolate and your cities waste.
34 Then the land shall enjoy its sabbaths as long as it lies desolate
and you *are* in your enemies' land;
then the land shall rest and enjoy its sabbaths.
35 As long as *it* lies desolate it shall rest—
for the time it did not rest on your sabbaths when you dwelt
in it.

36 'And as for those of you who are left, I will send faintness into their
hearts in the lands of their enemies;
the sound of a shaken leaf shall cause them to flee;
they shall flee as though fleeing from a sword, and they shall fall
when no one pursues.
37 They shall stumble over one another, as it were before a sword,
when no one pursues;
and you shall have no *power* to stand before your enemies.
38 You shall perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies
shall eat you up.
39 And those of you who are left shall waste away in their iniquity in
your enemies' lands;
also in their fathers' iniquities, which are with them, they shall
waste away.

40 '*But* if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers,
with their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me,
and that they also have walked contrary to Me,

41 and *that* I also have walked contrary to
them and have brought them into the
land of their enemies;
if their uncircumcised hearts are hum-
bled, and they accept their guilt—
42 then I will remember My covenant with
Jacob, and My covenant with Isaac
and My covenant with Abraham I will
remember;
I will remember the land.
43 The land also shall be left empty by them,
and will enjoy its sabbaths while it lies
desolate without them;
they will accept their guilt, because they
despised My judgments and because
their soul abhorred My statutes.
44 Yet for all that, when they are in the land
of their enemies, I will not cast them
away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly
destroy them and break My covenant
with them;
for I *am* the Lord their God.
45 But for their sake I will remember the
covenant of their ancestors, whom I
brought out of the land of Egypt in the
sight of the nations, that I might be
their God:
I *am* the Lord.' "

46 These *are* the statutes and judgments and laws which the Lord made between Himself and the children of Israel on Mount Sinai by the hand of Moses.

Redeeming Persons and Property Dedicated to God

27 Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,
2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When a man consecrates by a vow certain persons to the Lord, according to your valuation, 3 if your valuation is of a male from twenty years old up to sixty years old, then your valuation shall be fifty shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary. 4 If it *is* a female, then your valuation shall be thirty shekels; 5 and if from five years old up to twenty years old, then your valuation for a male shall be twenty shekels, and for a female ten shekels; 6 and if from a month old up to five years old, then your valuation for a male shall be five shekels of silver, and for a female your valuation shall be three shekels of silver; 7 and if from sixty years old and above, if *it is* a male, then your valuation shall be fifteen shekels, and for a female ten shekels.

8 'But if he is too poor to pay your valuation, then he shall present himself before the priest, and the priest shall set a value for him; according to the ability of him who vowed, the priest shall value him.

9 'If *it is* an animal that men may bring as an offering to the Lord, all that *anyone* gives to the Lord shall be holy. 10 He shall not substitute it or exchange it, good for bad or bad for good; and if he at all exchanges animal for animal, then both it and the one exchanged for it shall be holy. 11 If *it is* an unclean animal which they do not offer as a sacrifice to the Lord, then he shall present the animal before the priest; 12 and the priest shall set a value for it, whether it is good or bad; as you, the priest, value it, so it shall be. 13 But if he *wants* at all *to* redeem it, then he must add one-fifth to your valuation.

14 'And when a man dedicates his house *to be* holy to the Lord, then the priest shall set a value for it, whether it is good or bad; as the priest values it, so it shall stand. 15 If he who dedicated it *wants to* redeem his house, then he must add one-fifth of the money of your valuation to it, and it shall be his.

16 'If a man dedicates to the Lord *part* of a field of his possession, then your valuation shall be according to the seed for it. A homer of barley seed *shall be valued* at fifty shekels of silver. 17 If he dedicates his field from the Year of Jubilee, according to your valuation it shall stand. 18 But if he dedicates his field after the Jubilee, then the priest shall reckon to him the money due according to the years that remain till the Year of Jubilee, and it shall be deducted from your valuation. 19 And if he who dedicates the field ever wishes to redeem it, then he must add one-fifth of the money of your valuation to it, and it shall belong to him. 20 But if he does not want to redeem the field, or if he has sold the field to another man, it shall not be redeemed anymore; 21 but the field, when it is released in the Jubilee, shall be holy to the Lord, as a devoted field; it shall be the possession of the priest.

22 'And if a man dedicates to the Lord a field which he has bought, which is not the field of his possession, 23 then the priest shall reckon

to him the worth of your valuation, up to the Year of Jubilee, and he shall give your valuation on that day *as* a holy *offering* to the Lord.
24 In the Year of Jubilee the field shall return to him from whom it was bought, to the one who *owned* the land as a possession. 25 And all your valuations shall be according to the shekel of the sanctuary: twenty gerahs to the shekel.

26 'But the firstborn of the animals, which should be the Lord's firstborn, no man shall dedicate; whether *it is* an ox or sheep, it *is* the Lord's. 27 And if *it is* an unclean animal, then he shall redeem *it* according to your valuation, and shall add one-fifth to it; or if it is not redeemed, then it shall be sold according to your valuation.

28 'Nevertheless no devoted *offering* that a man may devote to the Lord of all that he has, *both* man and beast, or the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed; every devoted *offering is* most holy to the Lord. 29 No person under the ban, who may become doomed to destruction among men, shall be redeemed, *but* shall surely be put to death. 30 And all the tithe of the land, *whether* of the seed of the land *or* of the fruit of the tree, *is* the Lord's. It *is* holy to the Lord. 31 If a man wants at all to redeem *any* of his tithes, he shall add one-fifth to it. 32 And concerning the tithe of the herd or the flock, of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the Lord. 33 He shall not inquire whether it is good or bad, nor shall he exchange it; and if he exchanges it at all, then both it and the one exchanged for it shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed.' "

34 These *are* the commandments which the Lord commanded Moses for the children of Israel on Mount Sinai.

THE BOOK OF

NUMBERS INTRODUCTION

Every life is a pilgrimage.

Every person is on a journey.

Every journey has its challenges.

The Book of Numbers is a travel diary. Two million ex-slaves weaving their way through a desert. The trip from Egypt to the Promised Land can be made in less than 11 days (Deuteronomy 1:2). It took the Israelites thirty-eight years.

What they should have done, they didn't. And what they didn't do, they should have. So God decided they needed some time to rethink a few things.

He took them the long way.

Maybe you're on a detour in your journey. Things seem slow. Road seems dark. Maybe God is wanting to teach you a few things. Pay attention.

You don't want to spend thirty-eight years missing the point.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Moses

Date Written: 1500–1450 B.C.

Key Themes:

- When the Hebrews arrived at the border, they failed to trust God to keep His promise.
- Because of their lack of faith the Hebrews wandered miserably through the wilderness.
- When at last they returned to the border, the next Hebrew generation followed God as their parents had not.

Key Verse:

"Then the LORD said to Moses: 'How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them?'" (Numbers 14:11).

Contents:

I. The Hebrews Are Numbered and Organized to Enter the Land 1:1—10:36

II. Rebellion After Rebellion 11:1—17:13

III. The Priests Are Instructed 18:1—19:22

IV. The New Journey Begins 20:1—25:18

V. One More Census 26:1—27:65

VI. A New Leader and a New Life 28:1—36:13

Life Lessons

Numbers 1:1—2:34

SITUATION
God directed Moses and others to take a census of the Israelites and to organize the tribes for specific duties.

OBSERVATION
Moses counted all of God's people and assigned certain people to lead in worship. Each role helped to shape the community.

INSPIRATION
All the billions of Christ followers over the last two thousand years have this in common: "A spiritual gift is given to each of us" (1 Corinthians 12:7 NLT). God's body has no nobodies. No exceptions. No exclusions. Our gifts make an eternal difference only in concert with the church. Apart from the body of Christ, we are like clipped fingernails, shaved whiskers, and cut hair. Who needs them? No one! They make no contribution. The same applies to our gifts. "We, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Romans 12:5)." . . .

Pastor-teachers touch and teach. Gospel bearers share good news. Prophets speak words of truth. Visionaries dream of greater impact. Some administer. Some pray. Some lead. Some follow. But all help to heal brokenness. . . .

God heals His family through His family. In the church we use our gifts to love each other, honor one another, keep an eye on troublemakers, and carry each other's burdens. Do you need encouragement, prayers, or a hospitable

The First Census of Israel

Now the Lord spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of meeting, on the first *day* of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying:
2 "Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, every male individually, 3 from twenty years old and above—all who *are able to* go to war in Israel. You and Aaron shall number them by their armies. 4 And with you there shall be a man from every tribe, each one the head of his father's house.

5 "These are the names of the men who shall stand with you: from Reuben, Elizur the son of Shedeur; 6 from Simeon, Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai; 7 from Judah, Nahshon the son of Amminadab; 8 from Issachar, Nethanel the son of Zuar; 9 from Zebulun, Eliab the son of Helon; 10 from the sons of Joseph: from Ephraim, Elishama the son of Ammihud; from Manasseh, Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur; 11 from Benjamin, Abidan the son of Gideoni; 12 from Dan, Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai; 13 from Asher, Pagiel the son of Ocran; 14 from Gad, Eliasaph the son of Deuel;[a] 15 from Naphtali, Ahira the son of Enan."
16 These *were* chosen from the congregation, leaders of their fathers' tribes, heads of the divisions in Israel.

17 Then Moses and Aaron took these men who had been mentioned by name, 18 and they assembled all the congregation together on the first *day* of the second month; and they recited their ancestry by families, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, each one individually. 19 As the Lord commanded Moses, so he numbered them in the Wilderness of Sinai.

20 Now the children of Reuben, Israel's oldest son, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, every male individually, from twenty years old and above, all who *were able to* go to war: 21 those who were numbered of the tribe of Reuben *were* forty-six thousand five hundred.

22 From the children of Simeon, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, of those who were numbered, according to the number of names, every male individually, from twenty years old and above, all who *were able to* go to war: 23 those who were numbered of the tribe of Simeon *were* fifty-nine thousand three hundred.

24 From the children of Gad, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, all who *were able to* go to war: 25 those who were numbered of the tribe of Gad *were* forty-five thousand six hundred and fifty.

26 From the children of Judah, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, all who *were able to* go to war: 27 those who were numbered of the tribe of Judah *were* seventy-four thousand six hundred.

28 From the children of Issachar, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, all who *were able to* go to war: 29 those

1:14 [a] Spelled *Reuel* in 2:14

who were numbered of the tribe of Issachar *were* fifty-four thousand four hundred.

30 From the children of Zebulun, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, all who *were able to* go to war: 31 those who were numbered of the tribe of Zebulun *were* fifty-seven thousand four hundred.

32 From the sons of Joseph, the children of Ephraim, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, all who *were able to* go to war: 33 those who were numbered of the tribe of Ephraim *were* forty thousand five hundred.

34 From the children of Manasseh, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, all who *were able to* go to war: 35 those who were numbered of the tribe of Manasseh *were* thirty-two thousand two hundred.

36 From the children of Benjamin, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, all who *were able to* go to war: 37 those who were numbered of the tribe of Benjamin *were* thirty-five thousand four hundred.

38 From the children of Dan, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, all who *were able to* go to war: 39 those who were numbered of the tribe of Dan *were* sixty-two thousand seven hundred.

40 From the children of Asher, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, all who *were able to* go to war: 41 those who were numbered of the tribe of Asher *were* forty-one thousand five hundred.

42 From the children of Naphtali, their genealogies by their families, by their fathers' house, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and above, all who *were able to* go to war: 43 those who were numbered of the tribe of Naphtali *were* fifty-three thousand four hundred.

44 These are the ones who were numbered, whom Moses and Aaron numbered, with the leaders of Israel, twelve men, each one representing his father's house. 45 So all who were numbered of the children of Israel, by their fathers' houses, from twenty years old and above, all who *were able to* go to war in Israel— 46 all who were numbered were six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty.

47 But the Levites were not numbered among them by their fathers' tribe; 48 for the Lord had spoken to Moses, saying: 49 "Only the tribe of Levi you shall not number, nor take a census of them among the children of Israel; 50 but you shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the Testimony, over all its furnishings, and over all things that belong to it; they shall carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they shall attend to it and camp around the tabernacle. 51 And when the tabernacle is to go forward, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall set it up. The outsider who comes near shall be put to death. 52 The children of Israel shall pitch their tents, everyone by his own camp, everyone by

home? God entrusts the church to purvey these treasures. Consider the church God's treatment center for the common life.

Don't miss it. No one is strong all the time. Don't miss the place to find your place and heal your hurts. (From by *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

You can make a difference in the lives of your children and grandchildren by serving God and dedicating your children to His service. The next time your family comes together, share about the "point people" who have most affected your life for the Lord. Help instill a vision for service in the kingdom of God. Then share with your children how they can pass along that vision.

EXPLORATION

Influencing Future Generations—Genesis 17; Numbers 26; Joshua 24; 1 Kings 8.

Our Savior kneels down and gazes upon the darkest acts of our lives. But rather than recoil in horror, He reaches out in kindness and says, "I can clean that if you want."

—Max Lucado (Just Like Jesus)

his own standard, according to their armies;
53 but the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the Testimony, that there may be no
wrath on the congregation of the children of
Israel; and the Levites shall keep charge of the
tabernacle of the Testimony."
54 Thus the children of Israel did; according to all that the Lord commanded Moses,
so they did.

The Tribes and Leaders by Armies

2 And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron,
saying: 2 "Everyone of the children of Israel
shall camp by his own standard, beside the
emblems of his father's house; they shall camp
some distance from the tabernacle of meeting. 3 On the east side, toward the rising of the
sun, those of the standard of the forces with
Judah shall camp according to their armies;
and Nahshon the son of Amminadab *shall be*
the leader of the children of Judah." 4 And his
army was numbered at seventy-four thousand
six hundred.
5 "Those who camp next to him *shall be* the
tribe of Issachar, and Nethanel the son of Zuar
shall be the leader of the children of Issachar."
6 And his army was numbered at fifty-four
thousand four hundred.
7 "Then *comes* the tribe of Zebulun, and
Eliab the son of Helon *shall be* the leader of
the children of Zebulun." 8 And his army was
numbered at fifty-seven thousand four hundred. 9 "All who were numbered according
to their armies of the forces with Judah, one
hundred and eighty-six thousand four hundred—these shall break camp first.
10 "On the south side *shall be* the standard
of the forces with Reuben according to their
armies, and the leader of the children of Reuben *shall be* Elizur the son of Shedeur." 11 And
his army was numbered at forty-six thousand
five hundred.
12 "Those who camp next to him *shall be*
the tribe of Simeon, and the leader of the children of Simeon *shall be* Shelumiel the son of
Zurishaddai." 13 And his army was numbered
at fifty-nine thousand three hundred.
14 "Then *comes* the tribe of Gad, and the
leader of the children of Gad *shall be* Eliasaph
the son of Reuel."[a] 15 And his army was numbered at forty-five thousand six hundred and
fifty. 16 "All who were numbered according to
their armies of the forces with Reuben, one
hundred and fifty-one thousand four hundred
and fifty—they shall be the second to break
camp.
17 "And the tabernacle of meeting shall
move out with the camp of the Levites in the
middle of the camps; as they camp, so they
shall move out, everyone in his place, by their
standards.
18 "On the west side *shall be* the standard of the forces with Ephraim according
to their armies, and the leader of the children of Ephraim *shall be* Elishama the son of
Ammihud." 19 And his army was numbered at
forty thousand five hundred.
20 "Next to him *comes* the tribe of Manasseh,
and the leader of the children of Manasseh
shall be Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur." 21 And
his army was numbered at thirty-two thousand two hundred.
22 "Then *comes* the tribe of Benjamin, and
the leader of the children of Benjamin *shall be* Abidan the son of Gideoni." 23 And his army
was numbered at thirty-five thousand four
hundred. 24 "All who were numbered according to their armies of the forces with Ephraim,
one hundred and eight thousand one hundred—they shall be the third to break camp.
25 "The standard of the forces with Dan
shall be on the north side according to their
armies, and the leader of the children of Dan
shall be Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai."
26 And his army was numbered at sixty-two
thousand seven hundred.
27 "Those who camp next to him *shall be*
the tribe of Asher, and the leader of the children of Asher *shall be* Pagiel the son of Ocran."
28 And his army was numbered at forty-one
thousand five hundred.
29 "Then *comes* the tribe of Naphtali, and
the leader of the children of Naphtali *shall be* Ahira the son of Enan." 30 And his army
was numbered at fifty-three thousand four
hundred. 31 "All who were numbered of the
forces with Dan, one hundred and fifty-seven
thousand six hundred—they shall break camp
last, with their standards."
32 These *are* the ones who were numbered of

2:14 [a] Spelled *Deuel* in 1:14 and 7:42

the children of Israel by their fathers' houses. All who were numbered according to their armies of the forces *were* six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty. 33 But the Levites were not numbered among the children of Israel, just as the Lord commanded Moses.

34 Thus the children of Israel did according to all that the Lord commanded Moses; so they camped by their standards and so they broke camp, each one by his family, according to their fathers' houses.

The Sons of Aaron

3 Now these *are* the records of Aaron and Moses when the Lord spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai. 2 And these *are* the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab, the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. 3 These *are* the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whom he consecrated to minister as priests. 4 Nadab and Abihu had died before the Lord when they offered profane fire before the Lord in the Wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar ministered as priests in the presence of Aaron their father.

The Levites Serve in the Tabernacle

5 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 6 "Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him. 7 And they shall attend to his needs and the needs of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of meeting, to do the work of the tabernacle. 8 Also they shall attend to all the furnishings of the tabernacle of meeting, and to the needs of the children of Israel, to do the work of the tabernacle. 9 And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they *are* given entirely to him[a] from among the children of Israel. 10 So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall attend to their priesthood; but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death."

11 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 12 "Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine, 13 because all the firstborn *are* Mine. On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They shall be Mine: I *am* the Lord."

Census of the Levites Commanded

14 Then the Lord spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, saying: 15 "Number the children of Levi by their fathers' houses, by their families; you shall number every male from a month old and above."

16 So Moses numbered them according to the word of the Lord, as he was commanded. 17 These were the sons of Levi by their names: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. 18 And these *are* the names of the sons of Gershon by their families: Libni and Shimei. 19 And the sons of Kohath by their families: Amram, Izehar, Hebron, and Uzziel. 20 And the sons of Merari by their families: Mahli and Mushi. These *are* the families of the Levites by their fathers' houses.

21 From Gershon *came* the family of the Libnites and the family

3:9 [a] Samaritan Pentateuch and Septuagint read *Me.*

Life LESSONS

Numbers 3:1—5:31

SITUATION

God established the Levites as the tribe responsible for providing priests and caring for the tent of meeting. God gave different tribes specific responsibilities to meet certain needs. Anyone entering the sanctuary other than Moses and Aaron or his sons was punished by death.

OBSERVATION

The Old Testament agreement (or covenant) between God and His people required special intermediaries—the priests. Now, Christ is the only intermediary needed for forgiveness of sins. We can go straight to Him ourselves.

INSPIRATION

How can the presence of God come to us?

Should we light a candle, sing chants, build an altar, head up a committee, give a barrelful of money? What invokes the presence of God? Uzzah and David blend death and dancing to reveal an answer. [The story is recorded in 2 Samuel 6.]

Uzzah's tragedy teaches this: *God comes on His own terms.* He gave specific instructions as to the care and transport of the ark. Only the priests could draw near it. And then only after they had offered sacrifices for themselves and their families (see Leviticus 16). The ark would be lifted, not with hands, but with acacia poles. Priests ran long rods through the rings on the corners to carry the ark. "The sons of Kohath shall come to carry them; but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. . . .

Theirs was the service of the holy things, which they carried on their shoulders" (Numbers 4:15; 7:9).

Uzzah should have known this. He was a priest, a Kohathite priest, a descendant of Aaron himself. The ark had been kept in the house of his father, Abinadab. He had grown up with it. Which may be the best explanation for his actions.

He gets word that the king wants the chest and says, "Sure, I can get it. We keep it out back in the barn. Let's load it up." The holy has become humdrum. The sacred, second-rate. So he exchanges commands for convenience, using a wagon instead of poles and bulls instead of priests. We see no obedience or sacrifice; we see expediency.

God is angered. . . .

The image of a dead Uzzah sends a sobering and shuddering reminder to those of us who can attend church as often as we wish, take communion anytime we desire. The message: don't grow lax before the holy. God won't be loaded on convenient wagons or toted about by dumb animals. Don't confuse Him with a genie who pops out at the rub of a lamp or a butler who appears at the ring of a bell.

God comes, mind you. But He comes on His own terms. He comes when commands are revered, hearts are clean, and confession is made. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Under the old agreement, only the priests could approach God. Today, all who believe in Christ can approach God as members of the priesthood. Are you fully enjoying this privilege with God? Be thankful for

of the Shimites; these *were* the families of the Gershonites. 22 Those who were numbered, according to the number of all the males from a month old and above—of those who were numbered *there were* seven thousand five hundred. 23 The families of the Gershonites were to camp behind the tabernacle westward. 24 And the leader of the father's house of the Gershonites *was* Eliasaph the son of Lael. 25 The duties of the children of Gershon in the tabernacle of meeting *included* the tabernacle, the tent with its covering, the screen for the door of the tabernacle of meeting, 26 the screen for the door of the court, the hangings of the court which *are* around the tabernacle and the altar, and their cords, according to all the work relating to them.

27 From Kohath *came* the family of the Amramites, the family of the Izharites, the family of the Hebronites, and the family of the Uzzielites; these *were* the families of the Kohathites. 28 According to the number of all the males, from a month old and above, *there were* eight thousand six[a] hundred keeping charge of the sanctuary. 29 The families of the children of Kohath were to camp on the south side of the tabernacle. 30 And the leader of the fathers' house of the families of the Kohathites *was* Elizaphan the son of Uzziel. 31 Their duty *included* the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the utensils of the sanctuary with which they ministered, the screen, and all the work relating to them.

32 And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest *was to be* chief over the leaders of the Levites, *with* oversight of those who kept charge of the sanctuary.

33 From Merari *came* the family of the Mahlites and the family of the Mushites; these *were* the families of Merari. 34 And those who were numbered, according to the number of all the males from a month old and above, *were* six thousand two hundred. 35 The leader of the fathers' house of the families of Merari *was* Zuriel the son of Abihail. These *were* to camp on the north side of the tabernacle. 36 And the appointed duty of the children of Merari *included* the boards of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars, its sockets, its utensils, all the work relating to them, 37 and the pillars of the court all around, with their sockets, their pegs, and their cords.

38 Moreover those who were to camp before the tabernacle on the east, before the tabernacle of meeting, *were* Moses, Aaron, and his sons, keeping charge of the sanctuary, to meet the needs of the children of Israel; but the outsider who came near was to be put to death. 39 All who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron numbered at the commandment of the Lord, by their families, all the males from a month old and above, *were* twenty-two thousand.

Levites Dedicated Instead of the Firstborn

40 Then the Lord said to Moses: "Number all the firstborn males of the children of Israel from a month old and above, and take the number of their names. 41 And you shall take the Levites for Me—I *am* the Lord—instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the livestock of the children of Israel." 42 So Moses numbered all the

3:28 [a] Some manuscripts of the Septuagint read *three*.

firstborn among the children of Israel, as the Lord commanded him.
43 And all the firstborn males, according to the number of names from
a month old and above, of those who were numbered of them, were
twenty-two thousand two hundred and seventy-three.

44 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 45 "Take the Levites
instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the
livestock of the Levites instead of their livestock. The Levites shall be
Mine: I *am* the Lord. 46 And for the redemption of the two hundred
and seventy-three of the firstborn of the children of Israel, who are
more than the number of the Levites, 47 you shall take five shekels
for each one individually; you shall take *them* in the currency of the
shekel of the sanctuary, the shekel of twenty gerahs. 48 And you shall
give the money, with which the excess number of them is redeemed,
to Aaron and his sons."

49 So Moses took the redemption money from those who were over
and above those who were redeemed by the Levites. 50 From the first-
born of the children of Israel he took the money, one thousand three
hundred and sixty-five *shekels,* according to the shekel of the sanctu-
ary. 51 And Moses gave their redemption money to Aaron and his sons,
according to the word of the Lord, as the Lord commanded Moses.

Duties of the Sons of Kohath

4 Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: 2 "Take a census
of the sons of Kohath from among the children of Levi, by their
families, by their fathers' house, 3 from thirty years old and above,
even to fifty years old, all who enter the service to do the work in the
tabernacle of meeting.

4 "This *is* the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of
meeting, *relating to* the most holy things: 5 When the camp prepares
to journey, Aaron and his sons shall come, and they shall take down
the covering veil and cover the ark of the Testimony with it. 6 Then
they shall put on it a covering of badger skins, and spread over *that* a
cloth entirely of blue; and they shall insert its poles.

7 "On the table of showbread they shall spread a blue cloth, and put
on it the dishes, the pans, the bowls, and the pitchers for pouring; and
the showbread[a] shall be on it. 8 They shall spread over them a scarlet
cloth, and cover the same with a covering of badger skins; and they
shall insert its poles. 9 And they shall take a blue cloth and cover the
lampstand of the light, with its lamps, its wick-trimmers, its trays, and
all its oil vessels, with which they service it. 10 Then they shall put it
with all its utensils in a covering of badger skins, and put *it* on a car-
rying beam.

11 "Over the golden altar they shall spread a blue cloth, and cover it
with a covering of badger skins; and they shall insert its poles. 12 Then
they shall take all the utensils of service with which they minister in
the sanctuary, put *them* in a blue cloth, cover them with a covering
of badger skins, and put *them* on a carrying beam. 13 Also they shall
take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth over
it. 14 They shall put on it all its implements with which they minister
there—the firepans, the forks, the shovels, the basins, and all the

4:7 [a] Literally *the continual bread*

Christ's sacrifice which gives direct access to God at all times. Use the freedom often. Pray today for people who need help, for political leaders who need wisdom.

EXPLORATION
Relationship with God—Genesis 28:10–15; Exodus 19:20–24; Deuteronomy 10:16, 17; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 4:14–16; 10:11–14.

Your message,
your salvation,
your body,
your struggles,
your success—
all proclaim
God's glory.

—Max Lucado (It's Not About Me)

utensils of the altar—and they shall spread on it a covering of badger skins, and insert its poles. 15 And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is set to go, then the sons of Kohath shall come to carry *them;* but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die.

"These *are* the things in the tabernacle of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry.

16 "The appointed duty of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest *is* the oil for the light, the sweet incense, the daily grain offering, the anointing oil, the oversight of all the tabernacle, of all that *is* in it, with the sanctuary and its furnishings."

17 Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: 18 "Do not cut off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites; 19 but do this in regard to them, that they may live and not die when they approach the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in and appoint each of them to his service and his task. 20 But they shall not go in to watch while the holy things are being covered, lest they die."

Duties of the Sons of Gershon

21 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 22 "Also take a census of the sons of Gershon, by their fathers' house, by their families. 23 From thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, you shall number them, all who enter to perform the service, to do the work in the tabernacle of meeting. 24 This *is* the service of the families of the Gershonites, in serving and carrying: 25 They shall carry the curtains of the tabernacle and the tabernacle of meeting *with* its covering, the covering of badger skins that *is* on it, the screen for the door of the tabernacle of meeting, 26 the screen for the door of the gate of the court, the hangings of the court which *are* around the tabernacle and altar, and their cords, all the furnishings for their service and all that is made for these things: so shall they serve.

27 "Aaron and his sons shall assign all the service of the sons of the Gershonites, all their tasks and all their service. And you shall appoint to them all their tasks as their duty. 28 This *is* the service of the families of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of meeting. And their duties *shall be* under the authority[a] of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.

Duties of the Sons of Merari

29 "*As for* the sons of Merari, you shall number them by their families and by their fathers' house. 30 From thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, you shall number them, everyone who enters the service to do the work of the tabernacle of meeting. 31 And this *is* what they must carry as all their service for the tabernacle of meeting: the boards of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars, its sockets, 32 and the pillars around the court with their sockets, pegs, and cords, with all their furnishings and all their service; and you shall assign *to each man* by name the items he must carry. 33 This *is* the service of the families of the sons of Merari, as all their service for the tabernacle of meeting, under the authority[a] of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest."

Census of the Levites

34 And Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of the congregation numbered the sons of the Kohathites by their families and by their fathers' house, 35 from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the service for work in the tabernacle of meeting; 36 and those who were numbered by their families were two thousand seven hundred and fifty. 37 These *were* the ones who were numbered of the families of the Kohathites, all who might serve in the tabernacle of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the Lord by the hand of Moses.

38 And those who were numbered of the sons of Gershon, by their families and by their fathers' house, 39 from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the service for work in the tabernacle of meeting— 40 those who were numbered by their families, by their fathers' house, were two thousand six hundred and thirty. 41 These *are* the ones who were numbered of the families of the sons of Gershon, of all who might serve in the tabernacle of meeting, whom

4:28 [a]Literally *hand* **4:33** [a]Literally *hand*

Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the Lord.

42 Those of the families of the sons of Merari
who were numbered, by their families, by their
fathers' house, 43 from thirty years old and
above, even to fifty years old, everyone who
entered the service for work in the tabernacle
of meeting— 44 those who were numbered
by their families were three thousand two
hundred. 45 These *are* the ones who were num-
bered of the families of the sons of Merari,
whom Moses and Aaron numbered according
to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses.

46 All who were numbered of the Levites,
whom Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of Israel
numbered, by their families and by their
fathers' houses, 47 from thirty years old and
above, even to fifty years old, everyone who
came to do the work of service and the work
of bearing burdens in the tabernacle of meet-
ing— 48 those who were numbered were eight
thousand five hundred and eighty.

49 According to the commandment of the
Lord they were numbered by the hand of
Moses, each according to his service and
according to his task; thus were they num-
bered by him, as the Lord commanded Moses.

Ceremonially Unclean Persons Isolated

5 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:
2 "Command the children of Israel that
they put out of the camp every leper, everyone
who has a discharge, and whoever becomes
defiled by a corpse. 3 You shall put out both
male and female; you shall put them outside
the camp, that they may not defile their camps
in the midst of which I dwell." 4 And the chil-
dren of Israel did so, and put them outside
the camp; as the Lord spoke to Moses, so the
children of Israel did.

Confession and Restitution

5 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,
6 "Speak to the children of Israel: 'When a man
or woman commits any sin that men commit
in unfaithfulness against the Lord, and that
person is guilty, 7 then he shall confess the sin
which he has committed. He shall make resti-
tution for his trespass in full, plus one-fifth of
it, and give *it* to the one he has wronged. 8 But
if the man has no relative to whom restitution
may be made for the wrong, the restitution for
the wrong *must go* to the Lord for the priest,
in addition to the ram of the atonement with
which atonement is made for him. 9 Every
offering of all the holy things of the children
of Israel, which they bring to the priest, shall
be his. 10 And every man's holy things shall be
his; whatever any man gives the priest shall
be his.' "

Concerning Unfaithful Wives

11 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,
12 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say
to them: 'If any man's wife goes astray and
behaves unfaithfully toward him, 13 and a man
lies with her carnally, and it is hidden from
the eyes of her husband, and it is concealed
that she has defiled herself, and *there was*
no witness against her, nor was she caught—
14 if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him
and he becomes jealous of his wife, who has
defiled herself; or if the spirit of jealousy
comes upon him and he becomes jealous of
his wife, although she has not defiled herself—
15 then the man shall bring his wife to the
priest. He shall bring the offering required for
her, one-tenth of an ephah of barley meal; he
shall pour no oil on it and put no frankincense
on it, because it *is* a grain offering of jealousy,
an offering for remembering, for bringing
iniquity to remembrance.

16 'And the priest shall bring her near, and
set her before the Lord. 17 The priest shall
take holy water in an earthen vessel, and take
some of the dust that is on the floor of the
tabernacle and put *it* into the water. 18 Then
the priest shall stand the woman before the
Lord, uncover the woman's head, and put the
offering for remembering in her hands, which
is the grain offering of jealousy. And the priest
shall have in his hand the bitter water that
brings a curse. 19 And the priest shall put her
under oath, and say to the woman, "If no man
has lain with you, and if you have not gone
astray to uncleanness *while* under your hus-
band's *authority,* be free from this bitter water
that brings a curse. 20 But if you have gone
astray *while* under your husband's *authority,*
and if you have defiled yourself and some
man other than your husband has lain with
you"— 21 then the priest shall put the woman
under the oath of the curse, and he shall say

Life LESSONS

Numbers 6:1–27

SITUATION
God established the Nazirite vow to form a small group who would serve God. The restrictions (abstaining from wine, cutting or shaving hair, and touching a dead body) were intended to keep a Nazirite's life holy and clean.

OBSERVATION
The Nazirites followed special rules to be closer in mind and spirit to God. They provide examples for us of dedication to God. Religious rules should only be followed by people who have a sincere heart.

INSPIRATION
My father let me climb onto his lap . . . when he drove! He'd be arrested for doing so today. But half a century ago no one cared. Especially in a flat-as-a-skillet West Texas oil field, where rabbits outnumber people. . . .

I loved it. Did it matter that I couldn't see over the dash? That my feet stopped two feet shy of the brake and accelerator? That I didn't know a radio from a carburetor? By no means. I helped my dad drive his truck.

There were occasions when he even let me select the itinerary. At an intersection he would offer, "Right or left, Max?" I'd lift my freckled face and peer over the steering wheel, consider my options, and make my choice.

And do so with gusto, whipping the wheel like a race car driver at Monte Carlo. Did I fear driving into the ditch? Overturning the curve? Running the tire into a rut? By no means.

to the woman—"the Lord make you a curse and an oath among your people, when the Lord makes your thigh rot and your belly swell; 22 and may this water that causes the curse go into your stomach, and make *your* belly swell and *your* thigh rot."

'Then the woman shall say, "Amen, so be it."

23 'Then the priest shall write these curses in a book, and he shall scrape *them* off into the bitter water. 24 And he shall make the woman drink the bitter water that brings a curse, and the water that brings the curse shall enter her *to become* bitter. 25 Then the priest shall take the grain offering of jealousy from the woman's hand, shall wave the offering before the Lord, and bring it to the altar; 26 and the priest shall take a handful of the offering, as its memorial portion, burn *it* on the altar, and afterward make the woman drink the water. 27 When he has made her drink the water, then it shall be, if she has defiled herself and behaved unfaithfully toward her husband, that the water that brings a curse will enter her *and become* bitter, and her belly will swell, her thigh will rot, and the woman will become a curse among her people. 28 But if the woman has not defiled herself, and is clean, then she shall be free and may conceive children.

29 'This *is* the law of jealousy, when a wife, *while* under her husband's *authority,* goes astray and defiles herself, 30 or when the spirit of jealousy comes upon a man, and he becomes jealous of his wife; then he shall stand the woman before the Lord, and the priest shall execute all this law upon her. 31 Then the man shall be free from iniquity, but that woman shall bear her guilt.' "

The Law of the Nazirite

6 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When either a man or woman consecrates an offering to take the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the Lord, 3 he shall separate himself from wine and *similar* drink; he shall drink neither vinegar made from wine nor vinegar made from *similar* drink; neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh grapes or raisins. 4 All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin.

5 'All the days of the vow of his separation no razor shall come upon his head; until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the Lord, he shall be holy. *Then* he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow. 6 All the days that he separates himself to the Lord he shall not go near a dead body. 7 He shall not make himself unclean even for his father or his mother, for his brother or his sister, when they die, because his separation to God *is* on his head. 8 All the days of his separation he shall be holy to the Lord.

9 'And if anyone dies very suddenly beside him, and he defiles his consecrated head, then he shall shave his head on the day of his cleansing; on the seventh day he shall shave it. 10 Then on the eighth day he shall bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting; 11 and the priest shall offer one as a sin offering and *the* other as a burnt offering, and make atonement for him, because he sinned in regard to the corpse; and he shall sanctify his head that same day. 12 He shall consecrate to the Lord the days of his separation, and bring a male lamb in its first year

as a trespass offering; but the former days shall be lost, because his separation was defiled.

13 'Now this *is* the law of the Nazirite: When the days of his separation are fulfilled, he shall be brought to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. 14 And he shall present his offering to the Lord: one male lamb in its first year without blemish as a burnt offering, one ewe lamb in its first year without blemish as a sin offering, one ram without blemish as a peace offering, 15 a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mixed with oil, unleavened wafers anointed with oil, and their grain offering with their drink offerings.

16 'Then the priest shall bring *them* before the Lord and offer his sin offering and his burnt offering; 17 and he shall offer the ram as a sacrifice of a peace offering to the Lord, with the basket of unleavened bread; the priest shall also offer its grain offering and its drink offering. 18 Then the Nazirite shall shave his consecrated head *at* the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and shall take the hair from his consecrated head and put *it* on the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offering.

19 'And the priest shall take the boiled shoulder of the ram, one unleavened cake from the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and put *them* upon the hands of the Nazirite after he has shaved his consecrated *hair*, 20 and the priest shall wave them as a wave offering before the Lord; they *are* holy for the priest, together with the breast of the wave offering and the thigh of the heave offering. After that the Nazirite may drink wine.'

21 "This is the law of the Nazirite who vows to the Lord the offering for his separation, and besides that, whatever else his hand is able to provide; according to the vow which he takes, so he must do according to the law of his separation."

The Priestly Blessing

22 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 23 "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them:

24 "The Lord bless you and keep you;
25 The Lord make His face shine upon you,
And be gracious to you;
26 The Lord lift up His countenance upon you,
And give you peace."'

27 "So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them."

Offerings of the Leaders

7 Now it came to pass, when Moses had finished setting up the tabernacle, that he anointed it and consecrated it and all its furnishings, and the altar and all its utensils; so he anointed them and consecrated them. 2 Then the leaders of Israel, the heads of their fathers' houses, who *were* the leaders of the tribes and over those who were numbered, made an offering. 3 And they brought their offering before the Lord, six covered carts and twelve oxen, a cart for *every*

Dad's hands were next to mine, his eyes keener than mine. Consequently, I was fearless! Anyone can drive a car from the lap of a father.

And anyone can pray from the same perspective.

Prayer is the practice of sitting calmly in God's lap and placing our hands on His steering wheel. He handles the speed and hard curves and ensures safe arrival. And we offer our requests; we ask God to "take this cup away." This cup of disease, betrayal, financial collapse, joblessness, conflict, or senility. Prayer is this simple. And such simple prayer equipped Christ to stare down His deepest fear.

Do likewise. Fight your dragons in Gethsemane's garden. Those persistent, ugly villains of the heart—talk to God about them.

I don't want to lose my spouse, Lord. Help me to fear less and trust You more.

I have to fly tomorrow, Lord, and I can't sleep for fear some terrorist will get on board and take down the plane. Won't You remove this fear?

The bank just called and is about to foreclose on our home. What's going to happen to my family? Can You teach me to trust?

I'm scared, Lord. The doctor just called, and the news is not good. You know what's ahead for me. I give my fear to You.

Be specific about your fears. Identify what "this cup" is and talk to God about it. Putting your worries into words disrobes them. They look silly standing there naked. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

We do not need to become Nazirites to serve Christ. Follow God's Word and pray for God's wisdom so you can better serve him in your

family and work. Prayer takes away fear and places your trust firmly in your heavenly Father.

EXPLORATION
Dedication to Service—
1 Chronicles 6:31;
2 Chronicles 7:4, 5; Luke 9:62; Romans 12:1, 2.

Numbers 7:1—9:14

Life LESSONS

SITUATION
Moses consecrated and anointed the completed place of worship. The people brought gifts and offerings for the tent of meeting.

OBSERVATION
In order to truly know God, we must worship Him for who He really is, our great, powerful, and awesome God.

INSPIRATION
My taxi-driving friend in Brazil kept a miniature Jesus superglued to his car dashboard. Anytime he needed a parking place or green light, he rubbed his plastic do-me-a-favor Jesus.

The preacher occupying the midnight broadcast time slot assured me and other late-night cable viewers that prosperity was only a prayer away. Just ask the make-me-a-buck Jesus.

I once reduced Christ down to a handful of doctrines. He was a recipe, and I had the ingredients. Mix them correctly, and the Jesus-of-my-making would appear.

Politicians pull box-sized versions of Jesus off the shelf, asserting that Jesus would most certainly vote green, conservative; often, never; like a hawk, dove, or eagle. The Jesus-of-my-

two of the leaders, and for each one an ox; and they presented them before the tabernacle.

4 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 5 "Accept *these* from them, that they may be used in doing the work of the tabernacle of meeting; and you shall give them to the Levites, *to* every man according to his service." 6 So Moses took the carts and the oxen, and gave them to the Levites. 7 Two carts and four oxen he gave to the sons of Gershon, according to their service; 8 and four carts and eight oxen he gave to the sons of Merari, according to their service, under the authority[a] of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest. 9 But to the sons of Kohath he gave none, because theirs *was* the service of the holy things, *which* they carried on their shoulders.

10 Now the leaders offered the dedication *offering* for the altar when it was anointed; so the leaders offered their offering before the altar. 11 For the Lord said to Moses, "They shall offer their offering, one leader each day, for the dedication of the altar."

12 And the one who offered his offering on the first day *was* Nahshon the son of Amminadab, from the tribe of Judah. 13 His offering *was* one silver platter, the weight of which *was* one hundred and thirty *shekels,* and one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; 14 one gold pan of ten *shekels,* full of incense; 15 one young bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering; 16 one kid of the goats as a sin offering; 17 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first year. This *was* the offering of Nahshon the son of Amminadab.

18 On the second day Nethanel the son of Zuar, leader of Issachar, presented *an offering.* 19 *For* his offering he offered one silver platter, the weight of which *was* one hundred and thirty *shekels,* and one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; 20 one gold pan of ten *shekels,* full of incense; 21 one young bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering; 22 one kid of the goats as a sin offering; 23 and as the sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first year. This *was* the offering of Nethanel the son of Zuar.

24 On the third day Eliab the son of Helon, leader of the children of Zebulun, *presented an offering.* 25 His offering *was* one silver platter, the weight of which *was* one hundred and thirty *shekels,* and one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; 26 one gold pan of ten *shekels,* full of incense; 27 one young bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering; 28 one kid of the goats as a sin offering; 29 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first year. This *was* the offering of Eliab the son of Helon.

30 On the fourth day Elizur the son of Shedeur, leader of the children of Reuben, *presented an offering.* 31 His offering *was* one silver platter, the weight of which *was* one hundred and thirty *shekels,* and one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanc-

7:8 [a] Literally *hand*

tuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering;
32 one gold pan of ten *shekels,* full of incense; 33 one young bull, one
ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering; 34 one kid
of the goats as a sin offering; 35 and as the sacrifice of peace offerings:
two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first
year. This *was* the offering of Elizur the son of Shedeur.

36 On the fifth day Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai, leader of the
children of Simeon, *presented an offering.* 37 His offering *was* one silver
platter, the weight of which *was* one hundred and thirty *shekels,* and
one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanc-
tuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering;
38 one gold pan of ten *shekels,* full of incense; 39 one young bull, one
ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering; 40 one kid
of the goats as a sin offering; 41 and as the sacrifice of peace offerings:
two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first
year. This *was* the offering of Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai.

42 On the sixth day Eliasaph the son of Deuel,[a] leader of the children
of Gad, *presented an offering.* 43 His offering *was* one silver platter, the
weight of which *was* one hundred and thirty *shekels,* and one silver
bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both
of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; 44 one gold
pan of ten *shekels,* full of incense; 45 one young bull, one ram, and one
male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering; 46 one kid of the goats as
a sin offering; 47 and as the sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five
rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first year. This *was*
the offering of Eliasaph the son of Deuel.

48 On the seventh day Elishama the son of Ammihud, leader of the
children of Ephraim, *presented an offering.* 49 His offering *was* one
silver platter, the weight of which *was* one hundred and thirty *shekels,*
and one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the
sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain
offering; 50 one gold pan of ten *shekels,* full of incense; 51 one young
bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering;
52 one kid of the goats as a sin offering; 53 and as the sacrifice of peace
offerings: two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in
their first year. This *was* the offering of Elishama the son of Ammihud.

54 On the eighth day Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur, leader of the
children of Manasseh, *presented an offering.* 55 His offering *was* one
silver platter, the weight of which *was* one hundred and thirty *shekels,*
and one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the
sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain
offering; 56 one gold pan of ten *shekels,* full of incense; 57 one young
bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering;
58 one kid of the goats as a sin offering; 59 and as the sacrifice of peace
offerings: two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in
their first year. This *was* the offering of Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur.

60 On the ninth day Abidan the son of Gideoni, leader of the chil-
dren of Benjamin, *presented an offering.* 61 His offering *was* one silver
platter, the weight of which *was* one hundred and thirty *shekels,* and
one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the

7:42 [a] Spelled *Reuel* in 2:14

politics comes in handy during elections.

Box-sized gods. You'll find them in the tight grip of people who prefer a god they can manage, control, and predict. This topsy-turvy life requires a tame deity, doesn't it? In a world out of control, we need a god we can control, a comforting presence akin to a lap dog or the kitchen cat. We call and he comes. We pet and he purrs. *If we can just keep God in His place . . .* (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How do you approach worship? Next time you're in church, think about the amazing opportunity you have to come before the all-powerful God of the universe. You cannot box Him in or make Him to be how *you* choose. He alone is God.

EXPLORATION

Public Worship—Psalm 95:6; John 4:23, 24; Acts 2:42–47; Hebrews 10:25.

sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; 62 one gold pan of ten *shekels,* full of incense; 63 one young bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering; 64 one kid of the goats as a sin offering; 65 and as the sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first year. This *was* the offering of Abidan the son of Gideoni.

66 On the tenth day Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai, leader of the children of Dan, *presented an offering.* 67 His offering *was* one silver platter, the weight of which *was* one hundred and thirty *shekels,* and one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; 68 one gold pan of ten *shekels,* full of incense; 69 one young bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering; 70 one kid of the goats as a sin offering; 71 and as the sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first year. This *was* the offering of Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai.

72 On the eleventh day Pagiel the son of Ocran, leader of the children of Asher, *presented an offering.* 73 His offering *was* one silver platter, the weight of which *was* one hundred and thirty *shekels,* and one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; 74 one gold pan of ten *shekels,* full of incense; 75 one young bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering; 76 one kid of the goats as a sin offering; 77 and as the sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first year. This *was* the offering of Pagiel the son of Ocran.

78 On the twelfth day Ahira the son of Enan, leader of the children of Naphtali, *presented an offering.* 79 His offering *was* one silver platter, the weight of which *was* one hundred and thirty *shekels,* and one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; 80 one gold pan of ten *shekels,* full of incense; 81 one young bull, one ram, and one male lamb in its first year, as a burnt offering; 82 one kid of the goats as a sin offering; 83 and as the sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs in their first year. This *was* the offering of Ahira the son of Enan.

84 This *was* the dedication *offering* for the altar from the leaders of Israel, when it was anointed: twelve silver platters, twelve silver bowls, and twelve gold pans. 85 Each silver platter *weighed* one hundred and thirty *shekels* and each bowl seventy *shekels.* All the silver of the vessels *weighed* two thousand four hundred *shekels,* according to the shekel of the sanctuary. 86 The twelve gold pans full of incense *weighed* ten *shekels* apiece, according to the shekel of the sanctuary; all the gold of the pans *weighed* one hundred and twenty *shekels.* 87 All the oxen for the burnt offering *were* twelve young bulls, the rams twelve, the male lambs in their first year twelve, with their grain offering, and the kids of the goats as a sin offering twelve. 88 And all the oxen for the sacrifice of peace offerings were twenty-four bulls, the rams sixty, the male goats sixty, and the lambs in their first year sixty. This *was* the dedication *offering* for the altar after it was anointed.

89 Now when Moses went into the tabernacle of meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice of One speaking to him from above the mercy seat that *was* on the ark of the Testimony, from between the two cherubim; thus He spoke to him.

Arrangement of the Lamps

8 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2 "Speak to Aaron, and say to him, 'When you arrange the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in front of the lampstand.'" 3 And Aaron did so; he arranged the lamps to face toward the front of the lampstand, as the Lord commanded Moses. 4 Now this workmanship of the lampstand *was* hammered gold; from its shaft to its flowers it *was* hammered work. According to the pattern which the Lord had shown Moses, so he made the lampstand.

Cleansing and Dedication of the Levites

5 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 6 "Take the Levites from among the children of Israel and cleanse them *ceremonially.* 7 Thus you shall do to them to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purification on them, and let them shave all their body, and let them wash their

clothes, and *so* make themselves clean. 8 Then let them take a young bull with its grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil, and you shall take another young bull as a sin offering. 9 And you shall bring the Levites before the tabernacle of meeting, and you shall gather together the whole congregation of the children of Israel. 10 So you shall bring the Levites before the Lord, and the children of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites; 11 and Aaron shall offer the Levites before the Lord *like* a wave offering from the children of Israel, that they may perform the work of the Lord. 12 Then the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the young bulls, and you shall offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to the Lord, to make atonement for the Levites.

13 "And you shall stand the Levites before Aaron and his sons, and then offer them *like* a wave offering to the Lord. 14 Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the children of Israel, and the Levites shall be Mine. 15 After that the Levites shall go in to service the tabernacle of meeting. So you shall cleanse them and offer them *like* a wave offering. 16 For they *are* wholly given to Me from among the children of Israel; I have taken them for Myself instead of all who open the womb, the firstborn of all the children of Israel. 17 For all the firstborn among the children of Israel *are* Mine, *both* man and beast; on the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them to Myself. 18 I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn of the children of Israel. 19 And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the work for the children of Israel in the tabernacle of meeting, and to make atonement for the children of Israel, that there be no plague among the children of Israel when the children of Israel come near the sanctuary."

20 Thus Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel did to the Levites; according to all that the Lord commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so the children of Israel did to them. 21 And the Levites purified themselves and washed their clothes; then Aaron presented them *like* a wave offering before the Lord, and Aaron made atonement for them to cleanse them. 22 After that the Levites went in to do their work in the tabernacle of meeting before Aaron and his sons; as the Lord commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so they did to them.

23 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 24 "This *is* what *pertains* to the Levites: From twenty-five years old and above one may enter to perform service in the work of the tabernacle of meeting; 25 and at the age of fifty years they must cease performing this work, and shall work no more. 26 They may minister with their brethren in the tabernacle of meeting, to attend to needs, but they *themselves* shall do no work. Thus you shall do to the Levites regarding their duties."

The Second Passover

9 Now the Lord spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: 2 "Let the children of Israel keep the Passover at its appointed time. 3 On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, you shall keep it at its appointed time. According to all its rites and ceremonies you shall keep it." 4 So Moses told the children of Israel that they should keep the Passover. 5 And they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month, at twilight, in the Wilderness of Sinai; according to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so the children of Israel did.

6 Now there were *certain* men who were defiled by a human corpse, so that they could not keep the Passover on that day; and they came before Moses and Aaron that day. 7 And those men said to him, "We *became* defiled by a human corpse. Why are we kept from presenting the offering of the Lord at its appointed time among the children of Israel?"

8 And Moses said to them, "Stand still, that I may hear what the Lord will command concerning you."

9 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 10 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If anyone of you or your posterity is unclean because of a corpse, or *is* far away on a journey, he may still keep the Lord's Passover. 11 On the fourteenth day of the second month, at twilight, they may keep it. They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 12 They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break one of its bones. According to all

the ordinances of the Passover they shall keep it. 13 But the man who *is* clean and is not on a journey, and ceases to keep the Passover, that same person shall be cut off from among his people, because he did not bring the offering of the Lord at its appointed time; that man shall bear his sin.

14 'And if a stranger dwells among you, and would keep the Lord's Passover, he must do so according to the rite of the Passover and according to its ceremony; you shall have one ordinance, both for the stranger and the native of the land.' "

The Cloud and the Fire

15 Now on the day that the tabernacle was raised up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the Testimony; from evening until morning it was above the tabernacle like the appearance of fire. 16 So it was always: the cloud covered it *by day,* and the appearance of fire by night. 17 Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, after that the children of Israel would journey; and in the place where the cloud settled, there the children of Israel would pitch their tents. 18 At the command of the Lord the children of Israel would journey, and at the command of the Lord they would camp; as long as the cloud stayed above the tabernacle they remained encamped. 19 Even when the cloud continued long, many days above the tabernacle, the children of Israel kept the charge of the Lord and did not journey. 20 So it was, when the cloud was above the tabernacle a few days: according to the command of the Lord they would remain encamped, and according to the command of the Lord they would journey. 21 So it was, when the cloud remained only from evening until morning: when the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they would journey; whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud was taken up, they would journey. 22 *Whether it was* two days, a month, or a year that the cloud remained above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would remain encamped and not journey; but when it was taken up, they would journey. 23 At the command of the Lord they remained encamped, and at the command of the Lord they journeyed; they kept the charge of the Lord, at the command of the Lord by the hand of Moses.

Two Silver Trumpets

10 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2 "Make two silver trumpets for yourself; you shall make them of hammered work; you shall use them for calling the congregation and for directing the movement of the camps. 3 When they blow both of them, all the congregation shall gather before you at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. 4 But if they blow *only* one, then the leaders, the heads of the divisions of Israel, shall gather to you. 5 When you sound the advance, the camps that lie on the east side shall then begin their journey. 6 When you sound the advance the second time, then the camps that lie on the south side shall begin their journey; they shall sound the call for them to begin their journeys. 7 And when the assembly is to be gathered together, you shall blow, but not sound the advance. 8 The sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets; and these shall be to you as an ordinance forever throughout your generations.

9 "When you go to war in your land against the enemy who

Life Lessons

Numbers 9:15—10:10

SITUATION
God guided the Israelites in the wilderness with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The cloud and fire moved according to God's will. When they moved, the people moved; where they stopped, the people stopped.

OBSERVATION
When we follow God's guidance, we please Him. Although His plan may not always be clear to us, we must follow.

INSPIRATION
Some time ago I went to the Indianapolis airport to catch a return flight to San Antonio. Upon reaching the terminal, I realized I had lost my itinerary. But that was okay, because I knew which airline would carry me home. Continental. Having flown from San Antonio on Continental, I would return on Continental. Right? But the Continental counter was closed. The lights were off. No ticket agent was in sight. With the clock ticking toward my 7:40 p.m. departure, I called for help. "Hello? Anyone back there? I'm here for the 7:40 flight."

From within the catacombs emerged a Continental baggage handler. He looked at me and said, "We don't have a 7:40 flight."

I replied, "Yes, you do. I flew Continental here, and I need to fly it home."

He shrugged. "We don't have another flight tonight."

I turned to the automated ticket machine, entered my information, and requested a boarding pass for the 7:40

oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, and you will be remembered before the Lord your God, and you will be saved from your enemies. 10 Also in the day of your gladness, in your appointed feasts, and at the beginning of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be a memorial for you before your God: I *am* the Lord your God."

Departure from Sinai

11 Now it came to pass on the twentieth *day* of the second month, in the second year, that the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle of the Testimony. 12 And the children of Israel set out from the Wilderness of Sinai on their journeys; then the cloud settled down in the Wilderness of Paran. 13 So they started out for the first time according to the command of the Lord by the hand of Moses.

14 The standard of the camp of the children of Judah set out first according to their armies; over their army was Nahshon the son of Amminadab. 15 Over the army of the tribe of the children of Issachar *was* Nethanel the son of Zuar. 16 And over the army of the tribe of the children of Zebulun *was* Eliab the son of Helon.

17 Then the tabernacle was taken down; and the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari set out, carrying the tabernacle.

18 And the standard of the camp of Reuben set out according to their armies; over their army *was* Elizur the son of Shedeur. 19 Over the army of the tribe of the children of Simeon *was* Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai. 20 And over the army of the tribe of the children of Gad *was* Eliasaph the son of Deuel.

21 Then the Kohathites set out, carrying the holy things. (The tabernacle would be prepared for their arrival.)

22 And the standard of the camp of the children of Ephraim set out according to their armies; over their army *was* Elishama the son of Ammihud. 23 Over the army of the tribe of the children of Manasseh *was* Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur. 24 And over the army of the tribe of the children of Benjamin *was* Abidan the son of Gideoni.

25 Then the standard of the camp of the children of Dan (the rear guard of all the camps) set out according to their armies; over their army *was* Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai. 26 Over the army of the tribe of the children of Asher *was* Pagiel the son of Ocran. 27 And over the army of the tribe of the children of Naphtali *was* Ahira the son of Enan.

28 Thus *was* the order of march of the children of Israel, according to their armies, when they began their journey.

29 Now Moses said to Hobab the son of Reuel[a] the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place of which the Lord said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us, and we will treat you well; for the Lord has promised good things to Israel."

30 And he said to him, "I will not go, but I will depart to my *own* land and to my relatives."

31 So *Moses* said, "Please do not leave, inasmuch as you know how we are to camp in the wilderness, and you can be our eyes. 32 And it

10:29 [a] Septuagint reads *Raguel* (compare Exodus 2:18).

flight. It informed me that there was no such thing. Wouldn't you know? Even the machine was wrong!

The employee, much to his credit, bore with me. Scratching his bald head, he offered a solution. "You know, Northwest Airlines has a 7:40 flight. Maybe you should check with them."

Sure enough, they did. And I had to admit that the airline's schedule ranked higher than my opinion. Their authority checkmated mine. I could have stood in front of the Continental counter all night, stamping my feet and demanding my way. But what good would it have done? Eventually I had to submit to the truth of the itinerary.

Every so often in life, we find ourselves standing before God's counter, thinking we know the itinerary. Good health, a job promotion, a pregnancy. Many times God checks the itinerary He created and says yes. But there are times when He says, "No. That isn't the journey I have planned for you. I have you routed through the city of Struggle."

We can stamp our feet and shake our fists. Or we can make a sailor-in-the-storm decision. *I know God knows what is best.* (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How easily do you change direction? Are you willing to adapt to God's will? Ask God to make His plans for you clear and to move you toward His will for the future.

EXPLORATION

Guidance—Exodus 15:13; Psalm 23:1–4; Isaiah 58:11.

Life Lessons

Numbers 10:11—11:35

SITUATION
Approximately two years had passed since the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. During this time at Mount Sinai, God gave them the Meeting Tent, ceremonial and ritual laws, and travel instructions. Then they traveled from Mount Sinai into the wilderness of Paran en route to the Promised Land. When they faced many hardships, they forgot about God's provision and protection and began to curse and complain. God punished them for their lack of faith.

OBSERVATION
We show the same lack of faith when we think we can do as much (or more) than Almighty God. Such a lack of faith shows that we really don't know how to trust God.

INSPIRATION
If you look long enough and hard enough, you'll find something to bellyache about. So quit looking! Lift your eyes off the weeds. Major in the grace of God. …

Collect your blessings. Catalog His kindnesses. Assemble your reasons for gratitude and recite them. "Always be joyful. Pray continually, and give thanks whatever happens. That is what God wants for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 NCV).

Look at the totality of those terms. *Always be joyful. Pray continually. Give thanks whatever happens.* Learn a lesson from Sidney Connell. When her brand-new bicycle was stolen,

shall be, if you go with us—indeed it shall be—that whatever good the Lord will do to us, the same we will do to you."

33 So they departed from the mountain of the Lord on a journey of three days; and the ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them for the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them. 34 And the cloud of the Lord *was* above them by day when they went out from the camp.

35 So it was, whenever the ark set out, that Moses said:

"Rise up, O Lord!
Let Your enemies be scattered,
And let those who hate You flee before You."

36 And when it rested, he said:

"Return, O Lord,
To the many thousands of Israel."

The People Complain

11 Now *when* the people complained, it displeased the Lord; for the Lord heard *it,* and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the Lord burned among them, and consumed *some* in the outskirts of the camp. 2 Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the Lord, the fire was quenched. 3 So he called the name of the place Taberah,[a] because the fire of the Lord had burned among them.

4 Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: "Who will give us meat to eat? 5 We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; 6 but now our whole being *is* dried up; *there is* nothing at all except this manna *before* our eyes!"

7 Now the manna *was* like coriander seed, and its color like the color of bdellium. 8 The people went about and gathered *it,* ground *it* on millstones or beat *it* in the mortar, cooked *it* in pans, and made cakes of it; and its taste was like the taste of pastry prepared with oil. 9 And when the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna fell on it.

10 Then Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent; and the anger of the Lord was greatly aroused; Moses also was displeased. 11 So Moses said to the Lord, "Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me? 12 Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child,' to the land which You swore to their fathers? 13 Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? For they weep all over me, saying, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' 14 I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden *is* too heavy for me. 15 If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now—if I have found favor in Your sight—and do not let me see my wretchedness!"

11:3 [a] Literally *Burning*

The Seventy Elders

16 So the Lord said to Moses: "Gather to Me seventy men of the
elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and
officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they
may stand there with you. 17 Then I will come down and talk with you
there. I will take of the Spirit that *is* upon you and will put *the same*
upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you,
that you may not bear *it* yourself alone. 18 Then you shall say to the
people, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat;
for you have wept in the hearing of the Lord, saying, "Who will give us
meat to eat? For *it was* well with us in Egypt." Therefore the Lord will
give you meat, and you shall eat. 19 You shall eat, not one day, nor two
days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, 20 but *for* a whole
month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to
you, because you have despised the Lord who is among you, and have
wept before Him, saying, "Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?"' "
21 And Moses said, "The people whom I *am* among *are* six hundred
thousand men on foot; yet You have said, 'I will give them meat, that
they may eat *for* a whole month.' 22 Shall flocks and herds be slaugh-
tered for them, to provide enough for them? Or shall all the fish of
the sea be gathered together for them, to provide enough for them?"
23 And the Lord said to Moses, "Has the Lord's arm been shortened?
Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not."
24 So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord,
and he gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people and
placed them around the tabernacle. 25 Then the Lord came down in
the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that *was* upon
him, and placed *the same* upon the seventy elders; and it happened,
when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, although
they never did *so* again.[a]
26 But two men had remained in the camp: the name of one *was*
Eldad, and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon
them. Now they *were* among those listed, but who had not gone out to
the tabernacle; yet they prophesied in the camp. 27 And a young man
ran and told Moses, and said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in
the camp."
28 So Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, *one* of his choice
men, answered and said, "Moses my lord, forbid them!"
29 Then Moses said to him, "Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that
all the Lord's people were prophets *and* that the Lord would put His
Spirit upon them!" 30 And Moses returned to the camp, he and the
elders of Israel.

The Lord Sends Quail

31 Now a wind went out from the Lord, and it brought quail from
the sea and left *them* fluttering near the camp, about a day's journey
on this side and about a day's journey on the other side, all around the
camp, and about two cubits above the surface of the ground. 32 And
the people stayed up all that day, all night, and all the next day, and
gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers); and

11:25 [a] Targum and Vulgate read *did not cease.*

she called her dad with the bad news. He expected his daughter to be upset. But Sidney wasn't crying. She was honored. "Dad," she boasted, "out of all the bikes they could have taken, they took mine."

Gratitude is always an option. . . .

Need spice in your day? Thank God for every problem that comes down the pike. Is any situation so dire that gratitude is eliminated? (From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you find it hard to trust God when things are going poorly? Or is it harder when things are going well because you're more self-sufficient? Consider the areas in your life where you are having a hard time trusting God right now. Pray for wisdom to trust God in that specific situation. And ask God to help you be thankful.

EXPLORATION

Trust—Psalm 20:7; Proverbs 3:5; 16:20; Romans 4:5; 10:11; 1 Peter 2:6.

they spread *them* out for themselves all around the camp. 33 But while the meat *was* still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was aroused against the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very great plague. 34 So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah,[a] because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving.

35 From Kibroth Hattaavah the people moved to Hazeroth, and camped at Hazeroth.

Dissension of Aaron and Miriam

12 Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman. 2 So they said, "Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" And the Lord heard *it.* 3 (Now the man Moses *was* very humble, more than all men who *were* on the face of the earth.)

4 Suddenly the Lord said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!" So the three came out. 5 Then the Lord came down in the pillar of cloud and stood *in* the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward. 6 Then He said,

"Hear now My words:
If there is a prophet among you,
I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision;
I speak to him in a dream.
7 Not so with My servant Moses;
He *is* faithful in all My house.
8 I speak with him face to face,
Even plainly, and not in dark sayings;
And he sees the form of the Lord.
Why then were you not afraid
To speak against My servant Moses?"

9 So the anger of the Lord was aroused against them, and He departed. 10 And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam *became* leprous, as *white as* snow. Then Aaron turned toward Miriam, and there she was, a leper. 11 So Aaron said to Moses, "Oh, my lord! Please do not lay *this* sin on us, in which we have done foolishly and in which we have sinned. 12 Please do not let her be as one dead, whose flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother's womb!"

13 So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, "Please heal her, O God, I pray!"

14 Then the Lord said to Moses, "If her father had but spit in her face, would she not be shamed seven days? Let her be shut out of the camp seven days, and afterward she may be received *again.*" 15 So Miriam was shut out of the camp seven days, and the people did not journey till Miriam was brought in *again.* 16 And afterward the people moved from Hazeroth and camped in the Wilderness of Paran.

11:34 [a] Literally *Graves of Craving*

Life Lessons

Numbers 12:1–16

SITUATION
Jealousy caused Aaron and Miriam to speak out against Moses. God told them, however, that He spoke directly and openly with Moses. As a result, Aaron and Miriam received God's judgment.

OBSERVATION
A lack of contentment often leads to the problem of jealousy.

INSPIRATION
Are you hoping that a change in circumstances will bring a change in your attitude? If so, you are in prison, and you need to learn a secret of traveling light. What you have in your Shepherd is greater than what you don't have in life.

May I meddle for a moment? What is the one thing separating you from joy? How do you fill in this blank: "I will be happy when _____"? When I am healed. When I am promoted. When I am married. When I am single. When I am rich. How would you finish that statement?

Now, with your answer firmly in mind, answer this. If your ship never comes in, if your dream never comes true, if the situation never changes, could you be happy? If not, then you are sleeping in the cold cell of discontent. You are in prison. And you need to know what you have in your Shepherd.

You have a God who hears you, the power of love behind you, the Holy Spirit within you, and all of heaven ahead of you. If you have the Shepherd, you have grace for every sin,

Spies Sent into Canaan

13 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them."

3 So Moses sent them from the Wilderness of Paran according to the command of the Lord, all of them men who *were* heads of the children of Israel. 4 Now these *were* their names: from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua the son of Zaccur; 5 from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat the son of Hori; 6 from the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh; 7 from the tribe of Issachar, Igal the son of Joseph; 8 from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea[a] the son of Nun; 9 from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti the son of Raphu; 10 from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel the son of Sodi; 11 from the tribe of Joseph, *that is,* from the tribe of Manasseh, Gaddi the son of Susi; 12 from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel the son of Gemalli; 13 from the tribe of Asher, Sethur the son of Michael; 14 from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi the son of Vophsi; 15 from the tribe of Gad, Geuel the son of Machi.

16 These *are* the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Hoshea[a] the son of Nun, Joshua.

17 Then Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, "Go up this *way* into the South, and go up to the mountains, 18 and see what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it *are* strong or weak, few or many; 19 whether the land they dwell in *is* good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit *are* like camps or strongholds; 20 whether the land *is* rich or poor; and whether there are forests there or not. Be of good courage. And bring some of the fruit of the land." Now the time *was* the season of the first ripe grapes.

21 So they went up and spied out the land from the Wilderness of Zin as far as Rehob, near the entrance of Hamath. 22 And they went up through the South and came to Hebron; Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the descendants of Anak, *were* there. (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) 23 Then they came to the Valley of Eshcol, and there cut down a branch with one cluster of grapes; they carried it between two of them on a pole. *They* also *brought* some of the pomegranates and figs. 24 The place was called the Valley of Eshcol,[a] because of the cluster which the men of Israel cut down there. 25 And they returned from spying out the land after forty days.

26 Now they departed and came back to Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 Then they told him, and said: "We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this *is* its fruit. 28 Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land *are* strong; the cities *are* fortified *and* very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan."

13:8 [a]Septuagint and Vulgate read *Oshea.* **13:16** [a]Septuagint and Vulgate read *Oshea.*
13:24 [a]Literally *Cluster*

direction for every turn, a candle for every corner, and an anchor for every storm. You have everything you need.

And who can take it from you? Can leukemia infect your salvation? Can bankruptcy impoverish your prayers? A tornado might take your earthly house, but will it touch your heavenly home?

And look at your position. Why clamor for prestige and power? Are you not already privileged to be part of the greatest work in history? . . .

Paul says that "godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6). When we surrender to God the cumbersome sack of discontent, we don't just give up something; we gain something. God replaces it with a lightweight, tailor-made, sorrow-resistant attaché of gratitude.

What will you gain with contentment? You may gain your marriage. You may gain precious hours with your children. You may gain your self-respect. You may gain joy. You may gain the faith to say, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you jealous of someone's name? Position? Authority? Possessions? Family? Ask God to show how you can be content with the things that really matter.

EXPLORATION

Jealousy—Genesis 37:11; 1 Samuel 18:1–9; Matthew 27:18; Acts 5:17; Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 13:4; 1 Timothy 6:4; 1 Peter 2:1.

Life LESSONS

Numbers 13:1—14:45

SITUATION
The Promised Land flowed with milk and honey because of the abundance of figs, dates, and nuts there. But the land also contained many imposing cities with tall, thick walls.

OBSERVATION
Ten of the twelve spies discouraged the people from trying to conquer Canaan. Rather than trust in God's promises, they looked at unfavorable military odds. Though God had promised to be faithful, His people did not believe Him.

INSPIRATION
"Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted" (John 6:11).

When the disciples didn't pray, Jesus prayed. When the disciples didn't see God, Jesus sought God. When the disciples were weak, Jesus was strong. When the disciples had no faith, Jesus had faith. He thanked God.

For what? The crowds? The pandemonium? The weariness? The faithless disciples? No, He thanked God for the basket of bread. He ignored the clouds and found the ray and thanked God for it.

Look what He does next. "He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes" (Matthew 14:19).

Rather than punish the disciples, He employs them. There they go, passing out the bread they didn't

30 Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, "Let us go
up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it."
31 But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to
go up against the people, for they *are* stronger than we." 32 And they
gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had
spied out, saying, "The land through which we have gone as spies *is*
a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw
in it *are* men of *great* stature. 33 There we saw the giants[a] (the descen-
dants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers
in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."

Israel Refuses to Enter Canaan

14 So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the
people wept that night. 2 And all the children of Israel com-
plained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to
them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died
in this wilderness! 3 Why has the Lord brought us to this land to fall by
the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would
it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" 4 So they said to one another,
"Let us select a leader and return to Egypt."
5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly
of the congregation of the children of Israel.
6 But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, *who*
were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; 7 and
they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying:
"The land we passed through to spy out *is* an exceedingly good land.
8 If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and
give it to us, 'a land which flows with milk and honey.'[a] 9 Only do not
rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they *are* our
bread; their protection has departed from them, and the Lord *is* with
us. Do not fear them."
10 And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Now the
glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the
children of Israel.

Moses Intercedes for the People

11 Then the Lord said to Moses: "How long will these people reject
Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I
have performed among them? 12 I will strike them with the pestilence
and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and
mightier than they."
13 And Moses said to the Lord: "Then the Egyptians will hear *it,* for
by Your might You brought these people up from among them, 14 and
they will tell *it* to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that
You, Lord, *are* among these people; that You, Lord, are seen face to
face and Your cloud stands above them, and You go before them in a
pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. 15 Now *if* You kill
these people as one man, then the nations which have heard of Your
fame will speak, saying, 16 'Because the Lord was not able to bring this
people to the land which He swore to give them, therefore He killed

13:33 [a]Hebrew *nephilim* **14:8** [a]Exodus 3:8

them in the wilderness.' 17 And now, I pray, let the power of my Lord
be great, just as You have spoken, saying, 18 'The Lord is longsuffering
and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He
by no means clears *the guilty,* visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the
children to the third and fourth *generation.*'[a] 19 Pardon the iniquity of
this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as
You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."

20 Then the Lord said: "I have pardoned, according to your word;
21 but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the
Lord— 22 because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs
which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test
now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, 23 they certainly
shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of
those who rejected Me see it. 24 But My servant Caleb, because he has
a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the
land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it. 25 Now the
Amalekites and the Canaanites dwell in the valley; tomorrow turn and
move out into the wilderness by the Way of the Red Sea."

Death Sentence on the Rebels

26 And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 27 "How long
shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I
have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against
Me. 28 Say to them, 'As I live,' says the Lord, 'just as you have spoken
in My hearing, so I will do to you: 29 The carcasses of you who have
complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who
were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years
old and above. 30 Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua
the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I
would make you dwell in. 31 But your little ones, whom you said would
be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have
despised. 32 But *as for* you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness.
33 And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and
bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in
the wilderness. 34 According to the number of the days in which you
spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt
one year, *namely* forty years, and you shall know My rejection. 35 I the
Lord have spoken this. I will surely do so to all this evil congregation
who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be
consumed, and there they shall die.' "

36 Now the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, who
returned and made all the congregation complain against him by
bringing a bad report of the land, 37 those very men who brought the
evil report about the land, died by the plague before the Lord. 38 But
Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh remained
alive, of the men who went to spy out the land.

A Futile Invasion Attempt

39 Then Moses told these words to all the children of Israel, and the
people mourned greatly. 40 And they rose early in the morning and

14:18 [a] Exodus 34:6, 7

request, enjoying the answer to the prayer they didn't even pray. If Jesus would have acted according to the faith of His disciples, the multitudes would have gone unfed. But He didn't, and He doesn't. God is true to us even when we forget Him.

God's blessings are dispensed according to the riches of His grace, not according to the depth of our faith. "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13).

Why is that important to know? So you won't get cynical. Look around you. Aren't there more mouths than bread? Aren't there more wounds than physicians? Aren't there more who need the truth than those who tell it? Aren't there more churches asleep than churches afire?

So what do we do? Throw up our hands and walk away? Tell the world we can't help them? That's what the disciples wanted to do. Should we just give up on the church? . . .

No, we don't give up. We look up. We trust. We believe. And our optimism is not hollow. Christ has proven worthy. He has shown that He never fails, though there is nothing but failure in us. . . .

God is faithful even when His children are not.

That's what makes God, God. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What "clouds" in your life are keeping you from believing God? Commit your concerns to the Lord. Ask Him to help you obey His leading despite any challenges you face.

went up to the top of the mountain, saying, "Here we are, and we will go up to the place which the Lord has promised, for we have sinned!"

41 And Moses said, "Now why do you transgress the command of the Lord? For this will not succeed. 42 Do not go up, lest you be defeated by your enemies, for the Lord *is* not among you. 43 For the Amalekites and the Canaanites *are* there before you, and you shall fall by the sword; because you have turned away from the Lord, the Lord will not be with you."

44 But they presumed to go up to the mountaintop. Nevertheless, neither the ark of the covenant of the Lord nor Moses departed from the camp. 45 Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in that mountain came down and attacked them, and drove them back as far as Hormah.

Laws of Grain and Drink Offerings

15 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you have come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving to you, 3 and you make an offering by fire to the Lord, a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering or in your appointed feasts, to make a sweet aroma to the Lord, from the herd or the flock, 4 then he who presents his offering to the Lord shall bring a grain offering of one-tenth *of an ephah* of fine flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of oil; 5 and one-fourth of a hin of wine as a drink offering you shall prepare with the burnt offering or the sacrifice, for each lamb. 6 Or for a ram you shall prepare as a grain offering two-tenths *of an ephah* of fine flour mixed with one-third of a hin of oil; 7 and as a drink offering you shall offer one-third of a hin of wine as a sweet aroma to the Lord. 8 And when you prepare a young bull as a burnt offering, or as a sacrifice to fulfill a vow, or as a peace offering to the Lord, 9 then shall be offered with the young bull a grain offering of three-tenths *of an ephah* of fine flour mixed with half a hin of oil; 10 and you shall bring as the drink offering half a hin of wine as an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord.

11 'Thus it shall be done for each young bull, for each ram, or for each lamb or young goat. 12 According to the number that you prepare, so you shall do with everyone according to their number. 13 All who are native-born shall do these things in this manner, in presenting an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord. 14 And if a stranger dwells with you, or whoever *is* among you throughout your generations, and would present an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord, just as you do, so shall he do. 15 One ordinance *shall be* for you of the assembly and for the stranger who dwells *with you*, an ordinance forever throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the stranger be before the Lord. 16 One law and one custom shall be for you and for the stranger who dwells with you.' "[a]

17 Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 18 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land to which I bring you, 19 then it will be, when you eat of the bread of the land, that you shall offer up a heave offering to the Lord. 20 You shall offer up a cake of the first of your ground meal *as* a heave offering; as a heave

15:16 [a] Compare Exodus 12:49

EXPLORATION
Faith—Matthew 17:20, 21; Romans 10:17; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Colossians 1:23; 1 Timothy 1:19; 2 Timothy 2:22; Hebrews 11:1–6.

Life LESSONS

Numbers 15:1–41

SITUATION
God used tassels on garments as a visual reminder of His presence. Israel's religion contrasted with the pagan idol worship of other people in the land, worship led to self-centeredness and pride.

OBSERVATION
God still pointed His people toward the Promised Land, even after their rebellion in the desert. God has a purpose, and He will fulfill it. Follow Him without grumbling.

INSPIRATION
The wilderness of the desert. Parched ground. Sharp rocks. Shifting sand. Burning sun. Thorns that cut. A miraging oasis. Wavy horizons ever beyond reach. This is the wilderness of the desert.

The wilderness of the soul. Parched promises. Sharp words. Shifting commitments. Burning anger. Rejections that cut. Miraging hope. Distant solutions ever beyond reach. This is the wilderness of the soul.

Some of you know the first. All of you know the second. Jesus, however, knew both.

With skin still moist with Jordan water, He turned away from food and friends and entered the country of hyenas, lizards, and vultures. He was "led by the Spirit

offering of the threshing floor, so shall you offer it up. 21 Of the first of your ground meal you shall give to the Lord a heave offering throughout your generations.

Laws Concerning Unintentional Sin

22 'If you sin unintentionally, and do not observe all these commandments which the Lord has spoken to Moses— 23 all that the Lord has commanded you by the hand of Moses, from the day the Lord gave commandment and onward throughout your generations— 24 then it will be, if it is unintentionally committed, without the knowledge of the congregation, that the whole congregation shall offer one young bull as a burnt offering, as a sweet aroma to the Lord, with its grain offering and its drink offering, according to the ordinance, and one kid of the goats as a sin offering. 25 So the priest shall make atonement for the whole congregation of the children of Israel, and it shall be forgiven them, for it was unintentional; they shall bring their offering, an offering made by fire to the Lord, and their sin offering before the Lord, for their unintended sin. 26 It shall be forgiven the whole congregation of the children of Israel and the stranger who dwells among them, because all the people *did it* unintentionally.

27 'And if a person sins unintentionally, then he shall bring a female goat in its first year as a sin offering. 28 So the priest shall make atonement for the person who sins unintentionally, when he sins unintentionally before the Lord, to make atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him. 29 You shall have one law for him who sins unintentionally, *for* him who is native-born among the children of Israel and for the stranger who dwells among them.

Law Concerning Presumptuous Sin

30 'But the person who does *anything* presumptuously, *whether he is* native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the Lord, and he shall be cut off from among his people. 31 Because he has despised the word of the Lord, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt *shall be* upon him.' "

Penalty for Violating the Sabbath

32 Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. 33 And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation. 34 They put him under guard, because it had not been explained what should be done to him.

35 Then the Lord said to Moses, "The man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." 36 So, as the Lord commanded Moses, all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died.

Tassels on Garments

37 Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 38 "Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. 39 And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon

into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry" (Luke 4:1–2).

The wilderness was not a typical time for Jesus. Normalcy was left at the Jordan and would be rediscovered in Galilee. The wilderness was and is atypical. A dark parenthesis in the story of life. A fierce season of face-to-face encounters with the devil.

You needn't journey to Israel to experience the wilderness. A cemetery will do just fine. So will a hospital. Grief can lead you into the desert. So can divorce or debt or depression.

Received word this morning of a friend who, thinking he was cancer-free, is going back for chemotherapy. Wilderness. Ran into a fellow at lunch who once talked to me about his tough marriage. Asked him how it was going. "It's going," he shrugged. Wilderness. Opened an e-mail from an acquaintance who is spending her summer at the house of her dying mother. She and hospice and death. Waiting. In the wilderness.

You can often chalk up wilderness wanderings to transition. Jesus entered the Jordan River a carpenter and exited a Messiah. His baptism flipped a breaker switch.

Been through any transitions lately? A transfer? Job promotion? Job demotion? A new house? If so, be wary. The wilderness might be near.

How do you know when you're in one?

You are lonely. Whether in fact or in feeling, no one can help, understand, or rescue you. . . .

it and remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them, and that you *may* not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, 40 and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God. 41 I *am* the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I *am* the Lord your God."

Rebellion Against Moses and Aaron

16 Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took *men;* 2 and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. 3 They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "*You take* too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation *is* holy, every one of them, and the Lord *is* among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?"

4 So when Moses heard *it,* he fell on his face; 5 and he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, "Tomorrow morning the Lord will show who *is* His and *who is* holy, and will cause *him* to come near to Him. That one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him. 6 Do this: Take censers, Korah and all your company; 7 put fire in them and put incense in them before the Lord tomorrow, and it shall be *that* the man whom the Lord chooses *is* the holy one. *You take* too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi!"

8 Then Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi: 9 *Is it* a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; 10 and that He has brought you near *to Himself,* you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also? 11 Therefore you and all your company *are* gathered together against the Lord. And what *is* Aaron that you complain against him?"

12 And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, but they said, "We will not come up! 13 *Is it* a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, that you should keep acting like a prince over us? 14 Moreover you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!"

15 Then Moses was very angry, and said to the Lord, "Do not respect their offering. I have not taken one donkey from them, nor have I hurt one of them."

16 And Moses said to Korah, "Tomorrow, you and all your company be present before the Lord—you and they, as well as Aaron. 17 Let each take his censer and put incense in it, and each of you bring his censer before the Lord, two hundred and fifty censers; both you and Aaron, each *with* his censer." 18 So every man took his censer, put fire in it, laid incense on it, and stood at the door of the tabernacle of meeting with Moses and Aaron. 19 And Korah gathered all the congregation

Does the word *rematch* mean anything to you? For the second time in history an unfallen mind will be challenged by the fallen angel. The Second Adam has come to succeed where the first Adam failed. Jesus, however, faces a test far more severe. Adam was tested in a garden; Christ is in a stark wasteland. Adam faced Satan on a full stomach; Christ is in the midst of a fast. Adam had a companion: Eve. Christ has no one. Adam was challenged to remain sinless in a sinless world. Christ, on the other hand, is challenged to remain sinless in a sin-ridden world.

Stripped of any aid or excuses, Christ dares the devil to climb into the ring. "You've been haunting My children since the beginning. See what you can do with Me." And Satan does. For forty days the two go toe-to-toe. The Son of heaven is tempted but never wavers, struck but never struck down. He succeeds where Adam failed. This victory, according to Paul, is a huge victory for us all. "Here it is in a nutshell: Just as one person did it wrong and got us in all this trouble with sin and death, another person did it right and got us out of it" (Romans 5:18 MSG). (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you in a wilderness today—a place of hurt, sorrow, hunger, pain, fear? Jesus has walked there before you. He promises to guide you through.

EXPLORATION

Objects of Hope—Job 13:15; Psalm 33:20–22; Isaiah 42:4; Jeremiah 14:22; Romans 4:17, 18; 1 Timothy 6:17.

against them at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then the glory of the Lord appeared to all the congregation.

20 And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 21 "Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment."

22 Then they fell on their faces, and said, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?"

23 So the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 24 "Speak to the congregation, saying, 'Get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.'"

25 Then Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. 26 And he spoke to the congregation, saying, "Depart now from the tents of these wicked men! Touch nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed in all their sins." 27 So they got away from around the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the door of their tents, with their wives, their sons, and their little children.

28 And Moses said: "By this you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works, for *I have* not *done them* of my own will. 29 If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, *then* the Lord has not sent me. 30 But if the Lord creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the Lord."

31 Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, 32 and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all *their* goods. 33 So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly. 34 Then all Israel who *were* around them fled at their cry, for they said, "Lest the earth swallow us up *also!*"

35 And a fire came out from the Lord and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense.

36 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 37 "Tell Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, to pick up the censers out of the blaze, for they are holy, and scatter the fire some distance away. 38 The censers of these men who sinned against their own souls, let them be made into hammered plates as a covering for the altar. Because they presented them before the Lord, therefore they are holy; and they shall be a sign to the children of Israel." 39 So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers, which those who were burned up had presented, and they were hammered out as a covering on the altar, 40 *to be* a memorial to the children of Israel that no outsider, who *is* not a descendant of Aaron, should come near to offer incense before the Lord, that he might not become like Korah and his companions, just as the Lord had said to him through Moses.

Complaints of the People

41 On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You have killed the people of the Lord." 42 Now it happened, when the congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the

Life Lessons

Numbers 16:1—18:32

SITUATION

God directed the Israelites back into the desert for forty years because of disobedience and unbelief. The people resisted this tough directive. Some of the Levites became disgruntled with Moses' leadership. Korah, one of the Levites, led a disastrous rebellion.

OBSERVATION

Leaders deserve our respect and support, even during trying times. We must not take part in a rebellion or gossip against a leader.

INSPIRATION

If you look hard enough and long enough, you'll find something to complain about.

Adam and Eve did. Doesn't the bite into the forbidden fruit reflect a feeling of discontent? Surrounded by all they needed, they set their eyes on the one thing they couldn't have. They found something to complain about.

The followers of Moses did. They could have focused on the miracles: Red Sea becoming the Yellow Brick Road, fire escorting them by night and a cloud accompanying them by day, manna reflecting the morning sunrise and quail scampering into the camp at night. Instead they focused on their problems. They sketched pictures of Egypt, daydreamed of pyramids, and complained that life in the desert wasn't for them. They found something to complain about.

What about you? What are you looking at? The one fruit you can't eat? Or the

million you can? The manna or the misery? His plan or your problems? Each a gift or a grind?

"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

This is more than a silver-lining attitude, more than seeing the cup as half-full rather than half-empty. This is an admission that unseen favorable forces populate and direct the affairs of humanity. When we see as God wants us to see, we see heaven's hand in the midst of sickness, Jesus working on a troubled youth, the Holy Spirit comforting a broken heart. We see, not what is seen, but what is unseen. We see with faith and not flesh, and since faith begets hope, we of all people are hope filled. For we know there is more to life than what meets the eye. (From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Today, show loyalty to God when the way is rough and the future less bright than you want. Stay loyal to our great Leader, who surely knows the way home.

EXPLORATION

Rebellion—Numbers 12:1–15. Submission to Authority—Romans 13:1–6; Hebrews 13:17.

tabernacle of meeting; and suddenly the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord appeared. 43 Then Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of meeting.

44 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 45 "Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment."

And they fell on their faces.

46 So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense *on it,* and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the Lord. The plague has begun." 47 Then Aaron took *it* as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. 48 And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped. 49 Now those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the Korah incident. 50 So Aaron returned to Moses at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, for the plague had stopped.

The Budding of Aaron's Rod

17 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and get from them a rod from each father's house, all their leaders according to their fathers' houses—twelve rods. Write each man's name on his rod. 3 And you shall write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi. For there shall be one rod for the head of *each* father's house. 4 Then you shall place them in the tabernacle of meeting before the Testimony, where I meet with you. 5 And it shall be *that* the rod of the man whom I choose will blossom; thus I will rid Myself of the complaints of the children of Israel, which they make against you."

6 So Moses spoke to the children of Israel, and each of their leaders gave him a rod apiece, for each leader according to their fathers' houses, twelve rods; and the rod of Aaron *was* among their rods. 7 And Moses placed the rods before the Lord in the tabernacle of witness.

8 Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses went into the tabernacle of witness, and behold, the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds. 9 Then Moses brought out all the rods from before the Lord to all the children of Israel; and they looked, and each man took his rod.

10 And the Lord said to Moses, "Bring Aaron's rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die." 11 Thus did Moses; just as the Lord had commanded him, so he did.

12 So the children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, "Surely we die, we perish, we all perish! 13 Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the Lord must die. Shall we all utterly die?"

Duties of Priests and Levites

18 Then the Lord said to Aaron: "You and your sons and your father's house with you shall bear the iniquity *related to* the sanctuary, and you and your sons with you shall bear the iniquity *associated with* your priesthood. 2 Also bring with you your brethren of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, that they may be joined

with you and serve you while you and your sons *are* with you before the tabernacle of witness. 3 They shall attend to your needs and all the needs of the tabernacle; but they shall not come near the articles of the sanctuary and the altar, lest they die—they and you also. 4 They shall be joined with you and attend to the needs of the tabernacle of meeting, for all the work of the tabernacle; but an outsider shall not come near you. 5 And you shall attend to the duties of the sanctuary and the duties of the altar, that there *may* be no more wrath on the children of Israel. 6 Behold, I Myself have taken your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel; *they are* a gift to you, given by the Lord, to do the work of the tabernacle of meeting. 7 Therefore you and your sons with you shall attend to your priesthood for everything at the altar and behind the veil; and you shall serve. I give your priesthood *to you* as a gift for service, but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death."

Offerings for Support of the Priests

8 And the Lord spoke to Aaron: "Here, I Myself have also given you charge of My heave offerings, all the holy gifts of the children of Israel; I have given them as a portion to you and your sons, as an ordinance forever. 9 This shall be yours of the most holy things *reserved* from the fire: every offering of theirs, every grain offering and every sin offering and every trespass offering which they render to Me, *shall be* most holy for you and your sons. 10 In a most holy *place* you shall eat it; every male shall eat it. It shall be holy to you.

11 "This also *is* yours: the heave offering of their gift, with all the wave offerings of the children of Israel; I have given them to you, and your sons and daughters with you, as an ordinance forever. Everyone who is clean in your house may eat it.

12 "All the best of the oil, all the best of the new wine and the grain, their firstfruits which they offer to the Lord, I have given them to you. 13 Whatever first ripe fruit is in their land, which they bring to the Lord, shall be yours. Everyone who is clean in your house may eat it.

14 "Every devoted thing in Israel shall be yours.

15 "Everything that first opens the womb of all flesh, which they bring to the Lord, whether man or beast, shall be yours; nevertheless the firstborn of man you shall surely redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. 16 And those redeemed of the devoted things you shall redeem when one month old, according to your valuation, for five shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which *is* twenty gerahs. 17 But the firstborn of a cow, the firstborn of a sheep, or the firstborn of a goat you shall not redeem; they *are* holy. You shall sprinkle their blood on the altar, and burn their fat *as* an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to the Lord. 18 And their flesh shall be yours, just as the wave breast and the right thigh are yours.

19 "All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer to the Lord, I have given to you and your sons and daughters with you as an ordinance forever; it *is* a covenant of salt forever before the Lord with you and your descendants with you."

20 Then the Lord said to Aaron: "You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; I *am* your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel.

Tithes for Support of the Levites

21 "Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting. 22 Hereafter the children of Israel shall not come near the tabernacle of meeting, lest they bear sin and die. 23 But the Levites shall perform the work of the tabernacle of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity; *it shall be* a statute forever, throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance. 24 For the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer up *as* a heave offering to the Lord, I have given to the Levites as an inheritance; therefore I have said to them, 'Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.' "

The Tithe of the Levites

25 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 26 "Speak thus to the Levites, and say to them: 'When you take from the children of Israel the

tithes which I have given you from them as your inheritance, then you shall offer up a heave offering of it to the Lord, a tenth of the tithe. 27 And your heave offering shall be reckoned to you as though *it were* the grain of the threshing floor and as the fullness of the winepress. 28 Thus you shall also offer a heave offering to the Lord from all your tithes which you receive from the children of Israel, and you shall give the Lord's heave offering from it to Aaron the priest. 29 Of all your gifts you shall offer up every heave offering due to the Lord, from all the best of them, the consecrated part of them.' 30 Therefore you shall say to them: 'When you have lifted up the best of it, then *the rest* shall be accounted to the Levites as the produce of the threshing floor and as the produce of the winepress. 31 You may eat it in any place, you and your households, for it *is* your reward for your work in the tabernacle of meeting. 32 And you shall bear no sin because of it, when you have lifted up the best of it. But you shall not profane the holy gifts of the children of Israel, lest you die.' "

Laws of Purification

19 Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 2 "This *is* the ordinance of the law which the Lord has commanded, saying: 'Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring you a red heifer without blemish, in which there *is* no defect *and* on which a yoke has never come. 3 You shall give it to Eleazar the priest, that he may take it outside the camp, and it shall be slaughtered before him; 4 and Eleazar the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger, and sprinkle some of its blood seven times directly in front of the tabernacle of meeting. 5 Then the heifer shall be burned in his sight: its hide, its flesh, its blood, and its offal shall be burned. 6 And the priest shall take cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet, and cast *them* into the midst of the fire burning the heifer. 7 Then the priest shall wash his clothes, he shall bathe in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp; the priest shall be unclean until evening. 8 And the one who burns it shall wash his clothes in water, bathe in water, and shall be unclean until evening. 9 Then a man *who is* clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and store *them* outside the camp in a clean place; and they shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for the water of purification;[a] it *is* for purifying from sin. 10 And the one who gathers the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until evening. It shall be a statute forever to the children of Israel and to the stranger who dwells among them.

11 'He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days. 12 He shall purify himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; *then* he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean. 13 Whoever touches the body of anyone who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of the Lord. That person shall be cut off from Israel. He shall be unclean, because the water of purification was not sprinkled on him; his uncleanness *is* still on him.

14 'This *is* the law when a man dies in a tent: All who come into the tent and all who *are* in the tent shall be unclean seven days; 15 and

19:9 [a] Literally *impurity*

Life Lessons

Numbers 19:1—21:35

SITUATION

The Israelites returned to Kadesh thirty-seven years after the disappointing spy mission. Nearly all of the generation that left Egypt had died. Moses felt the people were ready for a fresh start toward the Promised Land.

OBSERVATION

God continued to be in control as He led His people, even to the extent of denying the leaders, Moses and Aaron, entrance into the Promised Land. When the people entered the land without these great men, God showed that His power does not depend on any dynamic leader. Every step of faith depends on Him alone.

INSPIRATION

Let's say a stress stirrer comes your way. The doctor decides you need an operation. She detects a lump and thinks it best that you have it removed. So there you are, walking out of her office. You've just been handed this cup of anxiety. What are you going to do with it? You can place it in one of two pots.

You can dump your bad news in the vat of worry and pull out the spoon. Turn on the fire. Stew on it. Stir it. Mope for a while. Brood for a time. Won't be long before you'll have a delightful pot of pessimism. Some of you have been sipping from this vat for a long time. Your friends and family have asked me to tell you that the stuff you're drinking is getting to you.

How about a different idea? The pot of prayer.

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: The One Who Purifies Our Hearts

The [oil] refinery does for petroleum and other products what your heart should do for you. It takes out the bad and utilizes the good.

We tend to think of the heart as the seat of emotion. We speak of "heartthrobs," "heartaches," and "broken hearts."

But when Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart" [Matthew 5:8], He was speaking in a different context. To Jesus' listeners, the heart was the totality of the inner person—the control tower, the cockpit. The heart was thought of as the seat of the character—the origin of desires, affections, perceptions, thoughts, reasoning, imagination, conscience, intentions, purpose, will, and faith.

Thus a proverb admonished, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" [Proverbs 4:23].

To the Hebrew mind, the heart is a freeway clover-leaf where all emotions and prejudices and wisdom converge. It is a switch house that receives freight cars loaded with moods, dead emotions and convictions and puts them on the right track.

And just as low-grade oil or alloyed gasoline would cause you to question the performance of a refinery, evil acts and impure thoughts cause us to question the condition of our hearts. . . .

The heart is the center of the spiritual life. If the fruit of a tree is bad, you don't try to fix the fruit; you treat the roots. And if a person's actions are evil, it's not enough to change habits; you have to go deeper. You have to go to the heart of the problem, which is the problem of the heart. . . .

And Jesus' statement rings true: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Note the order of this beatitude: first purify the heart, then you will see God. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 249.

Before the door of the doctor's office closes, give the problem to God. "I receive your lordship. Nothing comes to me that hasn't passed through you." In addition, stir in a healthy helping of gratitude. . . . A glimpse into the past generates strength for the future.

Your part is prayer and gratitude.

God's part? Peace and protection. If you do this, "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you have a major decision or important step of faith to take? What role have you let God play? Pray today that barriers to God's will in your life will be torn down. Be open to God's plan for you.

EXPLORATION

God's Will—Genesis 45:4–7; 50:19, 20; Isaiah 46:8–11; Micah 6:8; Matthew 25:34; Ephesians 3:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 5:16–18.

every open vessel, which has no cover fastened on it, *is* unclean. 16 Whoever in the open field touches one who is slain by a sword or who has died, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.

17 'And for an unclean *person* they shall take some of the ashes of the heifer burnt for purification from sin, and running water shall be put on them in a vessel. 18 A clean person shall take hyssop and dip *it* in the water, sprinkle *it* on the tent, on all the vessels, on the persons who were there, or on the one who touched a bone, the slain, the dead, or a grave. 19 The clean *person* shall sprinkle the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, wash his clothes, and bathe in water; and at evening he shall be clean.

20 'But the man who is unclean and does not purify himself, that person shall be cut off from among the assembly, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the Lord. The water of purification has not been sprinkled on him; he *is* unclean. 21 It shall be a perpetual statute for them. He who sprinkles the water of purification shall wash his clothes; and he who touches the water of purification shall be unclean until evening. 22 Whatever the unclean *person* touches shall be unclean; and the person who touches *it* shall be unclean until evening.' "

Moses' Error at Kadesh

20 Then the children of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the Wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh; and Miriam died there and was buried there.

2 Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron. 3 And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying: "If only we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! 4 Why have you brought up the assembly of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here? 5 And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It *is* not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor *is* there any water to drink." 6 So Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and they fell on their faces. And the glory of the Lord appeared to them.

7 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 8 "Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals." 9 So Moses took the rod from before the Lord as He commanded him.

10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" 11 Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.

12 Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."

13 This *was* the water of Meribah,[a] because the children of Israel contended with the Lord, and He was hallowed among them.

Passage Through Edom Refused

14 Now Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom. "Thus says your brother Israel: 'You know all the hardship that has befallen us, 15 how our fathers went down to Egypt, and we dwelt in Egypt a long time, and the Egyptians afflicted us and our fathers. 16 When we cried out to the Lord, He heard our voice and sent the Angel and brought us up out of Egypt; now here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your border. 17 Please let us pass through your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards, nor will we drink water from wells; we will go along the King's Highway; we will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left until we have passed through your territory.' "

18 Then Edom said to him, "You shall not pass through my *land,* lest I come out against you with the sword."

19 So the children of Israel said to him, "We will go by the Highway, and if I or my livestock

20:13 [a] Literally *Contention*

drink any of your water, then I will pay for it; let me only pass through on foot, nothing *more.*"
20 Then he said, "You shall not pass through."
So Edom came out against them with many men and with a strong hand. 21 Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his territory; so Israel turned away from him.

Death of Aaron

22 Now the children of Israel, the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh and came to Mount Hor. 23 And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom, saying: 24 "Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah. 25 Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up to Mount Hor; 26 and strip Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son; for Aaron shall be gathered *to his people* and die there." 27 So Moses did just as the Lord commanded, and they went up to Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. 28 Moses stripped Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain. 29 Now when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, all the house of Israel mourned for Aaron thirty days.

Canaanites Defeated at Hormah

21 The king of Arad, the Canaanite, who dwelt in the South, heard that Israel was coming on the road to Atharim. Then he fought against Israel and took *some* of them prisoners. 2 So Israel made a vow to the Lord, and said, "If You will indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities." 3 And the Lord listened to the voice of Israel and delivered up the Canaanites, and they utterly destroyed them and their cities. So the name of that place was called Hormah.[a]

The Bronze Serpent

4 Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. 5 And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For *there is* no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread." 6 So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.
7 Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord that He take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people.
8 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery *serpent,* and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live." 9 So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

From Mount Hor to Moab

10 Now the children of Israel moved on and camped in Oboth. 11 And they journeyed from Oboth and camped at Ije Abarim, in the wilderness which *is* east of Moab, toward the sunrise. 12 From there they moved and camped in the Valley of Zered. 13 From there they moved and camped on the other side of the Arnon, which *is* in the wilderness that extends from the border of the Amorites; for the Arnon *is* the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites. 14 Therefore it is said in the Book of the Wars of the Lord:

"Waheb in Suphah,[a]
The brooks of the Arnon,
15 And the slope of the brooks
That reaches to the dwelling of Ar,
And lies on the border of Moab."

16 From there *they went* to Beer, which *is* the well where the Lord said to Moses, "Gather the people together, and I will give them water."
17 Then Israel sang this song:

"Spring up, O well!
All of you sing to it—
18 The well the leaders sank,
Dug by the nation's nobles,
By the lawgiver, with their staves."

21:3 [a]Literally *Utter Destruction* **21:14** [a]Ancient unknown places; Vulgate reads *What He did in the Red Sea.*

And from the wilderness *they went* to Mattanah, [19]from Mattanah to Nahaliel, from Nahaliel to Bamoth, [20]and from Bamoth, *in* the valley that *is* in the country of Moab, to the top of Pisgah which looks down on the wasteland.[a]

King Sihon Defeated

[21]Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, [22]"Let me pass through your land. We will not turn aside into fields or vineyards; we will not drink water from wells. We will go by the King's Highway until we have passed through your territory." [23]But Sihon would not allow Israel to pass through his territory. So Sihon gathered all his people together and went out against Israel in the wilderness, and he came to Jahaz and fought against Israel. [24]Then Israel defeated him with the edge of the sword, and took possession of his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, as far as the people of Ammon; for the border of the people of Ammon *was* fortified. [25]So Israel took all these cities, and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon and in all its villages. [26]For Heshbon *was* the city of Sihon king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab, and had taken all his land from his hand as far as the Arnon. [27]Therefore those who speak in proverbs say:

21:20 [a]Hebrew *Jeshimon*

New Life In Christ

"Everyone who is bitten, when he looks at [the bronze serpent], shall live."
—Numbers 21:8

Jesus Became Sin for Us

God assigned Himself the task of balancing your account. You cannot deal with your own sins. "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7). Jesus is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). It's not you! . . .

So what did He do? "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ. . . . For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:19–21).

Don't miss what happened. He took your statement flowing with red ink and bad checks and put His name at the top. He took His statement, which listed a million deposits and not one withdrawal, and put your name at the top. He assumed your debt. You assumed His fortune. And that's not all He did.

He also paid your penalty. If you are overdrawn at a bank, a fine must be paid. If you are overdrawn with God, a penalty must be paid as well. The fine at the bank is a hassle. But the penalty from God is hell. Jesus not only balanced your account, He paid your penalty. He took your place and paid the price for your sins. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Question: How have you responded to Christ becoming sin for you?

For more on "New Life in Christ," see page 231.

"Come to Heshbon, let it be built;
Let the city of Sihon be repaired.

28 "For fire went out from Heshbon,
A flame from the city of Sihon;
It consumed Ar of Moab,
The lords of the heights of the Arnon.
29 Woe to you, Moab!
You have perished, O people of Chemosh!
He has given his sons as fugitives,
And his daughters into captivity,
To Sihon king of the Amorites.

30 "But we have shot at them;
Heshbon has perished as far as Dibon.
Then we laid waste as far as Nophah,
Which *reaches* to Medeba."

31 Thus Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites. 32 Then Moses sent to spy out Jazer; and they took its villages and drove out the Amorites who *were* there.

King Og Defeated

33 And they turned and went up by the way to Bashan. So Og king of Bashan went out against them, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei. 34 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Do not fear him, for I have delivered him into your hand, with all his people and his land; and you shall do to him as you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt at Heshbon." 35 So they defeated him, his sons, and all his people, until there was no survivor left him; and they took possession of his land.

Balak Sends for Balaam

22 Then the children of Israel moved, and camped in the plains of Moab on the side of the Jordan *across from* Jericho.

2 Now Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. 3 And Moab was exceedingly afraid of the people because they *were* many, and Moab was sick with dread because of the children of Israel. 4 So Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this company will lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field." And Balak the son of Zippor *was* king of the Moabites at that time. 5 Then he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which *is* near the River[a] in the land of the sons of his people,[b] to call him, saying: "Look, a people has come from Egypt. See, they cover the face of the earth, and are settling next to me! 6 Therefore please come at once, curse this people for me, for they *are* too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land, for I know that he whom you bless *is* blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed."

7 So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the diviner's fee in their hand, and they came to Balaam and spoke to him

22:5 [a] That is, the Euphrates [b] Or *the people of Amau*

Life Lessons

Numbers 22:1—25:18

SITUATION

People in Old Testament times commonly believed in curses and blessings. Balak and the Moabites wanted the sorcerer, Balaam, to use his supposed influence with Israel's God to curse the Israelites and halt their progress into Canaan.

OBSERVATION

God evaluates both motives and actions. Individuals' inner heart attitudes, such as Balaam's desire for power and money, will eventually be revealed no matter what outward disguise they use. God can and will use all kinds of messengers to get His message across.

INSPIRATION

So the one who plants *is not important*, and the one who waters *is not important*. Only God, who makes things grow, is important" (1 Corinthians 3:7 NCV, emphasis mine).

Remember the other messengers God has used?

A donkey to speak to Balaam (Numbers 22:28).

A staff-turned-snake to stir Pharaoh (Exodus 7:10).

He used stubborn oxen to make a point about reverence and a big fish to make a point about reluctant preachers (1 Samuel 6:1–12; Jonah 1:1–17).

God doesn't need you and me to do His work. We are expedient messengers, ambassadors by His kindness, not by our cleverness.

It's not about us, and it angers Him when we think it is. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
God can and will use various means to help people hear His message. How much better for us to be willing servants with pure motives who serve with loving and humble hearts.

EXPLORATION
Heart and Ethics—Deuteronomy 30:11–20; 1 Kings 8:57, 58; 2 Chronicles 29:31; Psalm 141:4; Matthew 5:8; 6:21; James 3:14.

the words of Balak. 8 And he said to them, "Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you, as the Lord speaks to me." So the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam.

9 Then God came to Balaam and said, "Who *are* these men with you?"

10 So Balaam said to God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me, *saying,* 11 'Look, a people has come out of Egypt, and they cover the face of the earth. Come now, curse them for me; perhaps I shall be able to overpower them and drive them out.' "

12 And God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they *are* blessed."

13 So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, "Go back to your land, for the Lord has refused to give me permission to go with you."

14 And the princes of Moab rose and went to Balak, and said, "Balaam refuses to come with us."

15 Then Balak again sent princes, more numerous and more honorable than they. 16 And they came to Balaam and said to him, "Thus says Balak the son of Zippor: 'Please let nothing hinder you from coming to me; 17 for I will certainly honor you greatly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Therefore please come, curse this people for me.' "

18 Then Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more. 19 Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what more the Lord will say to me."

20 And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men come to call you, rise *and* go with them; but only the word which I speak to you—that you shall do." 21 So Balaam rose in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab.

Balaam, the Donkey, and the Angel

22 Then God's anger was aroused because he went, and the Angel of the Lord took His stand in the way as an adversary against him. And he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants *were* with him. 23 Now the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand, and the donkey turned aside out of the way and went into the field. So Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back onto the road. 24 Then the Angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, *with* a wall on this side and a wall on that side. 25 And when the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord, she pushed herself against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck her again. 26 Then the Angel of the Lord went further, and stood in a narrow place where there *was* no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. 27 And when the donkey saw the Angel of the Lord, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam's anger was aroused, and he struck the donkey with his staff.

28 Then the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"

29 And Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have abused me. I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you!"

30 So the donkey said to Balaam, "*Am* I not
your donkey on which you have ridden, ever
since *I became* yours, to this day? Was I ever
disposed to do this to you?"
And he said, "No."
31 Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and
he saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the
way with His drawn sword in His hand; and he
bowed his head and fell flat on his face. 32 And
the Angel of the Lord said to him, "Why have
you struck your donkey these three times?
Behold, I have come out to stand against you,
because *your* way is perverse before Me. 33 The
donkey saw Me and turned aside from Me
these three times. If she had not turned aside
from Me, surely I would also have killed you by
now, and let her live."
34 And Balaam said to the Angel of the Lord,
"I have sinned, for I did not know You stood
in the way against me. Now therefore, if it dis-
pleases You, I will turn back."
35 Then the Angel of the Lord said to
Balaam, "Go with the men, but only the word
that I speak to you, that you shall speak." So
Balaam went with the princes of Balak.
36 Now when Balak heard that Balaam was
coming, he went out to meet him at the city of
Moab, which *is* on the border at the Arnon, the
boundary of the territory. 37 Then Balak said to
Balaam, "Did I not earnestly send to you, call-
ing for you? Why did you not come to me? Am
I not able to honor you?"
38 And Balaam said to Balak, "Look, I have
come to you! Now, have I any power at all to
say anything? The word that God puts in my
mouth, that I must speak." 39 So Balaam went
with Balak, and they came to Kirjath Huzoth.
40 Then Balak offered oxen and sheep, and he
sent *some* to Balaam and to the princes who
were with him.

Balaam's First Prophecy

41 So it was, the next day, that Balak took
Balaam and brought him up to the high places
of Baal, that from there he might observe the
extent of the people.

23 Then Balaam said to Balak, "Build
seven altars for me here, and prepare
for me here seven bulls and seven rams."
2 And Balak did just as Balaam had spoken,
and Balak and Balaam offered a bull and a
ram on *each* altar. 3 Then Balaam said to Balak,
"Stand by your burnt offering, and I will go;
perhaps the Lord will come to meet me, and
whatever He shows me I will tell you." So
he went to a desolate height. 4 And God met
Balaam, and he said to Him, "I have prepared
the seven altars, and I have offered on *each*
altar a bull and a ram."
5 Then the Lord put a word in Balaam's
mouth, and said, "Return to Balak, and thus
you shall speak." 6 So he returned to him, and
there he was, standing by his burnt offering,
he and all the princes of Moab.
7 And he took up his oracle and said:

"Balak the king of Moab has brought me
from Aram,
From the mountains of the east.
'Come, curse Jacob for me,
And come, denounce Israel!'

8 "How shall I curse whom God has not
cursed?
And how shall I denounce *whom* the Lord
has not denounced?
9 For from the top of the rocks I see him,
And from the hills I behold him;
There! A people dwelling alone,
Not reckoning itself among the nations.

10 "Who can count the dust[a] of Jacob,
Or number one-fourth of Israel?
Let me die the death of the righteous,
And let my end be like his!"

11 Then Balak said to Balaam, "What have
you done to me? I took you to curse my
enemies, and look, you have blessed *them*
bountifully!"
12 So he answered and said, "Must I not
take heed to speak what the Lord has put in
my mouth?"

Balaam's Second Prophecy

13 Then Balak said to him, "Please come
with me to another place from which you may
see them; you shall see only the outer part of
them, and shall not see them all; curse them
for me from there." 14 So he brought him to

23:10 [a] Or *dust cloud*

the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered a bull and a ram on *each* altar.

15 And he said to Balak, "Stand here by your burnt offering while I meet[a] *the* Lord over there."

16 Then the Lord met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth, and said, "Go back to Balak, and thus you shall speak." 17 So he came to him, and there he was, standing by his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab were with him. And Balak said to him, "What has the Lord spoken?"

18 Then he took up his oracle and said:

"Rise up, Balak, and hear!
Listen to me, son of Zippor!

19 "God *is* not a man, that He should lie,
Nor a son of man, that He should repent.
Has He said, and will He not do?
Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?
20 Behold, I have received *a command* to bless;
He has blessed, and I cannot reverse it.

21 "He has not observed iniquity in Jacob,
Nor has He seen wickedness in Israel.
The Lord his God *is* with him,
And the shout of a King *is* among them.
22 God brings them out of Egypt;
He has strength like a wild ox.

23 "For *there is* no sorcery against Jacob,
Nor any divination against Israel.
It now must be said of Jacob
And of Israel, 'Oh, what God has done!'
24 Look, a people rises like a lioness,
And lifts itself up like a lion;
It shall not lie down until it devours the prey,
And drinks the blood of the slain."

25 Then Balak said to Balaam, "Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all!"

26 So Balaam answered and said to Balak, "Did I not tell you, saying, 'All that the Lord speaks, that I must do'?"

Balaam's Third Prophecy

27 Then Balak said to Balaam, "Please come, I will take you to another place; perhaps it will please God that you may curse them for me from there." 28 So Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor, that overlooks the wasteland.[a] 29 Then Balaam said to Balak, "Build for me here seven altars, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams." 30 And Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bull and a ram on *every* altar.

24 Now when Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he did not go as at other times, to seek to use sorcery, but he set his face toward the wilderness. 2 And Balaam raised his eyes, and saw Israel encamped according to their tribes; and the Spirit of God came upon him.

3 Then he took up his oracle and said:

"The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor,
The utterance of the man whose eyes are opened,
4 The utterance of him who hears the words of God,
Who sees the vision of the Almighty,
Who falls down, with eyes wide open:

5 "How lovely are your tents, O Jacob!
Your dwellings, O Israel!
6 Like valleys that stretch out,
Like gardens by the riverside,
Like aloes planted by the Lord,
Like cedars beside the waters.
7 He shall pour water from his buckets,
And his seed *shall be* in many waters.

"His king shall be higher than Agag,
And his kingdom shall be exalted.

8 "God brings him out of Egypt;
He has strength like a wild ox;
He shall consume the nations, his enemies;
He shall break their bones
And pierce *them* with his arrows.
9 'He bows down, he lies down as a lion;
And as a lion, who shall rouse him?'[a]

23:15 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Syriac reads *call;* Septuagint reads *go and ask God.* **23:28** [a]Hebrew *Jeshimon* **24:9** [a]Genesis 49:9

"Blessed *is* he who blesses you,
And cursed *is* he who curses you."

10 Then Balak's anger was aroused against
Balaam, and he struck his hands together; and
Balak said to Balaam, "I called you to curse
my enemies, and look, you have bountifully
blessed *them* these three times! 11 Now there-
fore, flee to your place. I said I would greatly
honor you, but in fact, the Lord has kept you
back from honor."
12 So Balaam said to Balak, "Did I not also
speak to your messengers whom you sent
to me, saying, 13 'If Balak were to give me his
house full of silver and gold, I could not go
beyond the word of the Lord, to do good or
bad of my own will. What the Lord says, that
I must speak'? 14 And now, indeed, I am going
to my people. Come, I will advise you what
this people will do to your people in the latter
days."

Balaam's Fourth Prophecy

15 So he took up his oracle and said:

"The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor,
And the utterance of the man whose eyes
are opened;
16 The utterance of him who hears the
words of God,
And has the knowledge of the Most High,
Who sees the vision of the Almighty,
Who falls down, with eyes wide open:

17 "I see Him, but not now;
I behold Him, but not near;
A Star shall come out of Jacob;
A Scepter shall rise out of Israel,
And batter the brow of Moab,
And destroy all the sons of tumult.[a]

18 "And Edom shall be a possession;
Seir also, his enemies, shall be a
possession,
While Israel does valiantly.
19 Out of Jacob One shall have dominion,
And destroy the remains of the city."

20 Then he looked on Amalek, and he took
up his oracle and said:

"Amalek *was* first among the nations,
But *shall be* last until he perishes."

21 Then he looked on the Kenites, and he
took up his oracle and said:

"Firm is your dwelling place,
And your nest is set in the rock;
22 Nevertheless Kain shall be burned.
How long until Asshur carries you away
captive?"

23 Then he took up his oracle and said:

"Alas! Who shall live when God does this?
24 But ships *shall come* from the coasts of
Cyprus,[a]
And they shall afflict Asshur and afflict
Eber,
And so shall *Amalek*,[b] until he perishes."

25 So Balaam rose and departed and
returned to his place; Balak also went his way.

Israel's Harlotry in Moab

25 Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove,[a]
and the people began to commit har-
lotry with the women of Moab. 2 They invited
the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and
the people ate and bowed down to their gods.
3 So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the
anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel.
4 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Take all the
leaders of the people and hang the offenders
before the Lord, out in the sun, that the fierce
anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel."
5 So Moses said to the judges of Israel,
"Every one of you kill his men who were joined
to Baal of Peor."
6 And indeed, one of the children of
Israel came and presented to his brethren a
Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and
in the sight of all the congregation of the
children of Israel, who *were* weeping at the
door of the tabernacle of meeting. 7 Now when
Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron
the priest, saw *it,* he rose from among the con-
gregation and took a javelin in his hand; 8 and
he went after the man of Israel into the tent
and thrust both of them through, the man of

24:17 [a]Hebrew *Sheth* (compare Jeremiah 48:45) **24:24** [a]Hebrew *Kittim* [b]Literally *he* or *that one* **25:1** [a]Hebrew *Shittim*

Life Lessons

Numbers 26:1—27:23

SITUATION
Israel needed a new census because everyone over age twenty at the previous census had died. Census-taking demonstrated that God was keeping His people united and organized.

OBSERVATION
From the appointment of Joshua as his successor to the taking of a new census, Moses demonstrated consistency in following God. Leaders today can learn from his example.

INSPIRATION
"Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Whatever? Whatever. Let your message reflect His glory. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

Let your salvation reflect God's glory. "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:13, 14).

Let your body reflect God's glory. "You are not your own. . . . Glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20).

Your struggles. "For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of

Israel, and the woman through her body. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel. 9 And those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand.

10 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 11 "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal. 12 Therefore say, 'Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; 13 and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel.' "

14 Now the name of the Israelite who was killed, who was killed with the Midianite woman, *was* Zimri the son of Salu, a leader of a father's house among the Simeonites. 15 And the name of the Midianite woman who was killed *was* Cozbi the daughter of Zur; he *was* head of the people of a father's house in Midian.

16 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 17 "Harass the Midianites, and attack them; 18 for they harassed you with their schemes by which they seduced you in the matter of Peor and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a leader of Midian, their sister, who was killed in the day of the plague because of Peor."

The Second Census of Israel

26 And it came to pass, after the plague, that the Lord spoke to Moses and Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying: 2 "Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel from twenty years old and above, by their fathers' houses, all who are able to go to war in Israel." 3 So Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, *across from* Jericho, saying: 4 "*Take a census of the people* from twenty years old and above, just as the Lord commanded Moses and the children of Israel who came out of the land of Egypt."

5 Reuben *was* the firstborn of Israel. The children of Reuben *were: of* Hanoch, the family of the Hanochites; *of* Pallu, the family of the Palluites; 6 *of* Hezron, the family of the Hezronites; *of* Carmi, the family of the Carmites. 7 These *are* the families of the Reubenites: those who were numbered of them were forty-three thousand seven hundred and thirty. 8 And the son of Pallu *was* Eliab. 9 The sons of Eliab *were* Nemuel, Dathan, and Abiram. These *are* the Dathan and Abiram, representatives of the congregation, who contended against Moses and Aaron in the company of Korah, when they contended against the Lord; 10 and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up together with Korah when that company died, when the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men; and they became a sign. 11 Nevertheless the children of Korah did not die.

12 The sons of Simeon according to their families *were: of* Nemuel,[a] the family of the Nemuelites; *of* Jamin, the family of the Jaminites; *of* Jachin,[b] the family of the Jachinites; 13 *of* Zerah,[a] the family of the

26:12 [a]Spelled *Jemuel* in Genesis 46:10 and Exodus 6:15 [b]Called *Jarib* in 1 Chronicles 4:24 **26:13** [a]Called *Zohar* in Genesis 46:10

Zarhites; *of* Shaul, the family of the Shaulites. 14 These *are* the families of the Simeonites: twenty-two thousand two hundred.

15 The sons of Gad according to their families *were: of* Zephon,[a] the family of the Zephonites; *of* Haggi, the family of the Haggites; *of* Shuni, the family of the Shunites; 16 *of* Ozni,[a] the family of the Oznites; *of* Eri, the family of the Erites; 17 *of* Arod,[a] the family of the Arodites; *of* Areli, the family of the Arelites. 18 These *are* the families of the sons of Gad according to those who were numbered of them: forty thousand five hundred.

19 The sons of Judah *were* Er and Onan; and Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. 20 And the sons of Judah according to their families were: *of* Shelah, the family of the Shelanites; *of* Perez, the family of the Parzites; *of* Zerah, the family of the Zarhites. 21 And the sons of Perez were: *of* Hezron, the family of the Hezronites; *of* Hamul, the family of the Hamulites. 22 These *are* the families of Judah according to those who were numbered of them: seventy-six thousand five hundred.

23 The sons of Issachar according to their families *were: of* Tola, the family of the Tolaites; of Puah,[a] the family of the Punites;[b] 24 of Jashub, the family of the Jashubites; of Shimron, the family of the Shimronites. 25 These *are* the families of Issachar according to those who were numbered of them: sixty-four thousand three hundred.

26 The sons of Zebulun according to their families *were:* of Sered, the family of the Sardites; of Elon, the family of the Elonites; of Jahleel, the family of the Jahleelites. 27 These *are* the families of the Zebulunites according to those who were numbered of them: sixty thousand five hundred.

28 The sons of Joseph according to their families, by Manasseh and Ephraim, *were:* 29 The sons of Manasseh: of Machir, the family of the Machirites; and Machir begot Gilead; of Gilead, the family of the Gileadites. 30 These *are* the sons of Gilead: *of* Jeezer,[a] the family of the Jeezerites; of Helek, the family of the Helekites; 31 *of* Asriel, the family of the Asrielites; *of* Shechem, the family of the Shechemites; 32 *of* Shemida, the family of the Shemidaites; *of* Hepher, the family of the Hepherites. 33 Now Zelophehad the son of Hepher had no sons, but daughters; and the names of the daughters of Zelophehad *were* Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. 34 These *are* the families of Manasseh; and those who were numbered of them *were* fifty-two thousand seven hundred.

35 These *are* the sons of Ephraim according to their families: of Shuthelah, the family of the Shuthalhites; of Becher,[a] the family of the Bachrites; of Tahan, the family of the Tahanites. 36 And these *are* the sons of Shuthelah: of Eran, the family of the Eranites. 37 These *are* the families of the sons of Ephraim according to those who were numbered of them: thirty-two thousand five hundred.

These *are* the sons of Joseph according to their families.

38 The sons of Benjamin according to their families were: of Bela,

26:15 [a]Called *Ziphion* in Genesis 46:16 **26:16** [a]Called *Ezbon* in Genesis 46:16
26:17 [a]Spelled *Arodi* in Samaritan Pentateuch, Syriac, and Genesis 46:16
26:23 [a]Hebrew *Puvah* (compare Genesis 46:13 and 1 Chronicles 7:1); Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *Puah.* [b]Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *Puaites.* **26:30** [a]Called *Abiezer* in Joshua 17:2
26:35 [a]Called *Bered* in 1 Chronicles 7:20

God" (2 Corinthians 4:15; see also John 11:4).

Your success honors God. "Honor the Lord with your possessions" (Proverbs 3:9). "Both riches and honor come from You" (1 Chronicles 29:12). "God . . . gives you power to get wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18).

Your message, your salvation, your body, your struggles, your success—all proclaim God's glory.

"Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17).

He's the source; we are the glass. He's the light; we are the mirrors. He sends the message; we mirror it. We rest in His pack awaiting His call. And when placed in His hands, we do His work. It's not about us; it's all about Him. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Take a motivation inventory. Do you serve others for the praise you receive or for the pleasure of serving Christ? When you have an opportunity to serve, ask God to help you have the right motives. Ask yourself: *Why would I do this?*

EXPLORATION

Steadfastness—Psalm 37:31; 112:7; 125:1; Colossians 2:5; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; Hebrews 10:23.

the family of the Belaites; of Ashbel, the family of the Ashbelites; of Ahiram, the family of the Ahiramites; 39 of Shupham,[a] the family of the Shuphamites; of Hupham,[b] the family of the Huphamites. 40 And the sons of Bela were Ard[a] and Naaman: *of Ard,* the family of the Ardites; of Naaman, the family of the Naamites. 41 These *are* the sons of Benjamin according to their families; and those who were numbered of them *were* forty-five thousand six hundred.

42 These *are* the sons of Dan according to their families: of Shuham,[a] the family of the Shuhamites. These *are* the families of Dan according to their families. 43 All the families of the Shuhamites, according to those who were numbered of them, *were* sixty-four thousand four hundred.

44 The sons of Asher according to their families *were:* of Jimna, the family of the Jimnites; of Jesui, the family of the Jesuites; of Beriah, the family of the Beriites. 45 Of the sons of Beriah: of Heber, the family of the Heberites; of Malchiel, the family of the Malchielites. 46 And the name of the daughter of Asher *was* Serah. 47 These *are* the families of the sons of Asher according to those who were numbered of them: fifty-three thousand four hundred.

48 The sons of Naphtali according to their families *were:* of Jahzeel,[a] the family of the Jahzeelites; of Guni, the family of the Gunites; 49 of Jezer, the family of the Jezerites; of Shillem, the family of the Shillemites. 50 These *are* the families of Naphtali according to their families; and those who were numbered of them *were* forty-five thousand four hundred.

51 These *are* those who were numbered of the children of Israel: six hundred and one thousand seven hundred and thirty.

52 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 53 "To these the land shall be divided as an inheritance, according to the number of names. 54 To a large *tribe* you shall give a larger inheritance, and to a small *tribe* you shall give a smaller inheritance. Each shall be given its inheritance according to those who were numbered of them. 55 But the land shall be divided by lot; they shall inherit according to the names of the tribes of their fathers. 56 According to the lot their inheritance shall be divided between the larger and the smaller."

57 And these *are* those who were numbered of the Levites according to their families: of Gershon, the family of the Gershonites; of Kohath, the family of the Kohathites; of Merari, the family of the Merarites. 58 These *are* the families of the Levites: the family of the Libnites, the family of the Hebronites, the family of the Mahlites, the family of the Mushites, and the family of the Korathites. And Kohath begot Amram. 59 The name of Amram's wife *was* Jochebed the daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt; and to Amram she bore Aaron and Moses and their sister Miriam. 60 To Aaron were born Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. 61 And Nadab and Abihu died when they offered profane fire before the Lord.

62 Now those who were numbered of them were twenty-three thousand, every male from a month old and above; for they were not numbered among the other children of Israel, because there was no inheritance given to them among the children of Israel.

63 These *are* those who were numbered by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who numbered the children of Israel in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, *across from* Jericho. 64 But among these there was not a man of those who were numbered by Moses and Aaron the priest when they numbered the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Sinai. 65 For the Lord had said of them, "They shall surely die in the wilderness." So there was not left a man of them, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.

Inheritance Laws

27 Then came the daughters of Zelophehad the son of Hepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, from the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph; and these *were* the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. 2 And they stood before Moses, before Eleazar the priest, and before the leaders and all the congregation, *by* the doorway of the tabernacle of meeting, saying: 3 "Our father died in the wilderness; but he was not in the company

26:39 [a]Masoretic Text reads *Shephupham,* spelled *Shephuphan* in 1 Chronicles 8:5. [b]Called *Huppim* in Genesis 46:21
26:40 [a]Called *Addar* in 1 Chronicles 8:3 **26:42** [a]Called *Hushim* in Genesis 46:23 **26:48** [a]Spelled *Jahziel* in 1 Chronicles 7:13

of those who gathered together against the Lord, in company with Korah, but he died in his own sin; and he had no sons. 4 Why should the name of our father be removed from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father's brothers."

5 So Moses brought their case before the Lord.

6 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 7 "The daughters of Zelophehad speak *what is* right; you shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among their father's brothers, and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them. 8 And you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If a man dies and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter. 9 If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. 10 If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers. 11 And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the relative closest to him in his family, and he shall possess it.' " And it shall be to the children of Israel a statute of judgment, just as the Lord commanded Moses.

Joshua the Next Leader of Israel

12 Now the Lord said to Moses: "Go up into this Mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the children of Israel. 13 And when you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother was gathered. 14 For in the Wilderness of Zin, during the strife of the congregation, you rebelled against My command to hallow Me at the waters before their eyes." (These *are* the waters of Meribah, at Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin.)

15 Then Moses spoke to the Lord, saying: 16 "Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, 17 who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep which have no shepherd."

18 And the Lord said to Moses: "Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom *is* the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; 19 set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. 20 And you shall give *some* of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. 21 He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the Lord for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, he and all the children of Israel with him—all the congregation."

22 So Moses did as the Lord commanded him. He took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. 23 And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses.

Daily Offerings

28 Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Command the children of Israel, and say to them, 'My offering, My food for My offerings made by fire as a sweet aroma to Me, you shall be careful to offer to Me at their appointed time.'

3 "And you shall say to them, 'This *is* the offering made by fire which you shall offer to the Lord: two male lambs in their first year

Life Lessons

Numbers 28:1—30:16

SITUATION

God commanded the Israelites to remember Him. To do this, He assigned daily, weekly, and monthly offerings, as well as five annual events: Passover, Feast of Weeks, Feast of Trumpets, Feast of Tabernacles, and the Day of Atonement.

OBSERVATION

God wants His people to be thankful to Him. We can honor Him by giving regular offerings. This reminds us to keep Him the first priority in our lives.

INSPIRATION

Let your tallest finger remind you of your highest priority: God's reputation. David jealously guarded it. No one was going to defame his Lord. David fought so that "all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's" (1 Samuel 17:46, 47).

David saw Goliath as a chance for God to show off! Did David know he would exit the battle alive? No. But he was willing to give his life for the reputation of God.

What if you saw your giant in the same manner? Rather than begrudge him, welcome him. Your cancer is God's chance to flex His healing muscles. Your sin is God's opportunity to showcase grace. Your struggling marriage can billboard God's power. See your struggle as God's canvas. On it He will paint His multicolored supremacy. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
It takes time and effort to grow in our relationship with God. In what ways do you make God your daily priority? Think about the joy you have received from your growing friendship with the Lord; then decide how your daily worship needs to change to encourage a deeper and more joyful relationship with Him.

EXPLORATION
Life and Faith—
Deuteronomy 6:5–9; Psalm 1:2; 5:3; 16:8; Daily 6:10; John 4:24; Romans 12:1; Colossians 3:17; 1 Timothy 5:5; 1 Peter 2:5.

without blemish, day by day, as a regular burnt offering. 4 The one lamb you shall offer in the morning, the other lamb you shall offer in the evening, 5 and one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering mixed with one-fourth of a hin of pressed oil. 6 *It is* a regular burnt offering which was ordained at Mount Sinai for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the Lord. 7 And its drink offering *shall be* one-fourth of a hin for each lamb; in a holy *place* you shall pour out the drink to the Lord as an offering. 8 The other lamb you shall offer in the evening; as the morning grain offering and its drink offering, you shall offer *it* as an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord.

Sabbath Offerings

9 'And on the Sabbath day two lambs in their first year, without blemish, and two-tenths *of an ephah* of fine flour as a grain offering, mixed with oil, with its drink offering— 10 *this is* the burnt offering for every Sabbath, besides the regular burnt offering with its drink offering.

Monthly Offerings

11 'At the beginnings of your months you shall present a burnt offering to the Lord: two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year, without blemish; 12 three-tenths *of an ephah* of fine flour as a grain offering, mixed with oil, for each bull; two-tenths *of an ephah* of fine flour as a grain offering, mixed with oil, for the one ram; 13 and one-tenth *of an ephah* of fine flour, mixed with oil, as a grain offering for each lamb, as a burnt offering of sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the Lord. 14 Their drink offering shall be half a hin of wine for a bull, one-third of a hin for a ram, and one-fourth of a hin for a lamb; this *is* the burnt offering for each month throughout the months of the year. 15 Also one kid of the goats as a sin offering to the Lord shall be offered, besides the regular burnt offering and its drink offering.

Offerings at Passover

16 'On the fourteenth day of the first month *is* the Passover of the Lord. 17 And on the fifteenth day of this month *is* the feast; unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days. 18 On the first day *you shall have* a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work. 19 And you shall present an offering made by fire as a burnt offering to the Lord: two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year. Be sure they are without blemish. 20 Their grain offering shall be of fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths *of an ephah* you shall offer for a bull, and two-tenths for a ram; 21 you shall offer one-tenth *of an ephah* for each of the seven lambs; 22 also one goat *as* a sin offering, to make atonement for you. 23 You shall offer these besides the burnt offering of the morning, which *is* for a regular burnt offering. 24 In this manner you shall offer the food of the offering made by fire daily for seven days, as a sweet aroma to the Lord; it shall be offered besides the regular burnt offering and its drink offering. 25 And on the seventh day you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work.

Offerings at the Feast of Weeks

26 'Also on the day of the firstfruits, when you bring a new grain offering to the Lord at your *Feast of* Weeks, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work. 27 You shall present a

burnt offering as a sweet aroma to the Lord:
two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs
in their first year, 28with their grain offering
of fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths *of*
an ephah for each bull, two-tenths for the
one ram, 29and one-tenth for each of the
seven lambs; 30*also* one kid of the goats, to
make atonement for you. 31Be sure they are
without blemish. You shall present *them* with
their drink offerings, besides the regular burnt
offering with its grain offering.

Offerings at the Feast of Trumpets

29 'And in the seventh month, on the
first *day* of the month, you shall have
a holy convocation. You shall do no custom-
ary work. For you it is a day of blowing the
trumpets. 2You shall offer a burnt offering as
a sweet aroma to the Lord: one young bull,
one ram, *and* seven lambs in their first year,
without blemish. 3Their grain offering *shall*
be fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths *of*
an ephah for the bull, two-tenths for the ram,
4and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs;
5also one kid of the goats *as* a sin offering, to
make atonement for you; 6besides the burnt
offering with its grain offering for the New
Moon, the regular burnt offering with its grain
offering, and their drink offerings, according
to their ordinance, as a sweet aroma, an offer-
ing made by fire to the Lord.

Offerings on the Day of Atonement

7 'On the tenth *day* of this seventh month
you shall have a holy convocation. You shall
afflict your souls; you shall not do any work.
8You shall present a burnt offering to the Lord
as a sweet aroma: one young bull, one ram,
and seven lambs in their first year. Be sure
they are without blemish. 9Their grain offer-
ing *shall be of* fine flour mixed with oil: three-
tenths *of an ephah* for the bull, two-tenths for
the one ram, 10and one-tenth for each of the
seven lambs; 11also one kid of the goats *as* a
sin offering, besides the sin offering for atone-
ment, the regular burnt offering with its grain
offering, and their drink offerings.

Offerings at the Feast of Tabernacles

12 'On the fifteenth day of the seventh month
you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do
no customary work, and you shall keep a feast
to the Lord seven days. 13You shall present a
burnt offering, an offering made by fire as a
sweet aroma to the Lord: thirteen young bulls,
two rams, *and* fourteen lambs in their first
year. They shall be without blemish. 14Their
grain offering *shall be of* fine flour mixed with
oil: three-tenths *of an ephah* for each of the
thirteen bulls, two-tenths for each of the two
rams, 15and one-tenth for each of the fourteen
lambs; 16also one kid of the goats *as* a sin offer-
ing, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain
offering, and its drink offering.

17 'On the second day *present* twelve young
bulls, two rams, fourteen lambs in their first
year without blemish, 18and their grain offer-
ing and their drink offerings for the bulls, for
the rams, and for the lambs, by their number,
according to the ordinance; 19also one kid of
the goats *as* a sin offering, besides the regular
burnt offering with its grain offering, and their
drink offerings.

20 'On the third day *present* eleven bulls, two
rams, fourteen lambs in their first year with-
out blemish, 21and their grain offering and
their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams,
and for the lambs, by their number, accord-
ing to the ordinance; 22also one goat *as* a sin
offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its
grain offering, and its drink offering.

23 'On the fourth day *present* ten bulls, two
rams, *and* fourteen lambs in their first year,
without blemish, 24and their grain offering
and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the
rams, and for the lambs, by their number,
according to the ordinance; 25also one kid of
the goats *as* a sin offering, besides the regular
burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink
offering.

26 'On the fifth day *present* nine bulls, two
rams, *and* fourteen lambs in their first year
without blemish, 27and their grain offering
and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the
rams, and for the lambs, by their number,
according to the ordinance; 28also one goat *as*
a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offer-
ing, its grain offering, and its drink offering.

29 'On the sixth day *present* eight bulls, two
rams, *and* fourteen lambs in their first year
without blemish, 30and their grain offering
and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the
rams, and for the lambs, by their number,

according to the ordinance; 31 also one goat *as* a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering.

32 'On the seventh day *present* seven bulls, two rams, *and* fourteen lambs in their first year without blemish, 33 and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; 34 also one goat *as* a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering.

35 'On the eighth day you shall have a sacred assembly. You shall do no customary work. 36 You shall present a burnt offering, an offering made by fire as a sweet aroma to the Lord: one bull, one ram, seven lambs in their first year without blemish, 37 and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bull, for the ram, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; 38 also one goat *as* a sin offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its grain offering, and its drink offering.

39 'These you shall present to the Lord at your appointed feasts (besides your vowed offerings and your freewill offerings) as your burnt offerings and your grain offerings, as your drink offerings and your peace offerings.' "

40 So Moses told the children of Israel everything, just as the Lord commanded Moses.

The Law Concerning Vows

30 Then Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes concerning the children of Israel, saying, "This *is* the thing which the Lord has commanded: 2 If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

3 "Or if a woman makes a vow to the Lord, and binds *herself* by some agreement while in her father's house in her youth, 4 and her father hears her vow and the agreement by which she has bound herself, and her father holds his peace, then all her vows shall stand, and every agreement with which she has bound herself shall stand. 5 But if her father overrules her on the day that he hears, then none of her vows nor her agreements by which she has bound herself shall stand; and the Lord will release her, because her father overruled her.

6 "If indeed she takes a husband, while bound by her vows or by a rash utterance from her lips by which she bound herself, 7 and her husband hears *it,* and makes no response to her on the day that he hears, then her vows shall stand, and her agreements by which she bound herself shall stand. 8 But if her husband overrules her on the day that he hears *it,* he shall make void her vow which she took and what she uttered with her lips, by which she bound herself, and the Lord will release her.

9 "Also any vow of a widow or a divorced woman, by which she has bound herself, shall stand against her.

10 "If she vowed in her husband's house, or bound herself by an agreement with an oath, 11 and her husband heard *it,* and made no response to her *and* did not overrule her, then all her vows shall stand, and every agreement by which she bound herself shall stand. 12 But if her husband truly made them void on the day he heard *them,* then whatever proceeded from her lips concerning her vows or concerning the agreement binding her, it shall not stand; her husband has made them void, and the Lord will release her. 13 Every vow and every binding oath to afflict her soul, her husband may confirm it, or her husband may make it void. 14 Now if her husband makes no response whatever to her from day to day, then he confirms all her vows or all the agreements that bind her; he confirms them, because he made no response to her on the day that he heard *them.* 15 But if he does make them void after he has heard *them,* then he shall bear her guilt."

16 These *are* the statutes which the Lord commanded Moses, between a man and his wife, and between a father and his daughter in her youth in her father's house.

Vengeance on the Midianites

31 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2 "Take vengeance on the Midianites for the children of Israel. Afterward you shall be gathered to your people."

3 So Moses spoke to the people, saying, "Arm some of yourselves for war, and let them go against the Midianites to take vengeance for the Lord on Midian. 4 A thousand from each tribe of all the tribes of Israel you shall send to the war."

5 So there were recruited from the divisions of Israel one thousand
from *each* tribe, twelve thousand armed for war. 6 Then Moses sent
them to the war, one thousand from *each* tribe; he sent them to the
war with Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, with the holy articles
and the signal trumpets in his hand. 7 And they warred against the
Midianites, just as the Lord commanded Moses, and they killed all
the males. 8 They killed the kings of Midian with *the rest of* those who
were killed—Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian.
Balaam the son of Beor they also killed with the sword.

9 And the children of Israel took the women of Midian captive,
with their little ones, and took as spoil all their cattle, all their flocks,
and all their goods. 10 They also burned with fire all the cities where
they dwelt, and all their forts. 11 And they took all the spoil and all the
booty—of man and beast.

Return from the War

12 Then they brought the captives, the booty, and the spoil to
Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the congregation of the children
of Israel, to the camp in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, *across from*
Jericho. 13 And Moses, Eleazar the priest, and all the leaders of the
congregation, went to meet them outside the camp. 14 But Moses was
angry with the officers of the army, *with* the captains over thousands
and captains over hundreds, who had come from the battle.

15 And Moses said to them: "Have you kept all the women alive?
16 Look, these *women* caused the children of Israel, through the coun-
sel of Balaam, to trespass against the Lord in the incident of Peor,
and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord. 17 Now
therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman
who has known a man intimately. 18 But keep alive for yourselves all
the young girls who have not known a man intimately. 19 And as for
you, remain outside the camp seven days; whoever has killed any
person, and whoever has touched any slain, purify yourselves and
your captives on the third day and on the seventh day. 20 Purify every
garment, everything made of leather, everything woven of goats' *hair,*
and everything made of wood."

21 Then Eleazar the priest said to the men of war who had gone
to the battle, "This *is* the ordinance of the law which the Lord com-
manded Moses: 22 Only the gold, the silver, the bronze, the iron, the
tin, and the lead, 23 everything that can endure fire, you shall put
through the fire, and it shall be clean; and it shall be purified with
the water of purification. But all that cannot endure fire you shall put
through water. 24 And you shall wash your clothes on the seventh day
and be clean, and afterward you may come into the camp."

Division of the Plunder

25 Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 26 "Count up the plunder
that was taken—of man and beast—you and Eleazar the priest and
the chief fathers of the congregation; 27 and divide the plunder into
two parts, between those who took part in the war, who went out to
battle, and all the congregation. 28 And levy a tribute for the Lord on
the men of war who went out to battle: one of every five hundred of
the persons, the cattle, the donkeys, and the sheep; 29 take *it* from

Life LESSONS

Numbers 31:1–54

SITUATION

The Midianites tried to turn the Israelites away from God. Because of this, the two nomadic nations became enemies despite their common heritage, for the Midianites were descendants of Abraham and his second wife.

OBSERVATION

God's purpose for destroying the Midianites was to keep the people of Israel free from sin and ungodly influences. God desired moral purity in His followers. Not only were sinful influences to be completely destroyed, but the spoils of war—blessings to the people—were to be purified as well.

INSPIRATION

Jesus spoke to those who had turned their backs on history. He spoke to those who had blatantly ignored sign after sign, servant after servant. It wasn't as if they had just skipped a paragraph or missed a punchline. It wasn't as if they had misunderstood a chapter. They had missed the whole book. God had come into their city, walked down their street, knocked on their door, and they refused to let Him in.

For that reason—because they had refused to believe—Jesus speaks the most sobering words in the Gospel of Matthew: "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it" [Matthew 21:43].

God is intolerant of the callused heart.

He is patient with our

mistakes. He is longsuffering with our stumbles. He doesn't get angry at our questions. He doesn't turn away when we struggle. But when we repeatedly reject His message, when we are insensitive to His pleadings, when He changes history itself to get our attention and we still don't listen, He honors our request. . . .

Note it was not God who made the people unworthy. It was their refusal to listen that excluded them from grace. (For *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God does not force His way into your life; He patiently knocks and waits to be invited in. Those who invite Him in will find Him working hard to make them like Himself—pure and holy. Those who refuse to answer, who turn away, will seal their own eternity apart from Him.

EXPLORATION

Holiness—Leviticus 11:45; Matthew 5:8; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 5:27; Titus 2:11, 12; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15, 16; 2 Peter 3:14; 1 John 3:3.

their half, and give *it* to Eleazar the priest as a heave offering to the Lord. 30 And from the children of Israel's half you shall take one of every fifty, drawn from the persons, the cattle, the donkeys, and the sheep, from all the livestock, and give them to the Levites who keep charge of the tabernacle of the Lord." 31 So Moses and Eleazar the priest did as the Lord commanded Moses.

32 The booty remaining from the plunder, which the men of war had taken, was six hundred and seventy-five thousand sheep, 33 seventy-two thousand cattle, 34 sixty-one thousand donkeys, 35 and thirty-two thousand persons in all, of women who had not known a man intimately. 36 And the half, the portion for those who had gone out to war, was in number three hundred and thirty-seven thousand five hundred sheep; 37 and the Lord's tribute of the sheep was six hundred and seventy-five. 38 The cattle *were* thirty-six thousand, of which the Lord's tribute *was* seventy-two. 39 The donkeys *were* thirty thousand five hundred, of which the Lord's tribute *was* sixty-one. 40 The persons *were* sixteen thousand, of which the Lord's tribute *was* thirty-two persons. 41 So Moses gave the tribute *which was* the Lord's heave offering to Eleazar the priest, as the Lord commanded Moses.

42 And from the children of Israel's half, which Moses separated from the men who fought— 43 now the half belonging to the congregation was three hundred and thirty-seven thousand five hundred sheep, 44 thirty-six thousand cattle, 45 thirty thousand five hundred donkeys, 46 and sixteen thousand persons— 47 and from the children of Israel's half Moses took one of every fifty, drawn from man and beast, and gave them to the Levites, who kept charge of the tabernacle of the Lord, as the Lord commanded Moses.

48 Then the officers who *were* over thousands of the army, the captains of thousands and captains of hundreds, came near to Moses; 49 and they said to Moses, "Your servants have taken a count of the men of war who *are* under our command, and not a man of us is missing. 50 Therefore we have brought an offering for the Lord, what every man found of ornaments of gold: armlets and bracelets and signet rings and earrings and necklaces, to make atonement for ourselves before the Lord." 51 So Moses and Eleazar the priest received the gold from them, all the fashioned ornaments. 52 And all the gold of the offering that they offered to the Lord, from the captains of thousands and captains of hundreds, was sixteen thousand seven hundred and fifty shekels. 53 (The men of war had taken spoil, every man for himself.) 54 And Moses and Eleazar the priest received the gold from the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and brought it into the tabernacle of meeting as a memorial for the children of Israel before the Lord.

The Tribes Settling East of the Jordan

32 Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of livestock; and when they saw the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead, that indeed the region *was* a place for livestock, 2 the children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spoke to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the leaders of the congregation, saying, 3 "Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Shebam, Nebo, and Beon, 4 the country which the Lord defeated

before the congregation of Israel, *is* a land for livestock, and your servants have livestock." 5 Therefore they said, "If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants as a possession. Do not take us over the Jordan."

6 And Moses said to the children of Gad and to the children of Reuben: "Shall your brethren go to war while you sit here? 7 Now why will you discourage the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the Lord has given them? 8 Thus your fathers did when I sent them away from Kadesh Barnea to see the land. 9 For when they went up to the Valley of Eshcol and saw the land, they discouraged the heart of the children of Israel, so that they did not go into the land which the Lord had given them. 10 So the Lord's anger was aroused on that day, and He swore an oath, saying, 11 'Surely none of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old and above, shall see the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, because they have not wholly followed Me, 12 except Caleb the son of Jephunneh, the Kenizzite, and Joshua the son of Nun, for they have wholly followed the Lord.' 13 So the Lord's anger was aroused against Israel, and He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation that had done evil in the sight of the Lord was gone. 14 And look! You have risen in your fathers' place, a brood of sinful men, to increase still more the fierce anger of the Lord against Israel. 15 For if you turn away from following Him, He will once again leave them in the wilderness, and you will destroy all these people."

16 Then they came near to him and said: "We will build sheepfolds here for our livestock, and cities for our little ones, 17 but we ourselves will be armed, ready *to go* before the children of Israel until we have brought them to their place; and our little ones will dwell in the fortified cities because of the inhabitants of the land. 18 We will not return to our homes until every one of the children of Israel has received his inheritance. 19 For we will not inherit with them on the other side of the Jordan and beyond, because our inheritance has fallen to us on this eastern side of the Jordan."

20 Then Moses said to them: "If you do this thing, if you arm yourselves before the Lord for the war, 21 and all your armed men cross over the Jordan before the Lord until He has driven out His enemies from before Him, 22 and the land is subdued before the Lord, then afterward you may return and be blameless before the Lord and before Israel; and this land shall be your possession before the Lord. 23 But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the Lord; and be sure your sin will find you out. 24 Build cities for your little ones and folds for your sheep, and do what has proceeded out of your mouth."

25 And the children of Gad and the children of Reuben spoke to Moses, saying: "Your servants will do as my lord commands. 26 Our little ones, our wives, our flocks, and all our livestock will be there in the cities of Gilead; 27 but your servants will cross over, every man armed for war, before the Lord to battle, just as my lord says."

28 So Moses gave command concerning them to Eleazar the priest, to Joshua the son of Nun, and to the chief fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel. 29 And Moses said to them: "If the children of Gad and the children of Reuben cross over the Jordan with you, every man

Life Lessons

Numbers 32:1–42

SITUATION

Three tribes asked to reside east rather than west of the Jordan in order to secure their flocks in simple livestock pens. The pens' four stone walls would be built tall enough to keep out predatory animals and thieves. Then the men of the tribes would be free to help the other nine tribes west of the Jordan.

OBSERVATION

Moses asked that the tribes that took land on the east side of the Jordan would help the other tribes on the western side to conquer their land. If they refused to do this, Moses said they would be sinning against the Lord and their sin would find them out (32:23).

INSPIRATION

Oh, David. You never saw it coming, did you? You never saw Nathan erecting the gallows or throwing the rope over the beam. You never felt him tie your hands behind your back, lead you up the steps, and stand you squarely over the trap door. Only when he squeezed the noose around your neck, did you gulp. Only when Nathan tightened the rope with four three-letter words:

"You are the man!" (2 Samuel 12:7).

David's face pales; his Adam's apple bounces. A bead of sweat forms on his forehead. He slinks back in his chair. He makes no defense. He utters no response. He has nothing to say. . . .

From this day forward, turmoil and tragedy mark David's family. Even the child of this adultery will

die (2 Samuel 12:18). He must. Surrounding nations now question the holiness of David's God. David had soiled God's reputation, blemished God's honor. And God, who jealously guards His glory, punishes David's public sin in a public fashion. The infant perishes. The king of Israel discovers the harsh truth of Numbers 32:23: "Be sure your sin will find you out."

Have you found this to be true? . . .

God takes your sleep, your peace. He takes your rest. Want to know why? Because He wants to take away your sin. Can a mom do nothing as toxins invade her child? Can God sit idly as sin poisons his? He will not rest until we do what David did: confess our fault. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Have you ever known people who thought that they were getting away with sin—and facing no consequences? What about you? Ever thought that you'd "pulled one over" on God? Consider the words of Moses: Our sin will always find us out. Far better to talk to God about it and confess it.

EXPLORATION

Generosity—Psalm 15:5; Proverbs 14:21; Romans 13:8–10; 15:2; James 2:8.

armed for battle before the Lord, and the land is subdued before you, then you shall give them the land of Gilead as a possession. 30 But if they do not cross over armed with you, they shall have possessions among you in the land of Canaan."

31 Then the children of Gad and the children of Reuben answered, saying: "As the Lord has said to your servants, so we will do. 32 We will cross over armed before the Lord into the land of Canaan, but the possession of our inheritance *shall remain* with us on this side of the Jordan."

33 So Moses gave to the children of Gad, to the children of Reuben, and to half the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land with its cities within the borders, the cities of the surrounding country. 34 And the children of Gad built Dibon and Ataroth and Aroer, 35 Atroth and Shophan and Jazer and Jogbehah, 36 Beth Nimrah and Beth Haran, fortified cities, and folds for sheep. 37 And the children of Reuben built Heshbon and Elealeh and Kirjathaim, 38 Nebo and Baal Meon (*their* names being changed) and Shibmah; and they gave *other* names to the cities which they built.

39 And the children of Machir the son of Manasseh went to Gilead and took it, and dispossessed the Amorites who *were* in it. 40 So Moses gave Gilead to Machir the son of Manasseh, and he dwelt in it. 41 Also Jair the son of Manasseh went and took its small towns, and called them Havoth Jair.[a] 42 Then Nobah went and took Kenath and its villages, and he called it Nobah, after his own name.

Israel's Journey from Egypt Reviewed

33 These *are* the journeys of the children of Israel, who went out of the land of Egypt by their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron. 2 Now Moses wrote down the starting points of their journeys at the command of the Lord. And these *are* their journeys according to their starting points:

3 They departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day after the Passover the children of Israel went out with boldness in the sight of all the Egyptians. 4 For the Egyptians were burying all *their* firstborn, whom the Lord had killed among them. Also on their gods the Lord had executed judgments.

5 Then the children of Israel moved from Rameses and camped at Succoth. 6 They departed from Succoth and camped at Etham, which *is* on the edge of the wilderness. 7 They moved from Etham and turned back to Pi Hahiroth, which *is* east of Baal Zephon; and they camped near Migdol. 8 They departed from before Hahiroth[a] and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness, went three days' journey in the Wilderness of Etham, and camped at Marah. 9 They moved from Marah and came to Elim. At Elim *were* twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees; so they camped there.

10 They moved from Elim and camped by the Red Sea. 11 They moved from the Red Sea and camped in the Wilderness of Sin. 12 They journeyed from the Wilderness of Sin and camped at Dophkah.

32:41 [a]Literally *Towns of Jair* **33:8** [a]Many Hebrew manuscripts, Samaritan Pentateuch, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate read *from Pi Hahiroth* (compare verse 7).

13 They departed from Dophkah and camped at Alush. 14 They moved
from Alush and camped at Rephidim, where there was no water for
the people to drink.
15 They departed from Rephidim and camped in the Wilderness
of Sinai. 16 They moved from the Wilderness of Sinai and camped at
Kibroth Hattaavah. 17 They departed from Kibroth Hattaavah and
camped at Hazeroth. 18 They departed from Hazeroth and camped
at Rithmah. 19 They departed from Rithmah and camped at Rimmon
Perez. 20 They departed from Rimmon Perez and camped at Libnah.
21 They moved from Libnah and camped at Rissah. 22 They journeyed
from Rissah and camped at Kehelathah. 23 They went from Kehelathah
and camped at Mount Shepher. 24 They moved from Mount Shepher
and camped at Haradah. 25 They moved from Haradah and camped
at Makheloth. 26 They moved from Makheloth and camped at Tahath.
27 They departed from Tahath and camped at Terah. 28 They moved
from Terah and camped at Mithkah. 29 They went from Mithkah and
camped at Hashmonah. 30 They departed from Hashmonah and
camped at Moseroth. 31 They departed from Moseroth and camped
at Bene Jaakan. 32 They moved from Bene Jaakan and camped at Hor
Hagidgad. 33 They went from Hor Hagidgad and camped at Jotbathah.
34 They moved from Jotbathah and camped at Abronah. 35 They
departed from Abronah and camped at Ezion Geber. 36 They moved
from Ezion Geber and camped in the Wilderness of Zin, which *is*
Kadesh. 37 They moved from Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, on
the boundary of the land of Edom.
38 Then Aaron the priest went up to Mount Hor at the command of
the Lord, and died there in the fortieth year after the children of Israel
had come out of the land of Egypt, on the first *day* of the fifth month.
39 Aaron *was* one hundred and twenty-three years old when he died
on Mount Hor.
40 Now the king of Arad, the Canaanite, who dwelt in the South in
the land of Canaan, heard of the coming of the children of Israel.
41 So they departed from Mount Hor and camped at Zalmonah.
42 They departed from Zalmonah and camped at Punon. 43 They
departed from Punon and camped at Oboth. 44 They departed from
Oboth and camped at Ije Abarim, at the border of Moab. 45 They
departed from Ijim[a] and camped at Dibon Gad. 46 They moved from
Dibon Gad and camped at Almon Diblathaim. 47 They moved from
Almon Diblathaim and camped in the mountains of Abarim, before
Nebo. 48 They departed from the mountains of Abarim and camped in
the plains of Moab by the Jordan, *across from* Jericho. 49 They camped
by the Jordan, from Beth Jesimoth as far as the Abel Acacia Grove[a] in
the plains of Moab.

Instructions for the Conquest of Canaan

50 Now the Lord spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jor-
dan, *across from* Jericho, saying, 51 "Speak to the children of Israel,
and say to them: 'When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of
Canaan, 52 then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from
before you, destroy all their engraved stones, destroy all their molded

33:45 [a]Same as *Ije Abarim*, verse 44 **33:49** [a]Hebrew *Abel Shittim*

Numbers 33:1—36:13

SITUATION
God ordered the Israelites to destroy the Canaanites because of their wickedness. God wished to prevent the Canaanites' sinful practices from affecting the Israelites.

OBSERVATION
Learn to avoid sinful practices. Don't rub shoulders with those hostile to God. They will have a negative effect on you—like "thorns in your sides" (33:55).

INSPIRATION
Throughout Scripture thorns symbolize, not sin, but the consequence of sin (Genesis 3:17, 18; Numbers 33:55; Proverbs 22:5). The fruit of sin is thorns—spiny, prickly, cutting thorns.

I emphasize the "point" of the thorns to suggest a point you may have never considered: If the fruit of sin is thorns, isn't the thorny crown on Christ's brow a picture of the fruit of our sin that pierced his heart?

What is the fruit of sin? Step into the briar patch of humanity and feel a few thistles. Shame. Disgrace. Discouragement. Anxiety. Haven't our hearts been caught in these brambles?

The heart of Jesus, however, had not. He had never been cut by the thorns of sin. What you and I face daily, He never knew. Anxiety? He never worried! Guilt? He was never guilty! Jesus never knew the fruits of sin . . . until He became sin for us.

And when He did, all the emotions of sin tumbled in on Him like shadows in a forest. He felt anxious, guilty, and alone. Can't you

hear the emotion in His prayer? "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). These are not the words of a saint. This is the cry of a sinner.

And this prayer is one of the most remarkable parts of His coming. But I can think of something even greater. Want to know what it is? Want to know the coolest thing about the One who gave up the crown of heaven for a crown of thorns?

He did it for you. Just for you. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What sins in your life seem to you like "thorns in your side"? Jesus came to take away sin, and the power of sin, from your life. His death accomplished it. Ask Him to help you overcome troublesome sin. Then listen to what He has to say.

EXPLORATION

Listening—Deuteronomy 5:1; 1 Kings 19:11–13; Proverbs 1:23–28; Mark 4:9; Luke 6:49; Hebrews 2:1–3.

images, and demolish all their high places; 53 you shall dispossess *the inhabitants of* the land and dwell in it, for I have given you the land to possess. 54 And you shall divide the land by lot as an inheritance among your families; to the larger you shall give a larger inheritance, and to the smaller you shall give a smaller inheritance; there everyone's *inheritance* shall be whatever falls to him by lot. You shall inherit according to the tribes of your fathers. 55 But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain *shall be* irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell. 56 Moreover it shall be *that* I will do to you as I thought to do to them.' "

The Appointed Boundaries of Canaan

34 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Command the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land of Canaan, this *is* the land that shall fall to you as an inheritance—the land of Canaan to its boundaries. 3 Your southern border shall be from the Wilderness of Zin along the border of Edom; then your southern border shall extend eastward to the end of the Salt Sea; 4 your border shall turn from the southern side of the Ascent of Akrabbim, continue to Zin, and be on the south of Kadesh Barnea; then it shall go on to Hazar Addar, and continue to Azmon; 5 the border shall turn from Azmon to the Brook of Egypt, and it shall end at the Sea.

6 'As for the western border, you shall have the Great Sea for a border; this shall be your western border.

7 'And this shall be your northern border: From the Great Sea you shall mark out your *border* line to Mount Hor; 8 from Mount Hor you shall mark out *your border* to the entrance of Hamath; then the direction of the border shall be toward Zedad; 9 the border shall proceed to Ziphron, and it shall end at Hazar Enan. This shall be your northern border.

10 'You shall mark out your eastern border from Hazar Enan to Shepham; 11 the border shall go down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain; the border shall go down and reach to the eastern side of the Sea of Chinnereth; 12 the border shall go down along the Jordan, and it shall end at the Salt Sea. This shall be your land with its surrounding boundaries.' "

13 Then Moses commanded the children of Israel, saying: "This *is* the land which you shall inherit by lot, which the Lord has commanded to give to the nine tribes and to the half-tribe. 14 For the tribe of the children of Reuben according to the house of their fathers, and the tribe of the children of Gad according to the house of their fathers, have received *their inheritance;* and the half-tribe of Manasseh has received its inheritance. 15 The two tribes and the half-tribe have received their inheritance on this side of the Jordan, *across from* Jericho eastward, toward the sunrise."

The Leaders Appointed to Divide the Land

16 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 17 "These *are* the names of the men who shall divide the land among you as an inheritance: Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun. 18 And you shall take one leader of every tribe to divide the land for the inheritance. 19 These *are*

the names of the men: from the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh; 20 from the tribe of the children of Simeon, Shemuel the son of Ammihud; 21 from the tribe of Benjamin, Elidad the son of Chislon; 22 a leader from the tribe of the children of Dan, Bukki the son of Jogli; 23 from the sons of Joseph: a leader from the tribe of the children of Manasseh, Hanniel the son of Ephod, 24 and a leader from the tribe of the children of Ephraim, Kemuel the son of Shiphtan; 25 a leader from the tribe of the children of Zebulun, Elizaphan the son of Parnach; 26 a leader from the tribe of the children of Issachar, Paltiel the son of Azzan; 27 a leader from the tribe of the children of Asher, Ahihud the son of Shelomi; 28 and a leader from the tribe of the children of Naphtali, Pedahel the son of Ammihud."

29 These *are* the ones the Lord commanded to divide the inheritance among the children of Israel in the land of Canaan.

Cities for the Levites

35 And the Lord spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan *across from* Jericho, saying: 2 "Command the children of Israel that they give the Levites cities to dwell in from the inheritance of their possession, and you shall *also* give the Levites common-land around the cities. 3 They shall have the cities to dwell in; and their common-land shall be for their cattle, for their herds, and for all their animals. 4 The common-land of the cities which you will give the Levites *shall extend* from the wall of the city outward a thousand cubits all around. 5 And you shall measure outside the city on the east side two thousand cubits, on the south side two thousand cubits, on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two thousand cubits. The city *shall be* in the middle. This shall belong to them as common-land for the cities.

6 "Now among the cities which you will give to the Levites *you shall appoint* six cities of refuge, to which a manslayer may flee. And to these you shall add forty-two cities. 7 So all the cities you will give to the Levites *shall be* forty-eight; these *you shall give* with their common-land. 8 And the cities which you will give *shall be* from the possession of the children of Israel; from the larger *tribe* you shall give many, from the smaller you shall give few. Each shall give some of its cities to the Levites, in proportion to the inheritance that each receives."

Cities of Refuge

9 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 10 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, 11 then you shall appoint cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person accidentally may flee there. 12 They shall be cities of refuge for you from the avenger, that the manslayer may not die until he stands before the congregation in judgment. 13 And of the cities which you give, you shall have six cities of refuge. 14 You shall appoint three cities on this side of the Jordan, and three cities you shall appoint in the land of Canaan, *which* will be cities of refuge. 15 These six cities shall be for refuge for the children of Israel, for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them, that anyone who kills a person accidentally may flee there.

16 'But if he strikes him with an iron implement, so that he dies, he *is* a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. 17 And if he strikes him with a stone in the hand, by which one could die, and he does die, he *is* a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. 18 Or *if* he strikes him with a wooden hand weapon, by which one could die, and he does die, he *is* a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. 19 The avenger of blood himself shall put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death. 20 If he pushes him out of hatred or, while lying in wait, hurls something at him so that he dies, 21 or in enmity he strikes him with his hand so that he dies, the one who struck *him* shall surely be put to death. He *is* a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.

22 'However, if he pushes him suddenly without enmity, or throws anything at him without lying in wait, 23 or uses a stone, by which a man could die, throwing *it* at him without seeing *him,* so that he dies, while he was not his enemy or seeking his harm, 24 then the congregation shall judge between the manslayer and the avenger of blood according to these judgments. 25 So the congregation shall deliver

the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood, and the congregation shall return him to the city of refuge where he had fled, and he shall remain there until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil. 26 But if the manslayer at any time goes outside the limits of the city of refuge where he fled, 27 and the avenger of blood finds him outside the limits of his city of refuge, and the avenger of blood kills the manslayer, he shall not be guilty of blood, 28 because he should have remained in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest. But after the death of the high priest the manslayer may return to the land of his possession.

29 'And these *things* shall be a statute of judgment to you throughout your generations in all your dwellings. 30 Whoever kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the testimony of witnesses; but one witness is not *sufficient* testimony against a person for the death *penalty.* 31 Moreover you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who *is* guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death. 32 And you shall take no ransom for him who has fled to his city of refuge, that he may return to dwell in the land before the death of the priest. 33 So you shall not pollute the land where you *are;* for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. 34 Therefore do not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the Lord dwell among the children of Israel.' "

Marriage of Female Heirs

36 Now the chief fathers of the families of the children of Gilead the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of the sons of Joseph, came near and spoke before Moses and before the leaders, the chief fathers of the children of Israel. 2 And they said: "The Lord commanded my lord *Moses* to give the land as an inheritance by lot to the children of Israel, and my lord was commanded by the Lord to give the inheritance of our brother Zelophehad to his daughters. 3 Now if they are married to any of the sons of the *other* tribes of the children of Israel, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our fathers, and it will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so it will be taken from the lot of our inheritance. 4 And when the Jubilee of the children of Israel comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so their inheritance will be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers."

5 Then Moses commanded the children of Israel according to the word of the Lord, saying: "What the tribe of the sons of Joseph speaks is right. 6 This *is* what the Lord commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, 'Let them marry whom they think best, but they may marry only within the family of their father's tribe.' 7 So the inheritance of the children of Israel shall not change hands from tribe to tribe, for every one of the children of Israel shall keep the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. 8 And every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel shall be the wife of one of the family of her father's tribe, so that the children of Israel each may possess the inheritance of his fathers. 9 Thus no inheritance shall change hands from *one* tribe to another, but every tribe of the children of Israel shall keep its own inheritance."

10 Just as the Lord commanded Moses, so did the daughters of Zelophehad; 11 for Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, were married to the sons of their father's brothers. 12 They were married into the families of the children of Manasseh the son of Joseph, and their inheritance remained in the tribe of their father's family.

13 These *are* the commandments and the judgments which the Lord commanded the children of Israel by the hand of Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, *across from* Jericho.

THE BOOK OF

DEUTERONOMY

INTRODUCTION

If you've ever been a part of the following scene, you know you'll never forget it.

Inside the house is a quiet bedroom. Last spring's prom photo sits on the bedside table. A dried homecoming mum hangs from the bulletin board. Outside the house is a packed car. Both trunk and seat are full of clothes, books, and stereo. What was in the room is now in the car. The one who used to live in the room is about to drive the car . . . to college.

Both parent and child are stunned by the moment. What happened to childhood? Who fast-forwarded the years? Why, just yesterday this child was filling the house with cartwheels and play dough—now look. He's so tall. She's such a beauty. The child is grown.

The grown child is equally stunned. The road ahead looks lonely and long. There is safety in these walls. Protection. Security. Those pleas for independence so recently voiced are unheard today. "Just say the word, Dad, I'll stay. Just ask me, Mom, I won't leave."

But Mom and Dad know better. They know that love releases the loved. They know the training is over. The last bell has rung. The class is dismissed, and the application has begun.

And so parent and child hesitate at the side of the car. There's no time to teach new truths. There's no time to instill values or lay foundations. There is only one word that can be said— *Remember.* Remember who loves you. Remember what matters. Remember what is right and what is wrong.

Remember.

In Deuteronomy God tells His children to *remember*.

Israel is about to make a transition. For forty years they have wandered. Now they are about to settle down in a new land. It's a time of transition. From Moses to Joshua. From the wilderness to the Promised Land. From nomads to farmers. From people with no land to people of the land.

God wants them to stay faithful. Stay distinctive. For forty days Moses teaches the words you are about to read. God repeats what He has already taught. *Deutero* means "second." *Nomos* means "law." Deuteronomy is a second hearing of the law.

God didn't want them to forget.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Moses

Date Written: 1450–1405 B.C.

Key Themes:

- Moses reminded the people how God had led, to strengthen their faith in the future.
- Moses reminded the people of their covenant with God, a covenant of faith and obedience.
- Moses reviewed God's laws.

Key Verse:

"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5).

Contents:

I. Moses Remembered the Past 1:1—4:43

II. What Does God Require? 4:44—26:19

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IV. Moses' Good-bye and Joshua's Ordination 31:1—34:12

Life LESSONS

Deuteronomy 1:1—3:29

SITUATION
In Moab, Moses recounted the struggles and victories that God had given the Israelites while they wandered for forty years. This book reviews Israel's history and restates God's covenant with His people.

OBSERVATION
The Lord demonstrated His faithfulness to the Israelites by providing great leaders and a land for them. He also gave them His law to govern their religious, civil, and personal life.

INSPIRATION
A good memory makes heroes. A bad memory makes wimps. Amnesia made a wimp out of me last week. My Goliath awoke me at 4:00 a.m. with a woeful list of worries. Our church was attempting to raise money for a youth building, more money than we had ever raised in one effort.

The giant awoke me with ridicule. *You guys are crazy. You'll never collect that much money.* I couldn't argue. *The economy is down. People are stressed. We may not raise enough to buy one brick.* Goliath had me running for the trees.

But then I remembered David, the nine-to-two odds, the story of the lion and the bear. So I decided to do what David did: gaze at God's victories. I climbed out of bed, walked into the living room, turned on the lamp, pulled out my journal, and began making a list of lion-and bear-size conquests.

In the five previous years, God had prompted

The Previous Command to Enter Canaan

These *are* the words which Moses spoke to all Israel on this side of the Jordan in the wilderness, in the plain[a] opposite Suph,[b] between Paran, Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Dizahab. 2 *It is* eleven days' *journey* from Horeb by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea. 3 Now it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first *day* of the month, *that* Moses spoke to the children of Israel according to all that the Lord had given him as commandments to them, 4 after he had killed Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who dwelt at Ashtaroth in[a] Edrei.

5 On this side of the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses began to explain this law, saying, 6 "The Lord our God spoke to us in Horeb, saying: 'You have dwelt long enough at this mountain. 7 Turn and take your journey, and go to the mountains of the Amorites, to all the neighboring *places* in the plain,[a] in the mountains and in the lowland, in the South and on the seacoast, to the land of the Canaanites and to Lebanon, as far as the great river, the River Euphrates. 8 See, I have set the land before you; go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to your fathers—to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—to give to them and their descendants after them.'

Tribal Leaders Appointed

9 "And I spoke to you at that time, saying: 'I alone am not able to bear you. 10 The Lord your God has multiplied you, and here you *are* today, as the stars of heaven in multitude. 11 May the Lord God of your fathers make you a thousand times more numerous than you are, and bless you as He has promised you! 12 How can I alone bear your problems and your burdens and your complaints? 13 Choose wise, understanding, and knowledgeable men from among your tribes, and I will make them heads over you.' 14 And you answered me and said, 'The thing which you have told *us* to do *is* good.' 15 So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and knowledgeable men, and made them heads over you, leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, leaders of tens, and officers for your tribes.

16 "Then I commanded your judges at that time, saying, 'Hear *the cases* between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the stranger who is with him. 17 You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment *is* God's. The case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it.' 18 And I commanded you at that time all the things which you should do.

Israel's Refusal to Enter the Land

19 "So we departed from Horeb, and went through all that great and terrible wilderness which you saw on the way to the mountains of the Amorites, as the Lord our God had commanded us. Then we came to Kadesh Barnea. 20 And I said to you, 'You have come to the mountains of the Amorites, which the Lord our God is giving us. 21 Look, the Lord

1:1 [a]Hebrew *arabah* [b]One manuscript of the Septuagint, also Targum and Vulgate, read *Red Sea.* **1:4** [a]Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *and* (compare Joshua 12:4). **1:7** [a]Hebrew *arabah*

your God has set the land before you; go up *and* possess *it,* as the Lord God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged.'

22 "And every one of you came near to me and said, 'Let us send men before us, and let them search out the land for us, and bring back word to us of the way by which we should go up, and of the cities into which we shall come.'

23 "The plan pleased me well; so I took twelve of your men, one man from *each* tribe. 24 And they departed and went up into the mountains, and came to the Valley of Eshcol, and spied it out. 25 They also took *some* of the fruit of the land in their hands and brought *it* down to us; and they brought back word to us, saying, '*It is* a good land which the Lord our God is giving us.'

26 "Nevertheless you would not go up, but rebelled against the command of the Lord your God; 27 and you complained in your tents, and said, 'Because the Lord hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. 28 Where can we go up? Our brethren have discouraged our hearts, saying, "The people *are* greater and taller than we; the cities *are* great and fortified up to heaven; moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakim there." '

29 "Then I said to you, 'Do not be terrified, or afraid of them. 30 The Lord your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, 31 and in the wilderness where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place.' 32 Yet, for all that, you did not believe the Lord your God, 33 who went in the way before you to search out a place for you to pitch your tents, to show you the way you should go, in the fire by night and in the cloud by day.

The Penalty for Israel's Rebellion

34 "And the Lord heard the sound of your words, and was angry, and took an oath, saying, 35 'Surely not one of these men of this evil generation shall see that good land of which I swore to give to your fathers, 36 except Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him and his children I am giving the land on which he walked, because he wholly followed the Lord.' 37 The Lord was also angry with me for your sakes, saying, 'Even you shall not go in there. 38 Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall go in there. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it.

39 'Moreover your little ones and your children, who you say will be victims, who today have no knowledge of good and evil, they shall go in there; to them I will give it, and they shall possess it. 40 But *as for* you, turn and take your journey into the wilderness by the Way of the Red Sea.'

41 "Then you answered and said to me, 'We have sinned against the Lord; we will go up and fight, just as the Lord our God commanded us.' And when everyone of you had girded on his weapons of war, you were ready to go up into the mountain.

42 "And the Lord said to me, 'Tell them, "Do not go up nor fight, for I *am* not among you; lest you be defeated before your enemies." ' 43 So I spoke to you; yet you would not listen, but rebelled against

- a businessman to donate several acres of land to the church;
- another church to buy our old building;
- members to give above the needs, enabling the church to be 80 percent debt free.

God has done this before, I whispered. A lion's head hangs in the church foyer, and a bear rug rests on the sanctuary floor. About this time I heard a thud. Right there in the living room! I turned around just in time to see Goliath's eyes cross and knees buckle and body fall face-first on the carpet. I stood and placed a foot on his back and chuckled, *Take that, big boy.*

"Remember His marvelous works which He has done" (1 Chronicles 16:12). Catalog God's successes. Keep a list of his world records. Has he not walked you through high waters? Proven to be faithful? Have you not known his provision? How many nights have you gone to bed hungry? Mornings awakened in the cold? He has made road kill out of your enemies. Write today's worries in sand. Chisel yesterday's victories in stone. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Set aside time this week for reflection. Write down as many examples as you can of how the Lord has led you and of the Lord's faithfulness. Start a journal of events as they occur. Share these examples, as you are able, with your loved ones. Also, use them to begin a conversation with an unbeliever as you recount God's faithfulness.

EXPLORATION

God's Faithfulness—
1 Chronicles 16:14–18;

Psalm 103:14; 111:5; Lamentations 3:19–26.

Christ exchanged hearts with you. Yes, your thieving, lying, adulterous, and murderous heart. He placed your sin in Himself and invited God to punish it.

—Max Lucado (3:16)

the command of the Lord, and presumptuously went up into the mountain. 44And the Amorites who dwelt in that mountain came out against you and chased you as bees do, and drove you back from Seir to Hormah. 45Then you returned and wept before the Lord, but the Lord would not listen to your voice nor give ear to you.

46"So you remained in Kadesh many days, according to the days that you spent *there*.

The Desert Years

2 "Then we turned and journeyed into the wilderness of the Way of the Red Sea, as the Lord spoke to me, and we skirted Mount Seir for many days.

2"And the Lord spoke to me, saying: 3'You have skirted this mountain long enough; turn northward. 4And command the people, saying, "You *are about to* pass through the territory of your brethren, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. Therefore watch yourselves carefully. 5Do not meddle with them, for I will not give you *any* of their land, no, not so much as one footstep, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau *as* a possession. 6You shall buy food from them with money, that you may eat; and you shall also buy water from them with money, that you may drink.

7"For the Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand. He knows your trudging through this great wilderness. These forty years the Lord your God *has been* with you; you have lacked nothing." '

8"And when we passed beyond our brethren, the descendants of Esau who dwell in Seir, away from the road of the plain, away from Elath and Ezion Geber, we turned and passed by way of the Wilderness of Moab. 9Then the Lord said to me, 'Do not harass Moab, nor contend with them in battle, for I will not give you *any* of their land *as* a possession, because I have given Ar to the descendants of Lot *as* a possession.' "

10(The Emim had dwelt there in times past, a people as great and numerous and tall as the Anakim. 11They were also regarded as giants,[a] like the Anakim, but the Moabites call them Emim. 12The Horites formerly dwelt in Seir, but the descendants of Esau dispossessed them and destroyed them from before them, and dwelt in their place, just as Israel did to the land of their possession which the Lord gave them.)

13" 'Now rise and cross over the Valley of the Zered.' So we crossed over the Valley of the Zered. 14And the time we took to come from Kadesh Barnea until we crossed over the Valley of the Zered *was* thirty-eight years, until all the generation of the men of war was consumed from the midst of the camp, just as the Lord had sworn to them. 15For indeed the hand of the Lord was against them, to destroy them from the midst of the camp until they were consumed.

16"So it was, when all the men of war had finally perished from among the people, 17that the Lord spoke to me, saying: 18'This day you are to cross over at Ar, the boundary of Moab. 19And *when* you come near the people of Ammon, do not harass them or meddle with

2:11 [a]Hebrew *rephaim*

them, for I will not give you *any* of the land of the people of Ammon *as* a possession, because I have given it to the descendants of Lot *as* a possession.' "

20 (That was also regarded as a land of giants;[a] giants formerly dwelt there. But the Ammonites call them Zamzummim, 21 a people as great and numerous and tall as the Anakim. But the Lord destroyed them before them, and they dispossessed them and dwelt in their place, 22 just as He had done for the descendants of Esau, who dwelt in Seir, when He destroyed the Horites from before them. They dispossessed them and dwelt in their place, even to this day. 23 And the Avim, who dwelt in villages as far as Gaza—the Caphtorim, who came from Caphtor, destroyed them and dwelt in their place.)

24 " 'Rise, take your journey, and cross over the River Arnon. Look, I have given into your hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land. Begin to possess *it,* and engage him in battle. 25 This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you upon the nations under the whole heaven, who shall hear the report of you, and shall tremble and be in anguish because of you.'

King Sihon Defeated

26 "And I sent messengers from the Wilderness of Kedemoth to Sihon king of Heshbon, with words of peace, saying, 27 'Let me pass through your land; I will keep strictly to the road, and I will turn neither to the right nor to the left. 28 You shall sell me food for money, that I may eat, and give me water for money, that I may drink; only let me pass through on foot, 29 just as the descendants of Esau who dwell in Seir and the Moabites who dwell in Ar did for me, until I cross the Jordan to the land which the Lord our God is giving us.'

30 "But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass through, for the Lord your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that He might deliver him into your hand, as *it is* this day.

31 "And the Lord said to me, 'See, I have begun to give Sihon and his land over to you. Begin to possess *it,* that you may inherit his land.' 32 Then Sihon and all his people came out against us to fight at Jahaz. 33 And the Lord our God delivered him over to us; so we defeated him, his sons, and all his people. 34 We took all his cities at that time, and we utterly destroyed the men, women, and little ones of every city; we left none remaining. 35 We took only the livestock as plunder for ourselves, with the spoil of the cities which we took. 36 From Aroer, which *is* on the bank of the River Arnon, and *from* the city that *is* in the ravine, as far as Gilead, there was not one city too strong for us; the Lord our God delivered all to us. 37 Only you did not go near the land of the people of Ammon—anywhere along the River Jabbok, or to the cities of the mountains, or wherever the Lord our God had forbidden us.

King Og Defeated

3 "Then we turned and went up the road to Bashan; and Og king of Bashan came out against us, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei. 2 And the Lord said to me, 'Do not fear him, for I have delivered him and all his people and his land into your hand; you shall do to him as you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt at Heshbon.'

3 "So the Lord our God also delivered into our hands Og king of Bashan, with all his people, and we attacked him until he had no survivors remaining. 4 And we took all his cities at that time; there was not a city which we did not take from them: sixty cities, all the region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan. 5 All these cities *were* fortified with high walls, gates, and bars, besides a great many rural towns. 6 And we utterly destroyed them, as we did to Sihon king of Heshbon, utterly destroying the men, women, and children of every city. 7 But all the livestock and the spoil of the cities we took as booty for ourselves.

8 "And at that time we took the land from the hand of the two kings of the Amorites who *were* on this side of the Jordan, from the River Arnon to Mount Hermon 9 (the Sidonians call Hermon Sirion, and the Amorites call it Senir), 10 all the cities of the plain, all Gilead, and all Bashan, as far as Salcah and Edrei, cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan.

11 "For only Og king of Bashan remained

2:20 [a] Hebrew *rephaim*

of the remnant of the giants.[a] Indeed his bedstead *was* an iron bedstead. (*Is* it not in Rabbah of the people of Ammon?) Nine cubits *is* its length and four cubits its width, according to the standard cubit.

The Land East of the Jordan Divided

12 "And this land, *which* we possessed at that time, from Aroer, which *is* by the River Arnon, and half the mountains of Gilead and its cities, I gave to the Reubenites and the Gadites. 13 The rest of Gilead, and all Bashan, the kingdom of Og, I gave to half the tribe of Manasseh. (All the region of Argob, with all Bashan, was called the land of the giants.[a] 14 Jair the son of Manasseh took all the region of Argob, as far as the border of the Geshurites and the Maachathites, and called Bashan after his own name, Havoth Jair,[a] to this day.)

15 "Also I gave Gilead to Machir. 16 And to the Reubenites and the Gadites I gave from Gilead as far as the River Arnon, the middle of the river as *the* border, as far as the River Jabbok, the border of the people of Ammon; 17 the plain also, with the Jordan as *the* border, from Chinnereth as far as the east side of the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea), below the slopes of Pisgah.

18 "Then I commanded you at that time, saying: 'The Lord your God has given you this land to possess. All you men of valor shall cross over armed before your brethren, the children of Israel. 19 But your wives, your little ones, and your livestock (I know that you have much livestock) shall stay in your cities which I have given you, 20 until the Lord has given rest to your brethren as to you, and they also possess the land which the Lord your God is giving them beyond the Jordan. Then each of you may return to his possession which I have given you.'

21 "And I commanded Joshua at that time, saying, 'Your eyes have seen all that the Lord your God has done to these two kings; so will the Lord do to all the kingdoms through which you pass. 22 You must not fear them, for the Lord your God Himself fights for you.'

Moses Forbidden to Enter the Land

23 "Then I pleaded with the Lord at that time, saying: 24 'O Lord God, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your mighty hand, for what god *is there* in heaven or on earth who can do *anything* like Your works and Your mighty *deeds?* 25 I pray, let me cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, those pleasant mountains, and Lebanon.'

26 "But the Lord was angry with me on your account, and would not listen to me. So the Lord said to me: 'Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter. 27 Go up to the top of Pisgah, and lift your eyes toward the west, the north, the south, and the east; behold *it* with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan. 28 But command Joshua, and encourage him and strengthen him; for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which you will see.'

29 "So we stayed in the valley opposite Beth Peor.

Moses Commands Obedience

4 "Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you. 2 You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you. 3 Your eyes have seen what the Lord did at Baal Peor; for the Lord your God has destroyed from among you all the men who followed Baal of Peor. 4 But you who held fast to the Lord your God *are* alive today, every one of you.

5 "Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according *to them* in the land which you go to possess. 6 Therefore be careful to observe *them;* for this *is* your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people.'

7 "For what great nation *is there* that has God *so* near to it, as the Lord our God *is* to us, for whatever *reason* we may call upon Him? 8 And what great nation *is there* that has *such*

3:11 [a]Hebrew *rephaim* **3:13** [a]Hebrew *rephaim* **3:14** [a]Literally *Towns of Jair*

statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?

9 "Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren, 10 *especially concerning* the day you stood before the Lord your God in Horeb, when the Lord said to me, 'Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and *that* they may teach their children.'

11 "Then you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the midst of heaven, with darkness, cloud, and thick darkness. 12 And the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but saw no form; *you* only *heard* a voice. 13 So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone. 14 And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might observe them in the land which you cross over to possess.

Beware of Idolatry

15 "Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, 16 lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female, 17 the likeness of any animal that *is* on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, 18 the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of any fish that *is* in the water beneath the earth. 19 And *take heed,* lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and *when* you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the Lord your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage. 20 But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be His people, an inheritance, as you are this day. 21 Furthermore the Lord was angry with me for your sakes, and swore that I would not cross over the Jordan, and that I would not enter the good land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance. 22 But I must die in this land, I must not cross over the Jordan; but you shall cross over and possess that good land. 23 Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the Lord your God has forbidden you. 24 For the Lord your God *is* a consuming fire, a jealous God.

25 "When you beget children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, and act corruptly and make a carved image in the form of anything, and do evil in the sight of the Lord your God to provoke Him to anger, 26 I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that you will soon utterly perish from the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess; you will not prolong *your* days in it, but will be utterly destroyed. 27 And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you. 28 And there you will serve gods, the work of

Life LESSONS

Deuteronomy 4:1–43

SITUATION
After forty years of wandering in the desert, Moses carried out God's instructions to teach the people and prepare them to enter the Promised Land.

OBSERVATION
God loves His people with a jealous love that leaves no room for idolatry or other sin.

INSPIRATION
Who has plumbed the depths of God's love? Only God has. "Want to see the size of my love?" He invites. "Ascend the winding path outside of Jerusalem. Follow the dots of bloody dirt until you crest the hill. Before looking up, pause and hear Me whisper, 'This is how much I love you.'"

Whip-ripped muscles drape His back. Blood rivulets over His face. His eyes and lips are swollen shut. Pain rages at wildfire intensity. As He sinks to relieve the agony of His legs, His airway closes. At the edge of suffocation, He shoves pierced muscles against the spike and inches up the Cross. He does this for hours. Painfully up and down until His strength and our doubts are gone.

Does God love you? Behold the Cross, and behold your answer.

God the Son died for you. Who could have imagined such a gift? (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Idolatry makes anything but God the highest priority in life. Do you value your relationship with God more than anything else? Or have you allowed money,

leisure, friendships—or anything else—to rule your life? Smash the idols in your life and make a fresh commitment to put God first. He alone is worthy of this position! He alone died for you.

EXPLORATION
God's Jealousy—Exodus 20:4–6; 34:14; Joshua 24:19, 20.

You were intended to live in your Father's house. Any place less than His is insufficient. Any place far from His is dangerous. Only the home built for your heart can protect your heart. And your Father wants you to dwell in Him.

—Max Lucado (The Great House of God)

men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. 29But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find *Him* if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. 30When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the Lord your God and obey His voice 31(for the Lord your God *is* a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them.

32"For ask now concerning the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and *ask* from one end of heaven to the other, whether *any* great *thing* like this has happened, or *anything* like it has been heard. 33Did *any* people *ever* hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and live? 34Or did God *ever* try to go *and* take for Himself a nation from the midst of *another* nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? 35To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord Himself *is* God; *there is* none other besides Him. 36Out of heaven He let you hear His voice, that He might instruct you; on earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words out of the midst of the fire. 37And because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them; and He brought you out of Egypt with His Presence, with His mighty power, 38driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land *as* an inheritance, as *it is* this day. 39Therefore know this day, and consider *it* in your heart, that the Lord Himself *is* God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; *there is* no other. 40You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong *your* days in the land which the Lord your God is giving you for all time."

Cities of Refuge East of the Jordan

41Then Moses set apart three cities on this side of the Jordan, toward the rising of the sun, 42that the manslayer might flee there, who kills his neighbor unintentionally, without having hated him in time past, and that by fleeing to one of these cities he might live: 43Bezer in the wilderness on the plateau for the Reubenites, Ramoth in Gilead for the Gadites, and Golan in Bashan for the Manassites.

Introduction to God's Law

44Now this *is* the law which Moses set before the children of Israel. 45These *are* the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which Moses spoke to the children of Israel after they came out of Egypt, 46on this side of the Jordan, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, in the land of Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt at Heshbon, whom Moses and the children of Israel defeated after they came out of Egypt. 47And they took possession of his land and the land of Og king of Bashan, two kings of the Amorites, who *were* on this side of the Jordan, toward the rising of the sun, 48from Aroer, which *is* on the bank of the River Arnon, even to Mount Sion[a] (that is, Hermon), 49and all

the plain on the east side of the Jordan as far as the Sea of the Arabah, below the slopes of Pisgah.

The Ten Commandments Reviewed

5 And Moses called all Israel, and said to them: "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your hearing today, that you may learn them and be careful to observe them. 2 The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. 3 The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, those who *are* here today, all of us who *are* alive. 4 The Lord talked with you face to face on the mountain from the midst of the fire. 5 I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord; for you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up the mountain. *He* said:

6 'I *am* the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

7 'You shall have no other gods before Me.

8 'You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness *of anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth; 9 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me, 10 but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

11 'You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold *him* guiltless who takes His name in vain.

12 'Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. 13 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 14 but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the Lord your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. 15 And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

16 'Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

17 'You shall not murder.

18 'You shall not commit adultery.

19 'You shall not steal.

20 'You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

21 'You shall not covet your neighbor's wife; and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything that *is* your neighbor's.'

22 "These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly, in the

4:48 [a] Syriac reads *Sirion* (compare 3:9).

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 4:44—5:33

SITUATION

Finally. The fortieth year of the Exodus from Egypt. Many Israelites had died since God gave the commandments at Mount Sinai. God held the entire nation responsible for obeying the commandments.

OBSERVATION

God longs for His people to abide by His stipulations, so that all will be well with them and the generations that follow them. It pleases Him when His people profess willingness to obey His commandments, but He knows their hearts will lead them to disobey.

INSPIRATION

You lose your temper. You lust. You fall. You take a drag. You buy a drink. You kiss the woman. You follow the crowd. You rationalize. You say yes. You sign your name. You forget who you are. You walk into her room. You look in the window. You break your promise. You buy the magazine. You lie. You covet. You stomp your feet and demand your way. You deny your Master.

It's David disrobing Bathsheba. It's Adam accepting the fruit from Eve. It's Abraham lying about Sarah. It's Peter denying that he ever knew Jesus. It's Noah, drunk and naked in his tent. It's Lot in bed with his own daughter. It's your worst nightmare. It's sudden. It's sin.

Satan numbs our awareness and short-circuits our self-control. We know what we are doing and yet can't believe that we

are doing it. In the fog of weakness we want to stop but haven't the will to do so. We want to turn around, but our feet won't move. We want to run and, pitifully, we want to stay. . . .

No one who is reading these words is free from the treachery of sudden sin. No one is immune to this trick of perdition. This demon of hell can scale the highest monastery wall, penetrate the deepest faith, and desecrate the purest home.

Some of you know exactly what I mean. You could write these words better than I, couldn't you? Some of you, like me, have tumbled so often that the stench of Satan's breath is far from a novelty. You've asked for God's forgiveness so often that you worry that the well of mercy might run dry. . . .

Romans chapter 7 is the Emancipation Proclamation for those of us who have a tendency to tumble. Look at verse 15: "For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do."

Sound familiar? Read on. Verses 18,19: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but **how** to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will **to do,** I do not do; but the evil I will not **to do,** that I practice,"

Man, that fellow has been reading my diary!

"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (v. 24).

Please, Paul, don't stop there! Is there no oasis in this barrenness of guilt? There is. Thank God and drink deeply as you read verse 25 and verse 1 of chapter 8: "I thank God—

mountain from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and He added no more. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me.

The People Afraid of God's Presence

23 "So it was, when you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, that you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders. 24 And you said: 'Surely the Lord our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire. We have seen this day that God speaks with man; yet he *still* lives. 25 Now therefore, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the Lord our God anymore, then we shall die. 26 For who *is there* of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we *have,* and lived? 27 You go near and hear all that the Lord our God may say, and tell us all that the Lord our God says to you, and we will hear and do *it.*'

28 "Then the Lord heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the Lord said to me: 'I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They are right *in* all that they have spoken. 29 Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever! 30 Go and say to them, "Return to your tents." 31 But as for you, stand here by Me, and I will speak to you all the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments which you shall teach them, that they may observe *them* in the land which I am giving them to possess.'

32 "Therefore you shall be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. 33 You shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live and *that it may be* well with you, and *that* you may prolong *your* days in the land which you shall possess.

The Greatest Commandment

6 "Now this *is* the commandment, *and these are* the statutes and judgments which the Lord your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe *them* in the land which you are crossing over to possess, 2 that you may fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. 3 Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe *it,* that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the Lord God of your fathers has promised you—'a land flowing with milk and honey.' [a]

4 "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord *is* one! [a] 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

6 "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when

6:3 [a]Exodus 3:8 **6:4** [a]Or *The Lord is our God, the Lord alone* (that is, the only one)

you lie down, and when you rise up. 8You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Caution Against Disobedience

10"So it shall be, when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, 11houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant—when you have eaten and are full— 12*then* beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. 13You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name. 14You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who *are* all around you 15(for the Lord your God *is* a jealous God among you), lest the anger of the Lord your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth.

16"You shall not tempt the Lord your God as you tempted *Him* in

New Life In Christ

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! — Deuteronomy 6:4

Hearing God's Voice

It's not that we don't have ears; it's that we don't use them.

Scripture has always placed a premium on hearing God's voice. Indeed, the great command from God through Moses began with the words, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!" (Deuteronomy 6:4). Nehemiah and his men were commended because they "were attentive" to the book of the Law (Nehemiah 8:3). "Blessed is the man who listens to me" is the promise of Proverbs 8:34. Jesus urges us to learn to listen like sheep. "The sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. . . . The sheep follow him, for they know his voice" (John 10:3, 4). Each of the seven churches in Revelation is addressed in the same manner: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Our ears, unlike our eyes, do not have lids. They are to remain open, but how easily they close. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

Question: What is God telling you in His Scriptures?

For more on "New Life in Christ," see page 323.

through Jesus Christ our Lord! . . . **There is** therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."

Amen. There it is. You read it right. Underline it if you wish. For those in Christ there is *no* condemnation. Absolutely none. Claim the promise. Memorize the words. Accept the cleansing. Throw out the guilt. Praise the Lord. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Every Christian has suffered from the guilt that comes after sin. Remember, Christ's forgiveness covers every sin, every time. Don't let guilt drag you down after you have been forgiven. Believe it when He says you're forgiven!

EXPLORATION

Confessing Sin—Luke 15:11–32; James 5:16; 1 John 1:8–10.

Life LESSONS

Deuteronomy 6:1—7:26

SITUATION
God repeated these commands because of their importance. God wanted parents to teach His commandments to their children.

OBSERVATION
God gives parents the responsibility to teach His law to their children. This requires spending time with children daily and telling them about the commands of God.

INSPIRATION
Never underestimate the ponderings of a Christian parent. Never underestimate the power that comes when a parent pleads with God on behalf of a child. Who knows how many prayers are being answered right now because of the faithful ponderings of a parent ten or twenty years ago? God listens to thoughtful parents.

Praying for our children is a noble task. If what we are doing, in this fast-paced society, is taking us away from prayer time for our children, we're doing too much. There is nothing more special, more precious than that time that a parent spends struggling and pondering with God on behalf of a child.

It's not too late for the child who has brought only tears. Think of Jesus' parents; the mother who had to watch her son crucified saw her son raised from the dead. Though you may go to the grave wondering if your prayers will ever be answered, don't stop praying. God blesses faithfulness. (From

Massah. 17You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, His testimonies, and His statutes which He has commanded you. 18And you shall do *what is* right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may be well with you, and that you may go in and possess the good land of which the Lord swore to your fathers, 19to cast out all your enemies from before you, as the Lord has spoken.

20"When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What *is the meaning of* the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the Lord our God has commanded you?' 21then you shall say to your son: 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; 22and the Lord showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household. 23Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers. 24And the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as *it is* this day. 25Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us.'

A Chosen People

7 "When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, 2and when the Lord your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them *and* utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. 3Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. 4For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the Lord will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. 5But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their *sacred* pillars, and cut down their wooden images,[a] and burn their carved images with fire.

6"For you *are* a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. 7The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; 8but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

9"Therefore know that the Lord your God, He *is* God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; 10and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. 11Therefore

7:5 [a]Hebrew *Asherim,* Canaanite deities

you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them.

Blessings of Obedience

12 "Then it shall come to pass, because you listen to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the Lord your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers. 13 And He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your land, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flock, in the land of which He swore to your fathers to give you. 14 You shall be blessed above all peoples; there shall not be a male or female barren among you or among your livestock. 15 And the Lord will take away from you all sickness, and will afflict you with none of the terrible diseases of Egypt which you have known, but will lay *them* on all those who hate you. 16 Also you shall destroy all the peoples whom the Lord your God delivers over to you; your eye shall have no pity on them; nor shall you serve their gods, for that *will be* a snare to you.

17 "If you should say in your heart, 'These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them?'— 18 you shall not be afraid of them, *but* you shall remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt: 19 the great trials which your eyes saw, the signs and the wonders, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm, by which the Lord your God brought you out. So shall the Lord your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid. 20 Moreover the Lord your God will send the hornet among them until those who are left, who hide themselves from you, are destroyed. 21 You shall not be terrified of them; for the Lord your God, the great and awesome God, *is* among you. 22 And the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you little by little; you will be unable to destroy them at once, lest the beasts of the field become *too* numerous for you. 23 But the Lord your God will deliver them over to you, and will inflict defeat upon them until they are destroyed. 24 And He will deliver their kings into your hand, and you will destroy their name from under heaven; no one shall be able to stand against you until you have destroyed them. 25 You shall burn the carved images of their gods with fire; you shall not covet the silver or gold *that is* on them, nor take *it* for yourselves, lest you be snared by it; for it *is* an abomination to the Lord your God. 26 Nor shall you bring an abomination into your house, lest you be doomed to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest it and utterly abhor it, for it *is* an accursed thing.

Remember the Lord Your God

8 "Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers. 2 And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you *and* test you, to know what *was* in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. 3 So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He

The Inspirational Bible, "Parents")

APPLICATION
Spend time with your children, instructing them in the ways of God, modeling for them a Christ-centered lifestyle. Pray for your children daily. Pray that they would know and follow the one and only true God.

EXPLORATION
Commandments to Children—Exodus 20:12; Proverbs 1:8; 3:1–3; 23:22; Colossians 3:20.

Nature is God's workshop. The sky is His resume. The universe is His calling card.

—Max Lucado (The Great House of God)

might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every *word* that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. 4Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. 5You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, *so* the Lord your God chastens you.

6"Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him. 7For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; 8a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; 9a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones *are* iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper. 10When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you.

11"Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, 12lest—*when* you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell *in them;* 13and *when* your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; 14when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; 15who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, *in which were* fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; 16who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end— 17then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.'

18"And you shall remember the Lord your God, for *it is* He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as *it is* this day. 19Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the Lord your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. 20As the nations which the Lord destroys before you, so you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the Lord your God.

Israel's Rebellions Reviewed

9 "Hear, O Israel: You *are* to cross over the Jordan today, and go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than yourself, cities great and fortified up to heaven, 2a people great and tall, the descendants of the Anakim, whom you know, and *of whom* you heard *it said,* 'Who can stand before the descendants of Anak?' 3Therefore understand today that the Lord your God *is* He who goes over before you *as* a consuming fire. He will destroy them and bring them down before you; so you shall drive them out and destroy them quickly, as the Lord has said to you.

4"Do not think in your heart, after the Lord your God has cast them out before you, saying, 'Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land'; but *it is* because of the wickedness

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 8:1—9:29

SITUATION

The Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land. They had experienced important victories, enjoyed unprecedented prosperity, and achieved a homeland. But with these blessings came certain risks that the people would forget God, that they would lose their belief and develop false pride of self-achievement. To avoid these dangers the people had to remember their past and how God had helped them. That would keep them properly focused.

OBSERVATION

Remember God's protection and bountiful provisions. Let these memories keep you humble, thankful, and full of belief. Keep your gaze on Jesus.

INSPIRATION

Whether or not storms come, we cannot choose. But where we stare during a storm, that we can. I found a direct example of this truth while sitting in my cardiologist's office. My heart rate was misbehaving, taking the pace of a NASCAR race and the rhythm of a Morse code message. So I went to a specialist. After reviewing my tests and asking me some questions, the doctor nodded knowingly and told me to wait for him in his office.

I didn't like being sent to the principal's office as a kid. I don't like being sent to the doctor's office as a patient. But I went in, took a seat, and quickly noticed the doctor's abundant harvest of diplomas. They were everywhere, from

of these nations *that* the Lord is driving them out from before you. 5*It is* not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart *that* you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations *that* the Lord your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 6Therefore understand that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you *are* a stiff–necked people.

7"Remember! Do not forget how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day that you departed from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord. 8Also in Horeb you provoked the Lord to wrath, so that the Lord was angry *enough* with you to have destroyed you. 9When I went up into the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the Lord made with you, then I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water. 10Then the Lord delivered to me two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them *were* all the words which the Lord had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly. 11And it came to pass, at the end of forty days and forty nights, *that* the Lord gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant.

12"Then the Lord said to me, 'Arise, go down quickly from here, for your people whom you brought out of Egypt have acted corruptly; they have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them; they have made themselves a molded image.'

13"Furthermore the Lord spoke to me, saying, 'I have seen this people, and indeed they are a stiff–necked people. 14Let Me alone, that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of you a nation mightier and greater than they.'

15"So I turned and came down from the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire; and the two tablets of the covenant *were* in my two hands. 16And I looked, and behold, you had sinned against the Lord your God—had made for yourselves a molded calf! You had turned aside quickly from the way which the Lord had commanded you. 17Then I took the two tablets and threw them out of my two hands and broke them before your eyes. 18And I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you committed in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. 19For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the Lord was angry with you, to destroy you. But the Lord listened to me at that time also. 20And the Lord was very angry with Aaron *and* would have destroyed him; so I prayed for Aaron also at the same time. 21Then I took your sin, the calf which you had made, and burned it with fire and crushed it *and* ground *it* very small, until it was as fine as dust; and I threw its dust into the brook that descended from the mountain.

22"Also at Taberah and Massah and Kibroth Hattaavah you provoked the Lord to wrath. 23Likewise, when the Lord sent you from Kadesh Barnea, saying, 'Go up and possess the land which I have given you,' then you rebelled against the commandment of the Lord

everywhere. One degree from the university. Another degree from a residency. The third degree from his wife. (I'm pausing to see if you caught the joke . . .) The more I looked at his accomplishments, the better I felt. *I'm in good hands.* About the time I leaned back in the chair to relax, his nurse entered and handed me a sheet of paper. "The doctor will be in shortly," she explained. "In the meantime he wants you to acquaint yourself with this information. It summarizes your heart condition."

I lowered my gaze from the diplomas to the summary of the disorder. As I read, contrary winds began to blow. Unwelcome words like *atrial fibrillation, arrhythmia, embolic stroke,* and *blood clot* caused me to sink into my own Sea of Galilee.

What happened to my peace? I was feeling much better a moment ago. So I changed strategies. I counteracted diagnosis with diplomas. In between paragraphs of bad news, I looked at the wall for reminders of good news. That's what God wants us to do.

His call to courage is not a call to naïveté or ignorance. We aren't to be oblivious to the overwhelming challenges that life brings. We're to counterbalance them with long looks at God's accomplishments. "We must *pay much closer attention* to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it" (Hebrews 2:1 NASB). Do whatever it takes to keep your gaze on Jesus. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How are your beliefs changing? Growing or dissolving? Maturing or disintegrating? Hang on

to the elements in your life that promote growth. Cut off activities and relationships that cause you to sin and replace them with ones that help you grow.

EXPLORATION
Unbelief—Exodus 11:9, 10; Deuteronomy 9:23; Romans 11:20; Hebrews 3:19.

your God, and you did not believe Him nor obey His voice. 24You have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you.

25"Thus I prostrated myself before the Lord; forty days and forty nights I kept prostrating myself, because the Lord had said He would destroy you. 26Therefore I prayed to the Lord, and said: 'O Lord God, do not destroy Your people and Your inheritance whom You have redeemed through Your greatness, whom You have brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. 27Remember Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; do not look on the stubbornness of this people, or on their wickedness or their sin, 28lest the land from which You brought us should say, "Because the Lord was not able to bring them to the land which He promised them, and because He hated them, He has brought them out to kill them in the wilderness." 29Yet they *are* Your people and Your inheritance, whom You brought out by Your mighty power and by Your outstretched arm.'

The Second Pair of Tablets

10 "At that time the Lord said to me, 'Hew for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and come up to Me on the mountain and make yourself an ark of wood. 2And I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke; and you shall put them in the ark.'

3"So I made an ark of acacia wood, hewed two tablets of stone like the first, and went up the mountain, having the two tablets in my hand. 4And He wrote on the tablets according to the first writing, the Ten Commandments, which the Lord had spoken to you in the mountain from the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly; and the Lord gave them to me. 5Then I turned and came down from the mountain, and put the tablets in the ark which I had made; and there they are, just as the Lord commanded me."

6(Now the children of Israel journeyed from the wells of Bene Jaakan to Moserah, where Aaron died, and where he was buried; and Eleazar his son ministered as priest in his stead. 7From there they journeyed to Gudgodah, and from Gudgodah to Jotbathah, a land of rivers of water. 8At that time the Lord separated the tribe of Levi to bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister to Him and to bless in His name, to this day. 9Therefore Levi has no portion nor inheritance with his brethren; the Lord *is* his inheritance, just as the Lord your God promised him.)

10"As at the first time, I stayed in the mountain forty days and forty nights; the Lord also heard me at that time, *and* the Lord chose not to destroy you. 11Then the Lord said to me, 'Arise, begin *your* journey before the people, that they may go in and possess the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.'

The Essence of the Law

12"And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13*and* to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today for your good? 14Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the Lord your God, *also* the earth with all that *is*

in it. 15The Lord delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as *it is* this day. 16Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff–necked no longer. 17For the Lord your God *is* God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. 18He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. 19Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. 20You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast, and take oaths in His name. 21He *is* your praise, and He *is* your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things which your eyes have seen. 22Your fathers went down to Egypt with seventy persons, and now the Lord your God has made you as the stars of heaven in multitude.

Love and Obedience Rewarded

11 "Therefore you shall love the Lord your God, and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments always. 2Know today that *I do* not *speak* with your children, who have not known and who have not seen the chastening of the Lord your God, His greatness and His mighty hand and His outstretched arm— 3His signs and His acts which He did in the midst of Egypt, to Pharaoh king of Egypt, and to all his land; 4what He did to the army of Egypt, to their horses and their chariots: how He made the waters of the Red Sea overflow them as they pursued you, and *how* the Lord has destroyed them to this day; 5what He did for you in the wilderness until you came to this place; 6and what He did to Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben: how the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, their households, their tents, and all the substance that *was* in their possession, in the midst of all Israel— 7but your eyes have seen every great act of the Lord which He did.

8"Therefore you shall keep every commandment which I command you today, that you may be strong, and go in and possess the land which you cross over to possess, 9and that you may prolong *your* days in the land which the Lord swore to give your fathers, to them and their descendants, 'a land flowing with milk and honey.'[a] 10For the land which you go to possess *is* not like the land of Egypt from which you have come, where you sowed your seed and watered *it* by foot, as a vegetable garden; 11but the land which you cross over to possess *is* a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven, 12a land for which the Lord your God cares; the eyes of the Lord your God *are* always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year.

13'And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, 14then I[a] will give *you* the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil. 15And I will send grass in your fields for your livestock, that you may eat and

11:9 [a]Exodus 3:8 **11:14** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, and Vulgate read *He*.

Life LESSONS

Deuteronomy 10:1—11:32

SITUATION
Moses continued to emphasize the requirements for a personal relationship with a holy God. He reminded the Israelites that God gave moral laws and that they were for their benefit. God set before Israel a blessing and a curse.

OBSERVATION
The Lord wants us to worship and praise Him because the Lord has done great and wonderful things for us.

INSPIRATION
To the demoted and demeaned, Jesus directs His leadoff verb. "For God so *loved* the world . . ." *Love.* We've all but worn out the word. This morning I used *love* to describe my feelings toward my wife and toward peanut butter. Far from identical emotions. I've never proposed to a jar of peanut butter (though I have let one sit on my lap during a television show). Overuse has defused the word, leaving it with the punch of a butterfly wing.

Biblical options still retain their starch. Scripture employs an artillery of terms for love, each one calibrated to reach a different target. Consider the one Moses used with his followers: "The Lord delighted only in your fathers, to love them" (Deuteronomy 10:15).

This passage warms our hearts. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Israel was called to praise God because God had already fulfilled part of the promise He had made

to the nation. Praise God by making a list of all the blessings He has given you. Then thank God for His work in your life.

EXPLORATION
Praising God—Psalm 138; 146—150; Philippians 4:8; Colossians 3:16, 17; James 5:13.

We are always in the presence of God. We never leave church. There is never a nonsacred moment!

—Max Lucado (Just Like Jesus)

be filled.' 16Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, 17lest the Lord's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the Lord is giving you.

18"Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 19You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. 20And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, 21that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth.

22"For if you carefully keep all these commandments which I command you to do—to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, and to hold fast to Him— 23then the Lord will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess greater and mightier nations than yourselves. 24Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the River Euphrates, even to the Western Sea,[a] shall be your territory. 25No man shall be able to stand against you; the Lord your God will put the dread of you and the fear of you upon all the land where you tread, just as He has said to you.

26"Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: 27the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you today; 28and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known. 29Now it shall be, when the Lord your God has brought you into the land which you go to possess, that you shall put the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal. 30*Are* they not on the other side of the Jordan, toward the setting sun, in the land of the Canaanites who dwell in the plain opposite Gilgal, beside the terebinth trees of Moreh? 31For you will cross over the Jordan and go in to possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you, and you will possess it and dwell in it. 32And you shall be careful to observe all the statutes and judgments which I set before you today.

A Prescribed Place of Worship

12 "These *are* the statutes and judgments which you shall be careful to observe in the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth. 2You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. 3And you shall destroy their altars, break their *sacred* pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place. 4You shall not worship the Lord your God *with* such *things*.

11:24 [a]That is, the Mediterranean

5 "But you shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses,
out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and
there you shall go. 6 There you shall take your burnt offerings, your
sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed
offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and
flocks. 7 And there you shall eat before the Lord your God, and you
shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your
households, in which the Lord your God has blessed you.

8 "You shall not at all do as we are doing here today—every man do-
ing whatever *is* right in his own eyes— 9 for as yet you have not come
to the rest and the inheritance which the Lord your God is giving you.
10 But *when* you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the
Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all
your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety, 11 then there
will be the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name
abide. There you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offer-
ings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, and
all your choice offerings which you vow to the Lord. 12 And you shall
rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your sons and your daugh-
ters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who *is* within your
gates, since he has no portion nor inheritance with you. 13 Take heed
to yourself that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place
that you see; 14 but in the place which the Lord chooses, in one of your
tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall
do all that I command you.

15 "However, you may slaughter and eat meat within all your gates,
whatever your heart desires, according to the blessing of the Lord your
God which He has given you; the unclean and the clean may eat of it,
of the gazelle and the deer alike. 16 Only you shall not eat the blood;
you shall pour it on the earth like water. 17 You may not eat within your
gates the tithe of your grain or your new wine or your oil, of the first-
born of your herd or your flock, of any of your offerings which you
vow, of your freewill offerings, or of the heave offering of your hand.
18 But you must eat them before the Lord your God in the place which
the Lord your God chooses, you and your son and your daughter, your
male servant and your female servant, and the Levite who *is* within
your gates; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God in all to
which you put your hands. 19 Take heed to yourself that you do not
forsake the Levite as long as you live in your land.

20 "When the Lord your God enlarges your border as He has prom-
ised you, and you say, 'Let me eat meat,' because you long to eat meat,
you may eat as much meat as your heart desires. 21 If the place where
the Lord your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, then
you may slaughter from your herd and from your flock which the Lord
has given you, just as I have commanded you, and you may eat within
your gates as much as your heart desires. 22 Just as the gazelle and the
deer are eaten, so you may eat them; the unclean and the clean alike
may eat them. 23 Only be sure that you do not eat the blood, for the
blood *is* the life; you may not eat the life with the meat. 24 You shall
not eat it; you shall pour it on the earth like water. 25 You shall not eat
it, that it may go well with you and your children after you, when you
do *what is* right in the sight of the Lord. 26 Only the holy things which

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 12:1—13:18

SITUATION

Moses continued to prepare the Israelites to inhabit their new land. He reminded them of the Ten Commandments, their special place in God's eyes, and all the wondrous blessings God would give them.

OBSERVATION

The Israelites demonstrated that worship of God must be free from idolatry. God even used false prophets in order to test God's people.

INSPIRATION

If Christ is not raised, if His body is decayed into dust, what are you left with?

How about Eastern mysticism? Let's travel back in time and around the globe to India. It's 490 B.C., and Buddha is willing to see us. Here is our question: "Can you defeat death?" He never opens his eyes, just shakes his head. "You are disillusioned, dear child. Seek enlightenment."

So we do. By virtue of a vigorous imagination, we travel to Greece to meet with the father of logic, Socrates. He offers a sip of hemlock, but we pass, explaining that we have only one question. "Do you have power over the grave? Are you the Son of Zeus?" He scratches his bald head and calls us *raca* (Greek for turkey brains).

Undeterred, we advance a thousand years and locate the ancient village of Mecca. A bearded Muhammad sits in the midst of followers. From the back of the crowd we cry out, "We are looking for Allah incarnate. Are you

he?" He stands and rips his robe and demands that we be banished for such heresy.

But we escape. We escape back in time to Jerusalem. We ascend the stairs of a simple house where the King of the Jews is holding court. The room is crowded with earnest disciples. As we find a seat, we look into the radiant face of the resurrected Christ. The love in His eyes is as real as the wounds on His body.

If we ask the question of Him—"Are You raised from the dead? Are You the Son of God?"—we know His answer.

Jesus might well personalize the words He gave to the angel. "I am raised from the dead as I said I would be. Come and see the place where My body was."

Quite a claim. Just like passengers in the airport about to board a plane, we get to choose how we respond. Either board and trust the pilot—or try to get home on our own.

I know which choice I prefer. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

One of the best ways to avoid false teachers and their teachings is to know the Word of God. Apply yourself to reading and studying the Word of God daily.

EXPLORATION

False Prophets—Deuteronomy 18:22; Jeremiah 14:13–16; Matthew 7:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:6–9.

you have, and your vowed offerings, you shall take and go to the place which the Lord chooses. 27And you shall offer your burnt offerings, the meat and the blood, on the altar of the Lord your God; and the blood of your sacrifices shall be poured out on the altar of the Lord your God, and you shall eat the meat. 28Observe and obey all these words which I command you, that it may go well with you and your children after you forever, when you do *what is* good and right in the sight of the Lord your God.

Beware of False Gods

29"When the Lord your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, 30take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' 31You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way; for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.

32"Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.

Punishment of Apostates

13 "If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, 2and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods'—which you have not known—'and let us serve them,' 3you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 4You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. 5But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn *you* away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst.

6"If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, 7of the gods of the people which *are* all around you, near to you or far off from you, from *one* end of the earth to the *other* end of the earth, 8you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; 9but you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. 10And you shall stone him with stones until he dies, because he sought to entice you away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. 11So all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you.

12 "If you hear someone in one of your cities, which the Lord your
God gives you to dwell in, saying, 13 'Corrupt men have gone out from
among you and enticed the inhabitants of their city, saying, "Let us
go and serve other gods" '—which you have not known— 14 then you
shall inquire, search out, and ask diligently. And *if it is* indeed true
and certain *that* such an abomination was committed among you,
15 you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of
the sword, utterly destroying it, all that is in it and its livestock—with
the edge of the sword. 16 And you shall gather all its plunder into the
middle of the street, and completely burn with fire the city and all its
plunder, for the Lord your God. It shall be a heap forever; it shall not
be built again. 17 So none of the accursed things shall remain in your
hand, that the Lord may turn from the fierceness of His anger and
show you mercy, have compassion on you and multiply you, just as
He swore to your fathers, 18 because you have listened to the voice of
the Lord your God, to keep all His commandments which I command
you today, to do *what is* right in the eyes of the Lord your God.

Improper Mourning

14 "You *are* the children of the Lord your God; you shall not cut
yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead. 2 For
you *are* a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen
you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples
who *are* on the face of the earth.

Clean and Unclean Meat

3 "You shall not eat any detestable thing. 4 These *are* the animals
which you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat, 5 the deer, the gazelle,
the roe deer, the wild goat, the mountain goat,[a] the antelope, and the
mountain sheep. 6 And you may eat every animal with cloven hooves,
having the hoof split into two parts, *and that* chews the cud, among
the animals. 7 Nevertheless, of those that chew the cud or have cloven
hooves, you shall not eat, *such as* these: the camel, the hare, and the
rock hyrax; for they chew the cud but do not have cloven hooves; they
are unclean for you. 8 Also the swine is unclean for you, because it has
cloven hooves, yet *does* not *chew* the cud; you shall not eat their flesh
or touch their dead carcasses.

9 "These you may eat of all that *are* in the waters: you may eat all
that have fins and scales. 10 And whatever does not have fins and
scales you shall not eat; it *is* unclean for you.

11 "All clean birds you may eat. 12 But these you shall not eat: the
eagle, the vulture, the buzzard, 13 the red kite, the falcon, and the kite
after their kinds; 14 every raven after its kind; 15 the ostrich, the short–
eared owl, the sea gull, and the hawk after their kinds; 16 the little owl,
the screech owl, the white owl, 17 the jackdaw, the carrion vulture, the
fisher owl, 18 the stork, the heron after its kind, and the hoopoe and
the bat.

19 "Also every creeping thing that flies is unclean for you; they shall
not be eaten.

20 "You may eat all clean birds.

14:5 [a] Or *addax*

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 14:1—16:20

SITUATION

God prepared Israel to inhabit the Promised Land. Everything He told the Israelites was designed to protect them from forgetting God and turning to idolatry.

OBSERVATION

God gave the Israelites rules that helped them keep His priorities. The principles we follow today also help us keep perspectives right. He also gave them holidays and times of celebration. God wants us to have joy in our relationship with Him.

INSPIRATION

May I state an opinion that may raise an eyebrow? May I tell you why I think Jesus went to the wedding? I think he went to the wedding to—now hold on, hear me out, let me say it before you heat the tar and pluck the feathers—I think Jesus went to the wedding to have fun.

Think about it. It's been a tough season. Forty days in the desert. No food or water. A standoff with the devil. A week breaking in some greenhorn Galileans. A job change. He's left home. It hasn't been easy. A break would be welcome. Good meal with some good wine and some good friends . . . well, it sounds pretty nice.

So off they go.

His purpose wasn't to turn the water to wine. That was a favor for His friends.

His purpose wasn't to show His power. The wedding host didn't even know what Jesus did.

His purpose wasn't to

preach. There is no record of a sermon.

Really leaves only one reason. Fun. Jesus went to the wedding because He liked the people, He liked the food, and heaven forbid, He may have even wanted to swirl the bride around the dance floor a time or two.

So, forgive me, Deacon Drydust and Sister Somberheart. I'm sorry to rain on your dirge, but Jesus was a likable fellow. And His disciples should be the same. I'm not talking debauchery, drunkenness, and adultery. I'm not endorsing compromise, coarseness, or obscenity. I am simply crusading for the freedom to enjoy a good joke, enliven a dull party, and appreciate a fun evening.

Maybe these thoughts catch you by surprise. They do me. It's been awhile since I pegged Jesus as a party lover. But He was. His foes accused Him of eating too much, drinking too much, and hanging out with the wrong people! (See Matthew 11:19.) I must confess: it's been a while since I've been accused of having too much fun. How about you?

We used to be good at it. What has happened to us? What happened to clean joy and loud laughter? Is it our neckties that choke us? Is it our diplomas that dignify us? Is it the pew that stiffens us? . . .

Loosen up. Don't you have some people to hug, rocks to skip, or lips to kiss? Someone needs to laugh at Bugs Bunny; might as well be you. Someday you're going to learn to paint; might as well be now. Someday you're going to retire; why not today?

Not retire from your job, just retire from your

21 "You shall not eat anything that dies *of itself;* you may give it to
the alien who *is* within your gates, that he may eat it, or you may sell it
to a foreigner; for you *are* a holy people to the Lord your God.
"You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.

Tithing Principles

22 "You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field
produces year by year. 23 And you shall eat before the Lord your God,
in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of
your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your
herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the Lord your God
always. 24 But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able
to carry *the tithe, or* if the place where the Lord your God chooses to
put His name is too far from you, when the Lord your God has blessed
you, 25 then you shall exchange *it* for money, take the money in your
hand, and go to the place which the Lord your God chooses. 26 And
you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen
or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires;
you shall eat there before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice, you
and your household. 27 You shall not forsake the Levite who *is* within
your gates, for he has no part nor inheritance with you.

28 "At the end of *every* third year you shall bring out the tithe of
your produce of that year and store *it* up within your gates. 29 And the
Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the
stranger and the fatherless and the widow who *are* within your gates,
may come and eat and be satisfied, that the Lord your God may bless
you in all the work of your hand which you do.

Debts Canceled Every Seven Years

15 "At the end of *every* seven years you shall grant a release *of debts.*
2 And this *is* the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent
anything to his neighbor shall release *it;* he shall not require *it* of his
neighbor or his brother, because it is called the Lord's release. 3 Of a
foreigner you may require *it;* but you shall give up your claim to what
is owed by your brother, 4 except when there may be no poor among
you; for the Lord will greatly bless you in the land which the Lord your
God is giving you to possess *as* an inheritance— 5 only if you carefully
obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe with care all these
commandments which I command you today. 6 For the Lord your God
will bless you just as He promised you; you shall lend to many nations,
but you shall not borrow; you shall reign over many nations, but they
shall not reign over you.

Generosity to the Poor

7 "If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of
the gates in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall
not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother,
8 but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him suf-
ficient for his need, whatever he needs. 9 Beware lest there be a wicked
thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of release, is
at hand,' and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give
him nothing, and he cry out to the Lord against you, and it become sin

among you. 10You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand. 11For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'

The Law Concerning Bondservants

12"If your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and serves you six years, then in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. 13And when you send him away free from you, you shall not let him go away empty–handed; 14you shall supply him liberally from your flock, from your threshing floor, and from your winepress. *From what* the Lord your God has blessed you with, you shall give to him. 15You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this thing today. 16And if it happens that he says to you, 'I will not go away from you,' because he loves you and your house, since he prospers with you, 17then you shall take an awl and thrust *it* through his ear to the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also to your female servant you shall do likewise. 18It shall not seem hard to you when you send him away free from you; for he has been worth a double hired servant in serving you six years. Then the Lord your God will bless you in all that you do.

The Law Concerning Firstborn Animals

19"All the firstborn males that come from your herd and your flock you shall sanctify to the Lord your God; you shall do no work with the firstborn of your herd, nor shear the firstborn of your flock. 20You and your household shall eat *it* before the Lord your God year by year in the place which the Lord chooses. 21But if there is a defect in it, *if it is* lame or blind *or has* any serious defect, you shall not sacrifice it to the Lord your God. 22You may eat it within your gates; the unclean and the clean *person* alike *may eat it,* as *if it were* a gazelle or a deer. 23Only you shall not eat its blood; you shall pour it on the ground like water.

The Passover Reviewed

16 "Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover to the Lord your God, for in the month of Abib the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt by night. 2Therefore you shall sacrifice the Passover to the Lord your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place where the Lord chooses to put His name. 3You shall eat no leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it, *that is,* the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), that you may remember the day in which you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life. 4And no leaven shall be seen among you in all your territory for seven days, nor shall *any* of the meat which you sacrifice the first day at twilight remain overnight until morning.

5"You may not sacrifice the Passover within any of your gates which the Lord your God gives you; 6but at the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide, there you shall sacrifice the

attitude. Honestly, has complaining ever made the day better? Has grumbling ever paid the bills? Has worrying about tomorrow ever changed it?

Let someone else run the world for a while.

Jesus took time for a party . . . shouldn't we? (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Remind yourself of what is important. Take some time to just enjoy all that God has given you. Take a walk with your family. Send money to someone in need. Be a volunteer. Spend time worshiping God. Allow your perspective to be refocused.

EXPLORATION

Giving—Deuteronomy 15:7; Proverbs 25:21; Matthew 6:3; Luke 12:33; Romans 12:8; 2 Corinthians 9:7.

Passover at twilight, at the going down of the sun, at the time you came out of Egypt. 7And you shall roast and eat *it* in the place which the Lord your God chooses, and in the morning you shall turn and go to your tents. 8Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there *shall be* a sacred assembly to the Lord your God. You shall do no work *on it.*

The Feast of Weeks Reviewed

9"You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from *the time* you begin *to put* the sickle to the grain. 10Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the Lord your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the Lord your God blesses you. 11You shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who *is* within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who *are* among you, at the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide. 12And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.

The Feast of Tabernacles Reviewed

13"You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. 14And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who *are* within your gates. 15Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the Lord your God in the place which the Lord chooses, because the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice.

16"Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the Lord empty–handed. 17Every man *shall give* as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you.

Justice Must Be Administered

18"You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the Lord your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. 19You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. 20You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

21"You shall not plant for yourself any tree, as a wooden image, near the altar which you build for yourself to the Lord your God. 22You shall not set up a *sacred* pillar, which the Lord your God hates.

17 "You shall not sacrifice to the Lord your God a bull or sheep which has any blemish *or* defect, for that *is* an abomination to the Lord your God.

2"If there is found among you, within any of your gates which the

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 16:21—18:22

SITUATION

Moses gave civil laws for ruling the nation. Even in this area, strict compliance with God's rules was necessary in order to avoid harsh punishment. Worshiping other gods would not be tolerated. The people were to comply with instructions from courts, kings, priests, and prophets. They were to be wary of kings who were tempted by wealth and power, and prophets whose predictions were not fulfilled.

OBSERVATION

God provided precise instructions to the Israelites for governing themselves and honoring the divine moral code. He also told the people of a prophet who would come, one of their own, to whom they should listen. This is a prophecy of the coming of Jesus (18:15).

INSPIRATION

Jesus gives the invitation. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" [Revelation 3:20]. To know God is to receive His invitation. Not just to hear it, not just to study it, not just to acknowledge it, but to receive it. It is possible to learn much about God's invitation and never respond to it personally.

Yet His invitation is clear and nonnegotiable. He gives all and we give Him all. Simple and absolute. He is clear in what He asks and clear in what He offers. The choice is up to us.

Isn't it incredible that God leaves the choice to us? Think about it. There are many things in life we

Lord your God gives you, a man or a woman who has been wicked in the sight of the Lord your God, in transgressing His covenant, 3who has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, either the sun or moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded, 4and it is told you, and you hear *of it,* then you shall inquire diligently. And if *it is* indeed true *and* certain that such an abomination has been committed in Israel, 5then you shall bring out to your gates that man or woman who has committed that wicked thing, and shall stone to death that man or woman with stones. 6Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness. 7The hands of the witnesses shall be the first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So you shall put away the evil from among you.

8"If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, between degrees of guilt for bloodshed, between one judgment or another, or between one punishment or another, matters of controversy within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the Lord your God chooses. 9And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge *there* in those days, and inquire *of them;* they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment. 10You shall do according to the sentence which they pronounce upon you in that place which the Lord chooses. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they order you. 11According to the sentence of the law in which they instruct you, according to the judgment which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside *to* the right hand or *to* the left from the sentence which they pronounce upon you. 12Now the man who acts presumptuously and will not heed the priest who stands to minister there before the Lord your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So you shall put away the evil from Israel. 13And all the people shall hear and fear, and no longer act presumptuously.

Principles Governing Kings

14"When you come to the land which the Lord your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, 'I will set a king over me like all the nations that *are* around me,' 15you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses; *one* from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who *is* not your brother. 16But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the Lord has said to you, 'You shall not return that way again.' 17Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.

18"Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from *the one* before the priests, the Levites. 19And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, 20that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment *to* the right hand or *to* the left, and that he may prolong *his* days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.

can't choose. We can't, for example, choose the weather. We can't control the economy.

We can't choose whether or not we are born with a big nose or blue eyes or a lot of hair. We can't even choose how people respond to us.

But we can choose where we spend eternity. The big choice, God leaves to us. The critical decision is ours.

What are you doing with God's invitation?

What are you doing with His personal request that you live with Him forever?

That is the only decision that really matters. Whether or not you take the job transfer is not critical. Whether or not you buy a new car is not crucial. What college you choose or what profession you select is important, but not compared to where you spend eternity. That is the decision you will remember.

What are you doing with His invitation? (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

We like to rebel against laws when they limit our freedom. But God's law blesses us because it protects us and simplifies our decision-making. When we decide to become part of God's family, we discover that His rules become like moral guideposts, helping our trail through life have fewer twists and dead ends.

EXPLORATION

God's Law—Exodus 15:25; Leviticus 19; Galatians 2:15, 16.

The Portion of the Priests and Levites

18 "The priests, the Levites—all the tribe of Levi—shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel; they shall eat the offerings of the Lord made by fire, and His portion. 2Therefore they shall have no inheritance among their brethren; the Lord is their inheritance, as He said to them.

3"And this shall be the priest's due from the people, from those who offer a sacrifice, whether *it is* bull or sheep: they shall give to the priest the shoulder, the cheeks, and the stomach. 4The firstfruits of your grain and your new wine and your oil, and the first of the fleece of your sheep, you shall give him. 5For the Lord your God has chosen him out of all your tribes to stand to minister in the name of the Lord, him and his sons forever.

6"So if a Levite comes from any of your gates, from where he dwells among all Israel, and comes with all the desire of his mind to the place which the Lord chooses, 7then he may serve in the name of the Lord his God as all his brethren the Levites *do,* who stand there before the Lord. 8They shall have equal portions to eat, besides what comes from the sale of his inheritance.

Avoid Wicked Customs

9"When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. 10There shall not be found among you *anyone* who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, *or one* who practices witchcraft, *or* a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, 11or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. 12For all who do these things *are* an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out from before you. 13You shall be blameless before the Lord your God. 14For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the Lord your God has not appointed such for you.

A New Prophet Like Moses

15"The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, 16according to all you desired of the Lord your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.'

17"And the Lord said to me: 'What they have spoken is good. 18I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. 19And it shall be *that* whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require *it* of him. 20But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' 21And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?'— 22when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that *is* the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

Three Cities of Refuge

19 "When the Lord your God has cut off the nations whose land the Lord your God is giving you, and you dispossess them and dwell in their cities and in their houses, 2you shall separate three cities for yourself in the midst of your land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess. 3You shall prepare roads for yourself, and divide into three parts the territory of your land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, that any manslayer may flee there.

4"And this *is* the case of the manslayer who flees there, that he may live: Whoever kills his neighbor unintentionally, not having hated him in time past— 5as when *a man* goes to the woods with his neighbor to cut timber, and his hand swings a stroke with the ax to cut down the tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies—he shall flee to one of these cities and live; 6lest the avenger of blood, while his anger is hot, pursue the manslayer and overtake him, because the way is long, and kill him, though he *was* not deserving of death, since he had

not hated the victim in time past. 7Therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall separate three cities for yourself.'

8"Now if the Lord your God enlarges your territory, as He swore to your fathers, and gives you the land which He promised to give to your fathers, 9and if you keep all these commandments and do them, which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and to walk always in His ways, then you shall add three more cities for yourself besides these three, 10lest innocent blood be shed in the midst of your land which the Lord your God is giving you *as* an inheritance, and *thus* guilt of bloodshed be upon you.

11"But if anyone hates his neighbor, lies in wait for him, rises against him and strikes him mortally, so that he dies, and he flees to one of these cities, 12then the elders of his city shall send and bring him from there, and deliver him over to the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die. 13Your eye shall not pity him, but you shall put away *the guilt of* innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with you.

Property Boundaries

14"You shall not remove your neighbor's landmark, which the men of old have set, in your inheritance which you will inherit in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess.

The Law Concerning Witnesses

15"One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established. 16If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing, 17then both men in the controversy shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days. 18And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, *if* the witness *is* a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, 19then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you. 20And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you. 21Your eye shall not pity: life *shall be* for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

Principles Governing Warfare

20 "When you go out to battle against your enemies, and see horses and chariots *and* people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the Lord your God *is* with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. 2So it shall be, when you are on the verge of battle, that the priest shall approach and speak to the people. 3And he shall say to them, 'Hear, O Israel: Today you are on the verge of battle with your enemies. Do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble or be terrified because of them; 4for the Lord your God *is* He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.'

5"Then the officers shall speak to the people, saying: 'What man *is there* who has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man

Life LESSONS

Deuteronomy 19:1—20:20

SITUATION

Moses gave the people of Israel God's laws for ruling the nation. God's law stressed issues of safety, justice, and dealing with conflict. God promised to go with them in battle.

OBSERVATION

The cities of safety were designated towns to which people who had killed a person by accident could flee. Murderers who intentionally killed someone were not protected in those cities. This is an Old Testament illustration of grace. Believers, as refugees from sin, have a place to turn to—Jesus Christ.

INSPIRATION

The first step in finding your place in God's plan is to see His mercy—instead of looking inside yourself, look up to Him and reflect upon and understand His mercy. How great is the call of God!

God forgave us before we even asked it. He extended mercy to us before we even knew we needed it. Why? Because the God of mercy took pity on us—a band of creatures who are incapable of saving themselves without his gift of mercy. (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "Mercy")

APPLICATION

If you struggle with understanding God's mercy, reflect on where you would be today without God's grace. How have you experienced God as a place of safety? As a New Testament believer, you can now come before God's throne where there is grace

and mercy when you need it (see Hebrews 4:16).

EXPLORATION
Mercy—2 Samuel 24:14; Matthew 18:33; 1 Corinthians 7:25; James 5:11.

He knows what is best. No struggle will come your way apart from His purpose, presence, and permission.

—Max Lucado (Come Thirsty)

dedicate it. 6Also what man *is there* who has planted a vineyard and has not eaten of it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man eat of it. 7And what man *is there* who is betrothed to a woman and has not married her? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man marry her.'

8"The officers shall speak further to the people, and say, 'What man *is there who is* fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest the heart of his brethren faint[a] like his heart.' 9And so it shall be, when the officers have finished speaking to the people, that they shall make captains of the armies to lead the people.

10"When you go near a city to fight against it, then proclaim an offer of peace to it. 11And it shall be that if they accept your offer of peace, and open to you, then all the people *who are* found in it shall be placed under tribute to you, and serve you. 12Now if *the city* will not make peace with you, but war against you, then you shall besiege it. 13And when the Lord your God delivers it into your hands, you shall strike every male in it with the edge of the sword. 14But the women, the little ones, the livestock, and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall plunder for yourself; and you shall eat the enemies' plunder which the Lord your God gives you. 15Thus you shall do to all the cities *which are* very far from you, which *are* not of the cities of these nations.

16"But of the cities of these peoples which the Lord your God gives you *as* an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, 17but you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as the Lord your God has commanded you, 18lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against the Lord your God.

19"When you besiege a city for a long time, while making war against it to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an ax against them; if you can eat of them, do not cut them down to use in the siege, for the tree of the field *is* man's *food.* 20Only the trees which you know *are* not trees for food you may destroy and cut down, to build siegeworks against the city that makes war with you, until it is subdued.

The Law Concerning Unsolved Murder

21 "If *anyone* is found slain, lying in the field in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess, *and* it is not known who killed him, 2then your elders and your judges shall go out and measure *the distance* from the slain man to the surrounding cities. 3And it shall be *that* the elders of the city nearest to the slain man will take a heifer which has not been worked *and* which has not pulled with a yoke. 4The elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with flowing water, which is neither plowed nor sown, and they shall break the heifer's neck there in the valley. 5Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come near, for the Lord your God has chosen them to minister to Him and to bless in the name of

20:8 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *lest he make his brother's heart faint.*

the Lord; by their word every controversy and every assault shall be *settled.* 6And all the elders of that city nearest to the slain *man* shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley. 7Then they shall answer and say, 'Our hands have not shed this blood, nor have our eyes seen *it.* 8Provide atonement, O Lord, for Your people Israel, whom You have redeemed, and do not lay innocent blood to the charge of Your people Israel.' And atonement shall be provided on their behalf for the blood. 9So you shall put away the *guilt of* innocent blood from among you when you do *what is* right in the sight of the Lord.

Christ Through The Bible

Christ Became a Curse for Us

Through the eyes of Scripture we see what others missed but what Jesus saw. "He cancelled the debt, which listed all the rules we failed to follow. He took away the record with its rules and nailed it to the cross" (Colossians 2:14 NCV).

Between His hand and the wood there was a list. A long list. A list of our mistakes: our lusts and lies and greedy moments and prodigal years. A list of our sins.

Dangling from the Cross is an itemized catalog of your sins. The bad decisions from last year. The bad attitudes from last week. There, in broad daylight for all of heaven to see, is a list of your mistakes.

God . . . penned a list of our faults. The list God has made, however, cannot be read. The words can't be deciphered. The mistakes are covered. The sins are hidden. Those at the top are hidden by His hand; those down the list are covered by His blood. . . .

This is why He refused to close His fist. He saw the list! What kept Him from resisting? This warrant, this tabulation of your failures. He knew the price of those sins was death. He knew the source of those sins was you, and since He couldn't bear the thought of eternity without you, He chose the nails.

The hand squeezing the handle was not a Roman infantryman.

The force behind the hammer was not an angry mob.

The verdict behind the death was not decided by jealous Jews.

Jesus himself chose the nails. (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 277.

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 21:1—22:30

SITUATION

Moses gave the people laws on incest, murder, adultery, fornication, inheritance, discipline of children, and social responsibilities.

OBSERVATION

God gave us principles that we should honor. The ones here regarding marriage related to premarital sexual purity.

INSPIRATION

The Bible is the story of two gardens. Eden and Gethsemane. In the first, Adam took a fall. In the second, Jesus took a stand. In the first, God sought Adam. In the second, Jesus sought God. In Eden, Adam hid from God. In Gethsemane, Jesus emerged from the tomb. In Eden, Satan led Adam to a tree that led to his death. From Gethsemane, Jesus went to a tree that led to our life.

Satan was never invited to the Garden of Eden. He did not belong there. He was not wanted there. He slithered as a snake into God's garden and infected God's children.

That's all he's done since. Hasn't he entered a few of your holy gardens?

We even call it "holy matrimony." The word "altar" implies the presence of God. Marriage was God's idea. The first wedding occurred in the first garden. But that doesn't make any difference to the devil. He snakes his way into every home with one desire—to destroy.

Sexual intimacy is God's gift. Virginity is a rose plucked from the garden,

given by God and intended to be shared with your forever partner. Satan mocks such loyalty. He is the father of incest and abuse. He is the author of immorality. He is the pimp of the garden.

We give sacred oaths and make solemn promises. We vow to be a good parent, a true companion, and a loyal friend. But Satan's head turns when he hears a pledge. "We'll see about that," the father of lies smirks.

In God's eyes, a child is holy. The innocence of youth, the freshness of childhood, the joy of an infant. There was never a moment when Jesus turned away a child. But there has never been a child Satan didn't despise. He was killing babies to kill Moses. He was destroying infants to destroy the Christ. His tactics haven't changed. Millions of babies are still aborted; thousands of children are abused. Jesus said of Satan, "He was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44).

Is there a realm untouched by Satan? Is there a place unscarred by his sword? The church? The government? Children? Purity? Promises?

And you! And me! We are called to be holy. We were made to be holy. Set apart for His good work. We are the prized flowers of the garden. But is there one person who has not felt the foot of the intruder?

What Satan did in Eden, he does today. For that reason we need to know that what Jesus did in Gethsemane, He does today. He reclaims the holy. He will not long sit silent while Satan strip-mines the sacred. At the right moment Jesus stands and speaks. And when He stands and speaks, Satan stumbles and

Female Captives

10 "When you go out to war against your enemies, and the Lord your
God delivers them into your hand, and you take them captive, 11 and
you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and desire her and
would take her for your wife, 12 then you shall bring her home to your
house, and she shall shave her head and trim her nails. 13 She shall put
off the clothes of her captivity, remain in your house, and mourn her
father and her mother a full month; after that you may go in to her and
be her husband, and she shall be your wife. 14 And it shall be, if you
have no delight in her, then you shall set her free, but you certainly
shall not sell her for money; you shall not treat her brutally, because
you have humbled her.

Firstborn Inheritance Rights

15 "If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved, and
they have borne him children, *both* the loved and the unloved, and
if the firstborn son is of her who is unloved, 16 then it shall be, on the
day he bequeaths his possessions to his sons, *that* he must not bestow
firstborn status on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son
of the unloved, the *true* firstborn. 17 But he shall acknowledge the son
of the unloved wife *as* the firstborn by giving him a double portion of
all that he has, for he *is* the beginning of his strength; the right of the
firstborn *is* his.

The Rebellious Son

18 "If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the
voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and *who,* when they have
chastened him, will not heed them, 19 then his father and his mother
shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the
gate of his city. 20 And they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son
of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a
glutton and a drunkard.' 21 Then all the men of his city shall stone him
to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you,
and all Israel shall hear and fear.

Miscellaneous Laws

22 "If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to
death, and you hang him on a tree, 23 his body shall not remain over-
night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you
do not defile the land which the Lord your God is giving you *as* an
inheritance; for he who is hanged *is* accursed of God.

22 "You shall not see your brother's ox or his sheep going astray,
and hide yourself from them; you shall certainly bring them
back to your brother. 2 And if your brother *is* not near you, or if you do
not know him, then you shall bring it to your own house, and it shall
remain with you until your brother seeks it; then you shall restore it to
him. 3 You shall do the same with his donkey, and so shall you do with
his garment; with any lost thing of your brother's, which he has lost
and you have found, you shall do likewise; you must not hide yourself.

4 "You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fall down along
the road, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely help him lift
them up again.

5 "A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall
a man put on a woman's garment, for all who do so *are* an abomination to the Lord your God.
6 "If a bird's nest happens to be before you along the way, in any
tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs, with the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with
the young; 7 you shall surely let the mother go, and take the young for
yourself, that it may be well with you and *that* you may prolong *your* days.
8 "When you build a new house, then you shall make a parapet for
your roof, that you may not bring guilt of bloodshed on your household if anyone falls from it.
9 "You shall not sow your vineyard with different kinds of seed, lest
the yield of the seed which you have sown and the fruit of your vineyard be defiled.
10 "You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together.
11 "You shall not wear a garment of different sorts, *such as* wool and
linen mixed together.
12 "You shall make tassels on the four corners of the clothing with
which you cover *yourself.*

Laws of Sexual Morality

13 "If any man takes a wife, and goes in to her, and detests her, 14 and
charges her with shameful conduct, and brings a bad name on her, and says, 'I took this woman, and when I came to her I found she *was* not a virgin,' 15 then the father and mother of the young woman shall
take and bring out *the evidence of* the young woman's virginity to the elders of the city at the gate. 16 And the young woman's father shall
say to the elders, 'I gave my daughter to this man as wife, and he detests her. 17 Now he has charged her with shameful conduct, saying, "I found your daughter *was* not a virgin," and yet these *are the evidences of* my daughter's virginity.' And they shall spread the cloth before the
elders of the city. 18 Then the elders of that city shall take that man
and punish him; 19 and they shall fine him one hundred *shekels* of silver and give *them* to the father of the young woman, because he has brought a bad name on a virgin of Israel. And she shall be his wife; he cannot divorce her all his days.
20 "But if the thing is true, *and evidences of* virginity are not found
for the young woman, 21 then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has done a disgraceful thing in Israel, to play the harlot in her father's house. So you shall put away the evil from among you.
22 "If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband,
then both of them shall die—the man that lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from Israel.
23 "If a young woman *who is* a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and
a man finds her in the city and lies with her, 24 then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbor's wife; so you shall put away the evil from among you.

is silent. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are there areas in your life that Satan has taken hold of that need to be reclaimed? Don't let anything or anyone stand in the way of your leading a holy life. If you feel like you're in bondage, get help. See a pastor, friend, or counselor. Let them hold you accountable in the pursuit of holiness.

EXPLORATION

Shun Evil—Psalm 34:14–16; 97:10; Romans 12:9; Colossians 3:5; 1 Peter 3:11.

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 23:1—25:19

SITUATION
God continued to give laws to His people. He wanted them to treat each other with respect.

OBSERVATION
God revealed His concern for families. For God's people, family responsibilities should be a higher priority than civil responsibilities.

INSPIRATION
When do we get our first clue that Jesus knows He is the Son of God? In the temple of Jerusalem. He is twelve years old. His parents are three days into the return trip to Nazareth before they notice He is missing.

The temple is the last place they think to search. But it is the first place Jesus goes. He doesn't go to a cousin's house or a buddy's playground. Jesus seeks the place of godly thinking and, in doing so, inspires us to do the same. By the time Joseph and Mary locate their son, He has confounded the most learned men in the temple.

As a young boy, Jesus already senses the call of God. But what does He do next? Recruit apostles and preach sermons and perform miracles? No, He goes home to His folks and learns the family business.

That is exactly what you should do. Want to bring focus to your life? Do what Jesus did. Go home, love your family, and take care of business. *But, Max, I want to be a missionary.* Your first mission field is under your roof. What makes you think

25 "But if a man finds a betrothed young woman in the countryside,
and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lay
with her shall die. 26 But you shall do nothing to the young woman;
there is in the young woman no sin *deserving* of death, for just as when
a man rises against his neighbor and kills him, even so *is* this mat-
ter. 27 For he found her in the countryside, *and* the betrothed young
woman cried out, but *there was* no one to save her.

28 "If a man finds a young woman *who is* a virgin, who is not be-
trothed, and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are found out,
29 then the man who lay with her shall give to the young woman's
father fifty *shekels* of silver, and she shall be his wife because he has
humbled her; he shall not be permitted to divorce her all his days.

30 "A man shall not take his father's wife, nor uncover his father's
bed.

Those Excluded from the Congregation

23 "He who is emasculated by crushing or mutilation shall not
enter the assembly of the Lord.

2 "One of illegitimate birth shall not enter the assembly of the Lord;
even to the tenth generation none of his *descendants* shall enter the
assembly of the Lord.

3 "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the
Lord; even to the tenth generation none of his *descendants* shall en-
ter the assembly of the Lord forever, 4 because they did not meet you
with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and
because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of
Mesopotamia,[a] to curse you. 5 Nevertheless the Lord your God would
not listen to Balaam, but the Lord your God turned the curse into a
blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you. 6 You shall not
seek their peace nor their prosperity all your days forever.

7 "You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he *is* your brother. You shall
not abhor an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land. 8 The
children of the third generation born to them may enter the assembly
of the Lord.

Cleanliness of the Campsite

9 "When the army goes out against your enemies, then keep your-
self from every wicked thing. 10 If there is any man among you who
becomes unclean by some occurrence in the night, then he shall go
outside the camp; he shall not come inside the camp. 11 But it shall be,
when evening comes, that he shall wash with water; and when the sun
sets, he may come into the camp.

12 "Also you shall have a place outside the camp, where you may go
out; 13 and you shall have an implement among your equipment, and
when you sit down outside, you shall dig with it and turn and cover
your refuse. 14 For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp,
to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore your camp
shall be holy, that He may see no unclean thing among you, and turn
away from you.

23:4 [a]Hebrew *Aram Naharaim*

Miscellaneous Laws

15 "You shall not give back to his master the slave who has escaped
from his master to you. 16 He may dwell with you in your midst, in the
place which he chooses within one of your gates, where it seems best
to him; you shall not oppress him.

17 "There shall be no *ritual* harlot[a] of the daughters of Israel, or a
perverted[b] one of the sons of Israel. 18 You shall not bring the wages
of a harlot or the price of a dog to the house of the Lord your God for
any vowed offering, for both of these *are* an abomination to the Lord
your God.

19 "You shall not charge interest to your brother—interest on money
or food *or* anything that is lent out at interest. 20 To a foreigner you may
charge interest, but to your brother you shall not charge interest, that
the Lord your God may bless you in all to which you set your hand in
the land which you are entering to possess.

21 "When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not de-
lay to pay it; for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and it
would be sin to you. 22 But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be
sin to you. 23 That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and
perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you
have promised with your mouth.

24 "When you come into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat
your fill of grapes at your pleasure, but you shall not put *any* in your
container. 25 When you come into your neighbor's standing grain, you
may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on
your neighbor's standing grain.

Law Concerning Divorce

24 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens
that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some
uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts *it*
in her hand, and sends her out of his house, 2 when she has departed
from his house, and goes and becomes another man's *wife,* 3 *if* the
latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts
it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter hus-
band dies who took her as his wife, 4 *then* her former husband who
divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been
defiled; for that *is* an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not
bring sin on the land which the Lord your God is giving you *as* an
inheritance.

Miscellaneous Laws

5 "When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war or
be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and
bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken.

6 "No man shall take the lower or the upper millstone in pledge, for
he takes *one's* living in pledge.

7 "If a man is found kidnapping any of his brethren of the children
of Israel, and mistreats him or sells him, then that kidnapper shall die;

23:17 [a]Hebrew *qedeshah,* feminine of *qadesh* (see note *b*) [b]Hebrew *qadesh,* that is, one practicing sodomy and prostitution in religious rituals

they'll believe you overseas if they don't believe you across the hall? (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

If you are married, schedule regular time to spend with your spouse. Communicate often. Don't let even good things take a higher priority. If you are not married, look for ways to serve others in your immediate family or your church family. Ask God to help you have a pure heart.

EXPLORATION

Marriage—Genesis 2:18–25; 24; Song of Solomon 4:15; 5:2–8; Hebrews 13:4.

God lives with the self-assigned task of providing for His own, and so far, you've got to admit, He's done pretty well at the job.

—Max Lucado (The Great House of God)

and you shall put away the evil from among you.

8 "Take heed in an outbreak of leprosy, that you carefully observe and do according to all that the priests, the Levites, shall teach you; just as I commanded them, *so* you shall be careful to do. 9 Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam on the way when you came out of Egypt!

10 "When you lend your brother anything, you shall not go into his house to get his pledge. 11 You shall stand outside, and the man to whom you lend shall bring the pledge out to you. 12 And if the man *is* poor, you shall not keep his pledge overnight. 13 You shall in any case return the pledge to him again when the sun goes down, that he may sleep in his own garment and bless you; and it shall be righteousness to you before the Lord your God.

14 "You shall not oppress a hired servant *who is* poor and needy, *whether* one of your brethren or one of the aliens who *is* in your land within your gates. 15 Each day you shall give *him* his wages, and not let the sun go down on it, for he *is* poor and has set his heart on it; lest he cry out against you to the Lord, and it be sin to you.

16 "Fathers shall not be put to death for *their* children, nor shall children be put to death for *their* fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin.

17 "You shall not pervert justice due the stranger or the fatherless, nor take a widow's garment as a pledge. 18 But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this thing.

19 "When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. 20 When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. 21 When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean *it* afterward; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. 22 And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this thing.

25 "If there is a dispute between men, and they come to court, that *the judges* may judge them, and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked, 2 then it shall be, if the wicked man deserves to be beaten, that the judge will cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence, according to his guilt, with a certain number of blows. 3 Forty blows he may give him *and* no more, lest he should exceed this and beat him with many blows above these, and your brother be humiliated in your sight.

4 "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out *the grain.*

Marriage Duty of the Surviving Brother

5 "If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the widow of the dead man shall not be *married* to a stranger outside *the family;* her husband's brother shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. 6 And it shall be *that* the firstborn son which she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. 7 But if the man does not want to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate to the elders, and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to raise up a name to his brother in Israel; he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother.' 8 Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him. But *if* he stands firm and says, 'I do not want to take her,' 9 then his brother's wife shall come to him in the presence of the elders, remove his sandal from his foot, spit in his face, and answer and say, 'So shall it be done to the man who will not build up his brother's house.' 10 And his name shall be called in Israel, 'The house of him who had his sandal removed.'

Miscellaneous Laws

11 "If *two* men fight together, and the wife of one draws near to rescue her husband from the hand of the one attacking him, and puts out her hand and seizes him by the genitals, 12 then you shall cut off her hand; your eye shall not pity *her.*

13 "You shall not have in your bag differing weights, a heavy and a light. 14 You shall not have in your house differing measures, a large

and a small. 15You shall have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure, that your days may be lengthened in the land which the Lord your God is giving you. 16For all who do such things, all who behave unrighteously, *are* an abomination to the Lord your God.

Destroy the Amalekites

17"Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, 18how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you *were* tired and weary; and he did not fear God. 19Therefore it shall be, when the Lord your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess *as* an inheritance, *that* you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget.

Offerings of Firstfruits and Tithes

26 "And it shall be, when you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you *as* an inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it, 2that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground, which you shall bring from your land that the Lord your God is giving you, and put *it* in a basket and go to the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide. 3And you shall go to the one who is priest in those days, and say to him, 'I declare today to the Lord your[a] God that I have come to the country which the Lord swore to our fathers to give us.'

4"Then the priest shall take the basket out of your hand and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God. 5And you shall answer and say before the Lord your God: 'My father *was* a Syrian,[a] about to perish, and he went down to Egypt and dwelt there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. 6But the Egyptians mistreated us, afflicted us, and laid hard bondage on us. 7Then we cried out to the Lord God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and looked on our affliction and our labor and our oppression. 8So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. 9He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, "a land flowing with milk and honey";[a] 10and now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land which you, O Lord, have given me.'

"Then you shall set it before the Lord your God, and worship before the Lord your God. 11So you shall rejoice in every good *thing* which the Lord your God has given to you and your house, you and the Levite and the stranger who *is* among you.

12"When you have finished laying aside all the tithe of your increase in the third year—the year of tithing—and have given *it* to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your gates and be filled, 13then you shall say before the Lord your God: 'I have removed the holy *tithe* from *my* house, and also have given them to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed Your commandments, nor have

26:3 [a]Septuagint reads *my.* **26:5** [a]Or *Aramean* **26:9** [a]Exodus 3:8

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 26:1–19

SITUATION

God reminded the Israelites how he had faithfully provided for all their needs. They were also instructed to give the first portion of each harvest to God, and He would bless them in the land.

OBSERVATION

God's Word reminds us to honor Him by giving back a portion of what He has provided for us. When we are willing to give back, we show that we understand that God is the source of all that we have and that only in Him can we truly find contentment and joy.

INSPIRATION

Come with me to the world's most oppressive prison. Just ask the inmates; they will tell you. They are overworked and underfed. Their walls are bare and bunks are hard.

No prison is so populated, no prison so oppressive, and, what's more, no prison is so permanent. Most inmates never leave. They never escape. They never get released. They serve a life sentence in this overcrowded, underprovisioned facility.

The name of the prison? You'll see it over the entrance. Rainbowed over the gate are four cast-iron letters that spell out its name:

W-A-N-T

The prison of want. You've seen her prisoners. They are "in want." They want something. They want something bigger. Nicer. Faster. Thinner. They want.

They don't want much, mind you. They want just

one thing. One new job. One new car. One new house. One new spouse. They don't want much. They want just one.

And when they have "one," they will be happy. And they are right— they will be happy. When they have "one," they will leave the prison. But then it happens. The new-car smell passes. The new job gets old. The neighbors buy a larger television set. The new spouse has bad habits. The sizzle fizzles, and before you know it, another ex-con breaks parole and returns to jail.

Are you in prison? You are if you feel better when you have more and worse when you have less. You are if joy is one delivery away, one transfer away, one award away, or one makeover away. If your happiness comes from something you deposit, drive, drink, or digest, then face it—you are in prison, the prison of want. . . .

Are you hoping that a change in circumstances will bring a change in your attitude? If so, you are in prison. Learn this secret: *What you have in your Shepherd is greater than what you don't have in life.* (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you give money to God's work regularly? Is there money set apart in your budget so that He gets the first cut from your paycheck? Rework your budget or create one that will allow you to give to God's work before anything else. God deserves our firstfruits, not whatever is left at the end.

EXPLORATION

Giving—Proverbs 3:9; 11:24, 25; Luke 6:38; 1 John 3:17, 18.

I forgotten *them.* 14I have not eaten any of it when in mourning, nor have I removed *any* of it for an unclean *use,* nor given *any* of it for the dead. I have obeyed the voice of the Lord my God, and have done according to all that You have commanded me. 15Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the land which You have given us, just as You swore to our fathers, "a land flowing with milk and honey." '[a]

A Special People of God

16"This day the Lord your God commands you to observe these statutes and judgments; therefore you shall be careful to observe them with all your heart and with all your soul. 17Today you have proclaimed the Lord to be your God, and that you will walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments, and His judgments, and that you will obey His voice. 18Also today the Lord has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, that *you* should keep all His commandments, 19and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the Lord your God, just as He has spoken."

The Law Inscribed on Stones

27 Now Moses, with the elders of Israel, commanded the people, saying: "Keep all the commandments which I command you today. 2And it shall be, on the day when you cross over the Jordan to the land which the Lord your God is giving you, that you shall set up for yourselves large stones, and whitewash them with lime. 3You shall write on them all the words of this law, when you have crossed over, that you may enter the land which the Lord your God is giving you, 'a land flowing with milk and honey,'[a] just as the Lord God of your fathers promised you. 4Therefore it shall be, when you have crossed over the Jordan, *that* on Mount Ebal you shall set up these stones, which I command you today, and you shall whitewash them with lime. 5And there you shall build an altar to the Lord your God, an altar of stones; you shall not use an iron *tool* on them. 6You shall build with whole stones the altar of the Lord your God, and offer burnt offerings on it to the Lord your God. 7You shall offer peace offerings, and shall eat there, and rejoice before the Lord your God. 8And you shall write very plainly on the stones all the words of this law."

9Then Moses and the priests, the Levites, spoke to all Israel, saying, "Take heed and listen, O Israel: This day you have become the people of the Lord your God. 10Therefore you shall obey the voice of the Lord your God, and observe His commandments and His statutes which I command you today."

Curses Pronounced from Mount Ebal

11And Moses commanded the people on the same day, saying, 12"These shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people, when you have crossed over the Jordan: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Jo-

26:15 [a]Exodus 3:8 **27:3** [a]Exodus 3:8

seph, and Benjamin; 13 and these shall stand on Mount Ebal to curse: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.

14 "And the Levites shall speak with a loud voice and say to all the men of Israel: 15 'Cursed *is* the one who makes a carved or molded image, an abomination to the Lord, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and sets *it* up in secret.'

"And all the people shall answer and say, 'Amen!'

16 'Cursed *is* the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt.'

"And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

17 'Cursed *is* the one who moves his neighbor's landmark.'

"And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

18 'Cursed *is* the one who makes the blind to wander off the road.'

"And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

19 'Cursed *is* the one who perverts the justice due the stranger, the fatherless, and widow.'

"And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

20 'Cursed *is* the one who lies with his father's wife, because he has uncovered his father's bed.'

"And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

21 'Cursed *is* the one who lies with any kind of animal.'

"And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

22 'Cursed *is* the one who lies with his sister, the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother.'

"And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

23 'Cursed *is* the one who lies with his mother–in–law.'

"And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

24 'Cursed *is* the one who attacks his neighbor secretly.'

"And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

25 'Cursed *is* the one who takes a bribe to slay an innocent person.'

"And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

26 'Cursed *is* the one who does not confirm *all* the words of this law by observing them.'

"And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'"

Blessings on Obedience

28 "Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. 2 And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God:

3 "Blessed *shall* you *be* in the city, and blessed *shall* you *be* in the country.

4 "Blessed *shall be* the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks.

5 "Blessed *shall be* your basket and your kneading bowl.

6 "Blessed *shall* you *be* when you come in, and blessed *shall* you *be* when you go out.

7 "The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways.

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 27:1—28:68

SITUATION
The altar at Mount Ebal was to serve as a reminder of the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience.

OBSERVATION
Actions have consequences. Because the Israelites neglected to obey God, they fell into the hands of Assyria and Babylon.

INSPIRATION
All believers have God in their heart. But not all believers have given their whole heart to God. The question is not, how can I have more of the Spirit, but rather, how can the Spirit have more of me?

Take inventory. Go down the list.

Your tongue. Do you tend to stretch the truth? Puff up the facts? Your language? Is your language a sewer of profanities and foul talk? And grudges? Do you keep resentments parked in your "garudge"? Are you unproductive and lazy? Do you live off the system, assuming that the church or the country should take care of you? . . .

Do your actions interrupt the flow of the Spirit in your life? . . .

Remember Paul's instruction: "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice" (Ephesians 4:31). Harbored sin interferes with Spirit circulation. Confessed sin, however, splices the cable and restores the power.

This could take time. Don't give up on it. Don't let stumbles stop you. Come

and keep coming. Ask and keep asking. "Your heavenly Father [will] give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:13). (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God wants your life marked by obedience and integrity. How do you justify avoiding God? Because of money? Because some Christian has done you wrong? Because Sundays are for sports? Evaluate, adjust, and begin a fresh walk with God.

EXPLORATION

Warnings—Numbers 14:11, 12; 20:12; 2 Kings 17:11–15; Romans 11:19–21; Hebrews 2:1–3; 10:37, 38.

8 "The Lord will command the blessing on you in your storehouses
and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land
which the Lord your God is giving you.
9 "The Lord will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as
He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your
God and walk in His ways. 10 Then all peoples of the earth shall see
that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid
of you. 11 And the Lord will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of
your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of
your ground, in the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers to
give you. 12 The Lord will open to you His good treasure, the heavens,
to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of
your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.
13 And the Lord will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be
above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of
the Lord your God, which I command you today, and are careful to
observe *them*. 14 So you shall not turn aside from any of the words
which I command you this day, *to* the right or the left, to go after other
gods to serve them.

Curses on Disobedience

15 "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord
your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His stat-
utes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon
you and overtake you:
16 "Cursed *shall* you *be* in the city, and cursed *shall* you *be* in the
country.
17 "Cursed *shall be* your basket and your kneading bowl.
18 "Cursed *shall be* the fruit of your body and the produce of your
land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks.
19 "Cursed *shall* you *be* when you come in, and cursed *shall* you *be*
when you go out.
20 "The Lord will send on you cursing, confusion, and rebuke in all
that you set your hand to do, until you are destroyed and until you
perish quickly, because of the wickedness of your doings in which you
have forsaken Me. 21 The Lord will make the plague cling to you until
He has consumed you from the land which you are going to possess.
22 The Lord will strike you with consumption, with fever, with inflam-
mation, with severe burning fever, with the sword, with scorching, and
with mildew; they shall pursue you until you perish. 23 And your heav-
ens which *are* over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is
under you *shall be* iron. 24 The Lord will change the rain of your land
to powder and dust; from the heaven it shall come down on you until
you are destroyed.
25 "The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you
shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them;
and you shall become troublesome to all the kingdoms of the earth.
26 Your carcasses shall be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts
of the earth, and no one shall frighten *them* away. 27 The Lord will strike
you with the boils of Egypt, with tumors, with the scab, and with the
itch, from which you cannot be healed. 28 The Lord will strike you with
madness and blindness and confusion of heart. 29 And you shall grope

at noonday, as a blind man gropes in darkness; you shall not prosper in your ways; you shall be only oppressed and plundered continually, and no one shall save *you.*

30 "You shall betroth a wife, but another man shall lie with her; you shall build a house, but you shall not dwell in it; you shall plant a vineyard, but shall not gather its grapes. 31 Your ox *shall be* slaughtered before your eyes, but you shall not eat of it; your donkey *shall be* violently taken away from before you, and shall not be restored to you; your sheep *shall be* given to your enemies, and you shall have no one to rescue *them.* 32 Your sons and your daughters *shall be* given to another people, and your eyes shall look and fail *with longing* for them all day long; and *there shall be* no strength in your hand. 33 A nation whom you have not known shall eat the fruit of your land and the produce of your labor, and you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually. 34 So you shall be driven mad because of the sight which your eyes see. 35 The Lord will strike you in the knees and on the legs with severe boils which cannot be healed, and from the sole of your foot to the top of your head.

36 "The Lord will bring you and the king whom you set over you to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods—wood and stone. 37 And you shall become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations where the Lord will drive you.

38 "You shall carry much seed out to the field but gather little in, for the locust shall consume it. 39 You shall plant vineyards and tend *them,* but you shall neither drink *of* the wine nor gather the *grapes;* for the worms shall eat them. 40 You shall have olive trees throughout all your territory, but you shall not anoint *yourself* with the oil; for your olives shall drop off. 41 You shall beget sons and daughters, but they shall not be yours; for they shall go into captivity. 42 Locusts shall consume all your trees and the produce of your land.

43 "The alien who *is* among you shall rise higher and higher above you, and you shall come down lower and lower. 44 He shall lend to you, but you shall not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you shall be the tail.

45 "Moreover all these curses shall come upon you and pursue and overtake you, until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you. 46 And they shall be upon you for a sign and a wonder, and on your descendants forever.

47 "Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, 48 therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of everything; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you. 49 The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, *as swift* as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand, 50 a nation of fierce countenance, which does not respect the elderly nor show favor to the young. 51 And they shall eat the increase of your livestock and the produce of your land, until you are destroyed; they shall not leave you grain or new wine or oil, *or* the increase of your cattle or the offspring of your flocks, until they have destroyed you.

52 "They shall besiege you at all your gates until your high and fortified walls, in which you trust, come down throughout all your land; and they shall besiege you at all your gates throughout all your land which the Lord your God has given you. 53 You shall eat the fruit of your own body, the flesh of your sons and your daughters whom the Lord your God has given you, in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you. 54 The sensitive and very refined man among you will be hostile toward his brother, toward the wife of his bosom, and toward the rest of his children whom he leaves behind, 55 so that he will not give any of them the flesh of his children whom he will eat, because he has nothing left in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you at all your gates. 56 The tender and delicate woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground because of her delicateness and sensitivity, will refuse[a] to the husband of her bosom, and to her son and her

28:56 [a] Literally *her eye shall be evil toward*

daughter, [57]her placenta which comes out from between her feet and her children whom she bears; for she will eat them secretly for lack of everything in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you at all your gates.

[58]"If you do not carefully observe all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, THE Lord YOUR God, [59]then the Lord will bring upon you and your descendants extraordinary plagues—great and prolonged plagues—and serious and prolonged sicknesses. [60]Moreover He will bring back on you all the diseases of Egypt, of which you were afraid, and they shall cling to you. [61]Also every sickness and every plague, which *is* not written in this Book of the Law, will the Lord bring upon you until you are destroyed. [62]You shall be left few in number, whereas you were as the stars of heaven in multitude, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD YOUR GOD. [63]And it shall be, *that* just as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good and multiply you, so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you and bring you to nothing; and you shall be plucked from off the land which you go to possess.

[64]"Then the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known—wood and stone. [65]And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the Lord will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul. [66]Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life. [67]In the morning you shall say, 'Oh, that it were evening!' And at evening you shall say, 'Oh, that it were morning!' because of the fear which terrifies your heart, and because of the sight which your eyes see.

[68]"And the Lord will take you back to Egypt in ships, by the way of which I said to you, 'You shall never see it again.' And there you shall be offered for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy *you.*"

The Covenant Renewed in Moab

29 These *are* the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with them in Horeb.

[2]Now Moses called all Israel and said to them: "You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land— [3]the great trials which your eyes have seen, the signs, and those great wonders. [4]Yet the Lord has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this *very* day. [5]And I have led you forty years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn out on your feet. [6]You have not eaten bread, nor have you drunk wine or *similar* drink, that you may know that I *am* the Lord your God. [7]And when you came to this place, Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan came out against us to battle, and we conquered them. [8]We took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, to the Gadites, and to half the tribe of Manasseh. [9]Therefore keep the words of this covenant, and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do.

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 29:1—30:20

SITUATION
Moses summarized God's guidance and provision for the Israelites during the previous forty years. The adults who originally escaped from Egypt had all died in the desert, but God's agreement included their descendants. Many times throughout the Old Testament God renewed His agreement with them. Though all Israelites were invited to take part in God's agreement, only those who chose to obey the agreement received His blessings.

OBSERVATION
To choose against God brings emptiness and pain—death. To choose God brings blessings and fulfillment—life.

INSPIRATION
In salvation, God enters the hearts of His Adams and Eves. He permanently places Himself within us. What powerful implications this brings. "When God lives and breathes in you (and he does, as surely as he did in Jesus), you are delivered from that dead life" (Rom. 8:11 MSG). . . .

You can select your spiritual father. You can change your family tree from that of Adam to God. And when you do, He moves in. His resistance becomes your resistance. His Teflon coating becomes yours. Sin may entice you, but will never enslave you. Sin may, and will, touch you, discourage you, and distract you, but it cannot condemn you. Christ is in you, and you are in Him,

10 "All of you stand today before the Lord your God: your leaders
and your tribes and your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel,
11 your little ones and your wives—also the stranger who *is* in your
camp, from the one who cuts your wood to the one who draws your
water— 12 that you may enter into covenant with the Lord your God,
and into His oath, which the Lord your God makes with you today,
13 that He may establish you today as a people for Himself, and *that* He
may be God to you, just as He has spoken to you, and just as He has
sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

14 "I make this covenant and this oath, not with you alone, 15 but
with *him* who stands here with us today before the Lord our God, as
well as with *him* who *is* not here with us today 16 (for you know that
we dwelt in the land of Egypt and that we came through the nations
which you passed by, 17 and you saw their abominations and their
idols which *were* among them—wood and stone and silver and gold);
18 so that there may not be among you man or woman or family or
tribe, whose heart turns away today from the Lord our God, to go *and*
serve the gods of these nations, and that there may not be among you
a root bearing bitterness or wormwood; 19 and so it may not happen,
when he hears the words of this curse, that he blesses himself in his
heart, saying, 'I shall have peace, even though I follow the dictates[a] of
my heart'—as though the drunkard could be included with the sober.

20 "The Lord would not spare him; for then the anger of the Lord
and His jealousy would burn against that man, and every curse that
is written in this book would settle on him, and the Lord would blot
out his name from under heaven. 21 And the Lord would separate
him from all the tribes of Israel for adversity, according to all the
curses of the covenant that are written in this Book of the Law, 22 so
that the coming generation of your children who rise up after you,
and the foreigner who comes from a far land, would say, when they
see the plagues of that land and the sicknesses which the Lord has
laid on it:

23 'The whole land *is* brimstone, salt, and burning; it is not sown,
nor does it bear, nor does any grass grow there, like the overthrow of
Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, which the Lord over-
threw in His anger and His wrath.' 24 All nations would say, 'Why has
the Lord done so to this land? What does the heat of this great an-
ger mean?' 25 Then *people* would say: 'Because they have forsaken the
covenant of the Lord God of their fathers, which He made with them
when He brought them out of the land of Egypt; 26 for they went and
served other gods and worshiped them, gods that they did not know
and that He had not given to them. 27 Then the anger of the Lord was
aroused against this land, to bring on it every curse that is written in
this book. 28 And the Lord uprooted them from their land in anger, in
wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as
it is this day.'

29 "The secret *things belong* to the Lord our God, but those *things
which are* revealed *belong* to us and to our children forever, that *we*
may do all the words of this law.

29:19 [a]Or *stubbornness*

and "**there is** therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

Can I urge you to trust this truth? Let your constant prayer be this: "Lord, I receive your work. My sins are pardoned." Trust the work of God *for* you. Then trust the presence of Christ *in* you. Take frequent, refreshing drinks from His well of grace. You need regular reminders that you are not fatally afflicted! Don't live as though you are. (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Have you made a commitment to God? He offers a relationship open to all people. Today, accept Jesus Christ as Lord of your life, then you can experience His promises.

EXPLORATION

Commitment to God—Joshua 24:15; 1 Kings 18:21; 2 Kings 23:3; Matthew 19:27; Mark 12:30; Luke 9:23, 24; John 6:67, 68; Romans 12:1; Philippians 3:8, 9.

The Blessing of Returning to God

30 "Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call *them* to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God drives you, 2and you return to the Lord your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, 3that the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you. 4If *any* of you are driven out to the farthest *parts* under heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. 5Then the Lord your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. 6And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

7"Also the Lord your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. 8And you will again obey the voice of the Lord and do all His commandments which I command you today. 9The Lord your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land for good. For the Lord will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers, 10if you obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, *and* if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

The Choice of Life or Death

11"For this commandment which I command you today *is* not *too* mysterious for you, nor *is* it far off. 12It *is* not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' 13Nor *is* it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' 14But the word *is* very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.

15"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, 16in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. 17But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, 18I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong *your* days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. 19I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; 20that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He *is* your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

Joshua the New Leader of Israel

31 Then Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel. 2And he said to them: "I *am* one hundred and twenty years old today. I can no longer go out and come in. Also the Lord has said to me, 'You shall not cross over this Jordan.' 3The Lord your God Himself crosses over before you; He will destroy these nations from before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua himself crosses over before you, just as the Lord has said. 4And the Lord will do to them as He did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites and their land, when He destroyed them. 5The Lord will give them over to you, that you may do to them according to every commandment which I have commanded you. 6Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He *is* the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you."

7Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, "Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it. 8And the Lord, He *is* the One who

goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed."

The Law to Be Read Every Seven Years

9 So Moses wrote this law and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. 10 And Moses commanded them, saying: "At the end of *every* seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, 11 when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. 12 Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who *is* within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the Lord your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, 13 and *that* their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess."

Prediction of Israel's Rebellion

14 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, the days approach when you must die; call Joshua, and present yourselves in the tabernacle of meeting, that I may inaugurate him."

So Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves in the tabernacle of meeting. 15 Now the Lord appeared at the tabernacle in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood above the door of the tabernacle.

16 And the Lord said to Moses: "Behold, you will rest with your fathers; and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go *to be* among them, and they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. 17 Then My anger shall be aroused against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured. And many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, 'Have not these evils come upon us because our God *is* not among us?' 18 And I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they have done, in that they have turned to other gods.

19 "Now therefore, write down this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel. 20 When I have brought them to the land flowing with milk and honey, of which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and filled themselves and grown fat, then they will turn to other gods and serve them; and they will provoke Me and break My covenant. 21 Then it shall be, when many evils and troubles have come upon them, that this song will testify against them as a witness; for it will not be forgotten in the mouths of their descendants, for I know the inclination of their behavior today, even before I have brought them to the land of which I swore *to give them*."

22 Therefore Moses wrote this song the same day, and taught it to the children of Israel. 23 Then He inaugurated Joshua the son of Nun, and said, "Be strong and of good courage; for you shall bring the children of Israel into the land of which I swore to them, and I will be with you."

24 So it was, when Moses had completed writing the words of this law in a book, when they were finished, 25 that Moses commanded the

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 31:1—29

SITUATION
God instructed the Levites to read His laws to the people. Joshua took over the leadership from Moses.

OBSERVATION
God's Word benefits our lives. Because we need reminders to obey, we need to read the Bible and apply it often.

INSPIRATION
God creates the "want to" within us.

Be careful with this. People have been known to justify stupidity based on a "feeling." "I felt God leading me to cheat on my wife . . . disregard my bills . . . lie to my boss . . . flirt with my married neighbor." Mark it down: God will not lead you to violate His Word. He will not contradict His teaching. Be careful with the phrase "God led me . . ." Don't banter it about. Don't disguise your sin as a leading of God. He will not lead you to lie, cheat, or hurt. He will faithfully lead you through the words of His Scripture and the advice of His faithful. . . .

You have a heart for God? Heed it.

A family of faith? Consult it.

A Bible? Read it.

You have all you need to face the giant-size questions of your life. Most of all you have a God who loves you too much to let you wander. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Make God's Word a vital part of your day. Memorize a verse (try Deuteronomy 31:6) and think about it often.

EXPLORATION
Scripture—Deuteronomy 17:18–20; Psalm 119:9–11; Jeremiah 23:28; Luke 4:1–13; 24:25–27; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; 2 Peter 1:20, 21.

God is faithful even when His children are not. That's what makes God, God.

—Max Lucado (A Gentle Thunder)

Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying: 26 "Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there as a witness against you; 27 for I know your rebellion and your stiff neck. *If* today, while I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious against the Lord, then how much more after my death? 28 Gather to me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their hearing and call heaven and earth to witness against them. 29 For I know that after my death you will become utterly corrupt, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you. And evil will befall you in the latter days, because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands."

The Song of Moses

30 Then Moses spoke in the hearing of all the assembly of Israel the words of this song until they were ended:

32 "Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak;
And hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.
2 Let my teaching drop as the rain,
My speech distill as the dew,
As raindrops on the tender herb,
And as showers on the grass.
3 For I proclaim the name of the Lord:
Ascribe greatness to our God.
4 *He is* the Rock, His work *is* perfect;
For all His ways *are* justice,
A God of truth and without injustice;
Righteous and upright *is* He.

5 "They have corrupted themselves;
They are not His children,
Because of their blemish:
A perverse and crooked generation.
6 Do you thus deal with the Lord,
O foolish and unwise people?
Is He not your Father, *who* bought you?
Has He not made you and established you?

7 "Remember the days of old,
Consider the years of many generations.
Ask your father, and he will show you;
Your elders, and they will tell you:
8 When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations,
When He separated the sons of Adam,
He set the boundaries of the peoples
According to the number of the children of Israel.
9 For the Lord's portion *is* His people;
Jacob *is* the place of His inheritance.

10 "He found him in a desert land
And in the wasteland, a howling wilderness;

He encircled him, He instructed him,
He kept him as the apple of His eye.
11 As an eagle stirs up its nest,
Hovers over its young,
Spreading out its wings, taking them up,
Carrying them on its wings,
12 *So* the Lord alone led him,
And *there was* no foreign god with him.

13 "He made him ride in the heights of the earth,
That he might eat the produce of the fields;
He made him draw honey from the rock,
And oil from the flinty rock;
14 Curds from the cattle, and milk of the flock,
With fat of lambs;
And rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats,
With the choicest wheat;
And you drank wine, the blood of the grapes.

15 "But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked;
You grew fat, you grew thick,
You are obese!
Then he forsook God *who* made him,
And scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation.
16 They provoked Him to jealousy with foreign *gods;*
With abominations they provoked Him to anger.
17 They sacrificed to demons, not to God,
To gods they did not know,
To new *gods,* new arrivals
That your fathers did not fear.
18 Of the Rock *who* begot you, you are unmindful,
And have forgotten the God who fathered you.

19 "And when the Lord saw *it,* He spurned *them,*
Because of the provocation of His sons and His daughters.
20 And He said: 'I will hide My face from them,
I will see what their end *will be,*
For they *are* a perverse generation,
Children in whom *is* no faith.
21 They have provoked Me to jealousy by *what* is not God;
They have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols.
But I will provoke them to jealousy by *those who are* not a nation;
I will move them to anger by a foolish nation.
22 For a fire is kindled in My anger,
And shall burn to the lowest hell;
It shall consume the earth with her increase,
And set on fire the foundations of the mountains.

23 'I will heap disasters on them;
I will spend My arrows on them.
24 *They shall be* wasted with hunger,
Devoured by pestilence and bitter destruction;

Life LESSONS

Deuteronomy 31:30—32:52

SITUATION

Moses' death was near. He gave his last sermon in the form of a song. He reminded the people of their history and warned them not to repeat their mistakes but instead to trust the Lord. He prophesied their future disloyalty and punishment, as well as God's forgiveness and mercy.

OBSERVATION

We have no excuse for abandoning God. He protects, provides, and leads us like a shepherd. We must always put our faith and trust in Him.

INSPIRATION

Believing prayer ushers in God's peace. Not a random, nebulous, earthly peace, but His peace. Imported from heaven. The same tranquility that marks the throne room, God offers to you.

Do you think He battles anxiety? You suppose He ever wrings His hands or asks the angels for antacids? Of course not. A problem is no more a challenge to God than a twig is to an elephant. God enjoys perfect peace because God enjoys perfect power.

And He offers His peace to you. A peace that will "guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" [Philippians 4:7]. Paul employs a military metaphor here. The Philippians, living in a garrison town, were accustomed to the Roman sentries maintaining their watch. Before any enemy could get inside, he had to pass through the guards. God gives you the same

offer. His supernatural peace overshadows you like a protective dome, guarding your heart. (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Plans rarely turn out as intended. Accidents happen. People move, die, or grow cold toward us. What is your anchor in a changing world? Thank God today for the immense security He provides. Take comfort in God's promises to you.

EXPLORATION

Trust—Psalm 62:5–8; Proverbs 3:5, 6; Romans 3:21–28; Hebrews 3:15—4:3.

I will also send against them the teeth of beasts,
With the poison of serpents of the dust.
25 The sword shall destroy outside;
There shall be terror within
For the young man and virgin,
The nursing child with the man of gray hairs.
26 I would have said, "I will dash them in pieces,
I will make the memory of them to cease from among men,"
27 Had I not feared the wrath of the enemy,
Lest their adversaries should misunderstand,
Lest they should say, "Our hand *is* high;
And it is not the Lord who has done all this." '

28 "For they *are* a nation void of counsel,
Nor *is there any* understanding in them.
29 Oh, that they were wise, *that* they understood this,
That they would consider their latter end!
30 How could one chase a thousand,
And two put ten thousand to flight,
Unless their Rock had sold them,
And the Lord had surrendered them?
31 For their rock *is* not like our Rock,
Even our enemies themselves *being* judges.
32 For their vine *is* of the vine of Sodom
And of the fields of Gomorrah;
Their grapes *are* grapes of gall,
Their clusters *are* bitter.
33 Their wine *is* the poison of serpents,
And the cruel venom of cobras.

34 'Is this not laid up in store with Me,
Sealed up among My treasures?
35 Vengeance is Mine, and recompense;
Their foot shall slip in *due* time;
For the day of their calamity *is* at hand,
And the things to come hasten upon them.'

36 "For the Lord will judge His people
And have compassion on His servants,
When He sees that *their* power is gone,
And *there is* no one *remaining,* bond or free.
37 He will say: 'Where *are* their gods,
The rock in which they sought refuge?
38 Who ate the fat of their sacrifices,
And drank the wine of their drink offering?
Let them rise and help you,
And be your refuge.

39 'Now see that I, *even* I, *am* He,
And *there is* no God besides Me;
I kill and I make alive;
I wound and I heal;

Vengeance

Revenge belongs to God! If vengeance is God's then it is not ours. God has not asked us to settle the score or get even. Ever. Judgment is God's job. To assume otherwise is to assume God can't do it.

When we are mistreated, our animalistic response is to go on the hunt. Instinctively, we double up our fists. Getting even is only natural. Which, incidentally, is precisely the problem. Revenge is natural, not spiritual. Getting even is the rule of the jungle. Giving grace is the rule of the kingdom.

X-ray the soul of the vengeful and behold the tumor of bitterness: black, menacing, malignant. Carcinoma of the spirit. Its fatal fibers creep around the edge of the heart and ravage it. Yesterday you can't alter, but your reaction to yesterday you can. The past you cannot change, but your response to the past you can.

Revenge is irreverent. When we strike back we are saying, "I know vengeance is yours, God, but I just didn't think you'd punish enough. I thought I'd better take this situation into my own hands. You have a tendency to be a little soft."

To forgive someone is to display reverence. Forgiveness is not saying the one who hurt you was right. Forgiveness is stating that God is fair and he will do what is right.

After all, don't we have enough things to do without trying to do God's work too?

Study Guide

Read Deuteronomy 32:15–35.

- Describe a situation from your childhood when you wanted to get even with someone.
- If left unchecked, how can anger and a thirst for revenge destroy a person's life?
- What is the balance between rightfully defending yourself and seeking revenge?
- How much of our desire for revenge do you think is merely a sense of justice?
- In what circumstances is it right and good to seek justice?
- How does it feel to let go of hurts or injustices?
- How do others typically respond when you repay evil with good?
- In what situation or relationship in your life are you still holding out for some revenge?

Nor *is there any* who can deliver from My hand.
40 For I raise My hand to heaven,
And say, "*As* I live forever,
41 If I whet My glittering sword,
And My hand takes hold on judgment,
I will render vengeance to My enemies,
And repay those who hate Me.
42 I will make My arrows drunk with blood,
And My sword shall devour flesh,
With the blood of the slain and the captives,
From the heads of the leaders of the enemy." '

43 "Rejoice, O Gentiles, *with* His people;[a]
For He will avenge the blood of His servants,
And render vengeance to His adversaries;
He will provide atonement for His land *and* His people."

44 So Moses came with Joshua[a] the son of Nun and spoke all the words of this song in the hearing of the people. 45 Moses finished speaking all these words to all Israel, 46 and he said to them: "Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe—all the words of this law. 47 For it *is* not a futile thing for you, because it *is* your life, and by this word you shall prolong *your* days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess."

Moses to Die on Mount Nebo

48 Then the Lord spoke to Moses that very same day, saying: 49 "Go up this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which *is* in the land of Moab, across from Jericho; view the land of Canaan, which I give to the children of Israel as a possession; 50 and die on the mountain which you ascend, and be gathered to your people, just as Aaron your brother died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people; 51 because you trespassed against Me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah Kadesh, in the Wilderness of Zin, because you did not hallow Me in the midst of the children of Israel. 52 Yet you shall see the land before *you,* though you shall not go there, into the land which I am giving to the children of Israel."

Moses' Final Blessing on Israel

33 Now this *is* the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death. 2 And he said:

"The Lord came from Sinai,
And dawned on them from Seir;
He shone forth from Mount Paran,
And He came with ten thousands of saints;
From His right hand

32:43 [a]A Dead Sea Scroll fragment adds *And let all the gods (angels) worship Him* (compare Septuagint and Hebrews 1:6). **32:44** [a]Hebrew *Hoshea* (compare Numbers 13:8, 16)

Life Lessons

Deuteronomy 33:1—34:12

SITUATION
Moses imparted his blessing shortly before his death. Before his death, the Lord allowed him to view the Promised Land. Though Moses was disciplined for his lack of obedience, he died in faith and in honor.

OBSERVATION
Moses was honored as the only man the Lord buried. The mourning time of thirty days exceeded the normal mourning time of seven days.

INSPIRATION
We don't like to say goodbye to those whom we love. Whether it be at a school or a cemetery, separation is tough. It is right for us to weep, but there is no need for us to despair. They had pain here. They have no pain there. They struggled here. They have no struggles there. You and I might wonder why God took them home. But they don't. They understand. They are, at this very moment, at peace in the presence of God.

I had been ministering in San Antonio for less than a year when one of our members asked me to speak at the funeral of his mother. Her name was Ida Glossbrenner, but her friends called her Polly.

As the son and I planned the service, he told me a fascinating story about the final words his mother spoke. Mrs. Glossbrenner was unresponsive for the last few hours of her life. She never spoke a word. But moments before her death, she opened her eyes and stated in a clear voice, "My

Came a fiery law for them.
3 Yes, He loves the people;
All His saints *are* in Your hand;
They sit down at Your feet;
Everyone receives Your words.
4 Moses commanded a law for us,
A heritage of the congregation of Jacob.
5 And He was King in Jeshurun,
When the leaders of the people were gathered,
All the tribes of Israel together.

6 "Let Reuben live, and not die,
Nor let his men be few."

7 And this he said of Judah:

"Hear, Lord, the voice of Judah,
And bring him to his people;
Let his hands be sufficient for him,
And may You be a help against his enemies."

8 And of Levi he said:

"*Let* Your Thummim and Your Urim *be* with Your holy one,
Whom You tested at Massah,
And with whom You contended at the waters of Meribah,
9 Who says of his father and mother,
'I have not seen them';
Nor did he acknowledge his brothers,
Or know his own children;
For they have observed Your word
And kept Your covenant.
10 They shall teach Jacob Your judgments,
And Israel Your law.
They shall put incense before You,
And a whole burnt sacrifice on Your altar.
11 Bless his substance, Lord,
And accept the work of his hands;
Strike the loins of those who rise against him,
And of those who hate him, that they rise not again."

12 Of Benjamin he said:

"The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him,
Who shelters him all the day long;
And he shall dwell between His shoulders."

13 And of Joseph he said:

"Blessed of the Lord *is* his land,
With the precious things of heaven, with the dew,
And the deep lying beneath,

name is Ida Glossbrenner, but my friends call me Polly."

Meaningless words of hallucination? Perhaps. Or, perhaps more. Perhaps Ida was, well, maybe she was at the schoolhouse doors of heaven. Her body behind her. Her soul in the presence of God. And maybe she was getting acquainted.

I don't know. But I do know this. When it is cold on earth, we can take comfort in knowing that our loved ones are in the warm arms of God. And when Christ comes, we will hold them, too. (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God wants us to be prepared for death. The first step we take is to receive Him by faith. Then we are to live a life holy and pleasing unto Him. Grief is normal but, for the Christian, despair is not. What steps can you take today to help ensure that you die in faith and honor as Moses did?

EXPLORATION

Christ's Victory Over Death—1 Corinthians 15:24–26, 54–57; 2 Timothy 1:10; Hebrews 2:14; Revelation 1:18.

14 With the precious fruits of the sun,
With the precious produce of the months,
15 With the best things of the ancient
mountains,
With the precious things of the everlasting
hills,
16 With the precious things of the earth and
its fullness,
And the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush.
Let *the blessing* come 'on the head of
Joseph,
And on the crown of the head of him *who*
was separate from his brothers.'[a]
17 His glory *is like* a firstborn bull,
And his horns *like* the horns of the wild ox;
Together with them
He shall push the peoples
To the ends of the earth;
They *are* the ten thousands of Ephraim,
And they *are* the thousands of Manasseh."

18 And of Zebulun he said:

"Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out,
And Issachar in your tents!
19 They shall call the peoples *to* the
mountain;
There they shall offer sacrifices of
righteousness;
For they shall partake *of* the abundance of
the seas
And *of* treasures hidden in the sand."

20 And of Gad he said:

"Blessed *is* he who enlarges Gad;
He dwells as a lion,
And tears the arm and the crown of his
head.
21 He provided the first *part* for himself,
Because a lawgiver's portion was reserved
there.
He came *with* the heads of the people;
He administered the justice of the Lord,
And His judgments with Israel."

22 And of Dan he said:

"Dan *is* a lion's whelp;
He shall leap from Bashan."

23 And of Naphtali he said:

"O Naphtali, satisfied with favor,
And full of the blessing of the Lord,
Possess the west and the south."

24 And of Asher he said:

"Asher *is* most blessed of sons;
Let him be favored by his brothers,
And let him dip his foot in oil.
25 Your sandals *shall be* iron and bronze;
As your days, *so shall* your strength *be.*

26 "*There is* no one like the God of Jeshurun,
Who rides the heavens to help you,
And in His excellency on the clouds.
27 The eternal God *is your* refuge,
And underneath *are* the everlasting arms;
He will thrust out the enemy from before
you,
And will say, 'Destroy!'
28 Then Israel shall dwell in safety,
The fountain of Jacob alone,
In a land of grain and new wine;
His heavens shall also drop dew.
29 Happy *are* you, O Israel!
Who *is* like you, a people saved by the
Lord,
The shield of your help
And the sword of your majesty!
Your enemies shall submit to you,
And you shall tread down their high
places."

Moses Dies on Mount Nebo

34 Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is across from Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land of Gilead as far as Dan, 2 all Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea,[a] 3 the South, and the plain of the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. 4 Then the Lord said to him, "This *is* the land of which I swore to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have caused you to see *it* with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there."

5 So Moses the servant of the Lord died there

33:16 [a]Genesis 49:26 **34:2** [a]That is, the Mediterranean

in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. 6And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day. 7Moses *was* one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor diminished. 8And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. So the days of weeping *and* mourning for Moses ended.

9Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses.

10But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, 11in all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, before Pharaoh, before all his servants, and in all his land, 12and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

THE BOOK OF

JOSHUA

INTRODUCTION

May I describe a few battles?

Let's say that you have a problem with a person—a rotten person. A scoundrel who has taken advantage of your kindness. Because of him you have less money, more headaches, and a bitter heart.

Let's also say that you've got the goods on this guy. Caught him. Aha! Red-handed. You can turn him in. Make a spectacle. Get even and get out. Give him what he deserves.

But something won't let you. A verse from your past tethers your heart. "Vengeance is Mine," says the Lord. "I will repay."

Within you the battle rages. *Let vengeance be mine, Lord,* you pray. *Just once. Let me get even.* But the Word won't let you. And with time, you drop your fists to your side and just trust.

Here's another battle.

Let's say you have a problem with money. Every month you just barely make it. Each paycheck is spent before it's cashed. If just one month you could get a break. Just some cushion. That's all you need.

Poof, your prayer is answered. Unexpected bonus. An extra month's salary. Finally, some breathing room. First, pay off the credit card, next repay my sister, then get the bumper fixed and . . . uh-oh—my giving. "Surely God doesn't want me to give 10 percent of the bonus? I mean, I give every month. . . . Surely, He'll understand if I use this for something else. . . . "

But the words challenge faintly yet firmly, "Honor the Lord . . . with the firstfruits of all your increase." Within you the battle rages. One side says, "Believe." The other, "Be real." Finally, a truce is called and a white flag is waved and a check is written and placed in the plate.

But even as you give, you confess, "Doesn't make sense, but because you say so . . ."

Let's go one more. This time let's really stretch it. Let's say you are a general. A general

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Joshua, except for the end which describes his death

Date Written: 1400–1350 B.C.

Key Themes:

- The Hebrews crossed the border into Canaan because of their faith that God would give them the land.
- The Hebrews received God's blessing when they obeyed His laws.
- Joshua led his people by obeying God.

Key Verse:

"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Joshua 1:8).

Contents:

I. Joshua Becomes Israel's Leader 1:1–18

II. The Hebrews Conquer Canaan 2:1—12:24

III. The Land Is Divided 13:1—22:34

IV. Joshua Says Good-bye 23:1—24:33

in the Israeli army. Moses is dead, the Jordan has been crossed, the mantle passed, and you are wearing it.

God has promised that you will take Jericho. But as you look at the city, you have to wonder . . . the walls are high. The people are armed. The challenge is great.

But God has a plan.

You can't wait to hear it. "Surely, He'll give us more soldiers, stronger weapons, mightier swords. His plan must include this and more."

So you sit and listen as God explains. As He talks you are stunned, "What? Walk around the city seven times, blow some trumpets, and . . . . Wait a minute, God, this doesn't make sense."

The Book of Joshua is a book of battles. A book for soldiers. A book for people who would dare to win God's way. What applied then, applies today. It is the faithful who conquer. Those who follow the strategy win, those who don't—don't.

God's Commission to Joshua

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, it came to pass that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying: 2 "Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel. 3 Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. 4 From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. 5 No man shall *be able to* stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, *so* I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. 6 Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. 7 Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. 8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God *is* with you wherever you go."

The Order to Cross the Jordan

10 Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, 11 "Pass through the camp and command the people, saying, 'Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you will cross over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess.' "

Life LESSONS

JOSHUA 1:1—2:24

SITUATION
The story of Joshua began after the death of Moses. God appointed Joshua to lead the Israelites across the Jordan River into the land of Canaan.

OBSERVATION
The Lord instructed Joshua to remember what was written in the Book of the Law. Wisdom and success come from obeying its commands.

INSPIRATION
We go to the Word of God for comfort, and when we do, the words pierce like a surgeon's scalpel, both cutting and healing. The Word of God cuts to the very place where thoughts and attitudes come together, at the juncture of soul and spirit, providing a healing that can be obtained in no other way on earth.

The Bible was provided for us as a vehicle to carry us so that we might be able to see Jesus Christ.

If you want to grow in the Word of God, become a person with a chisel and quarry the Word—look, explore, seek. Let the Word become your Word, and you will grow.

I challenge you to rediscover the Bible in your own life . . . to regain the same hunger and enthusiasm you felt when you first heard the name of Jesus! (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "Bible")

APPLICATION

Knowing, studying, and meditating on the Word of God is critical if you are to grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ. If you are not spending regular time in the Bible, ask yourself what changes you can make to your schedule to make that time a priority.

EXPLORATION

Importance of the Scriptures—Psalm 119:1–8; John 10:35; Acts 18:24; Romans 15:4; Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 1:23–25.

12 And to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of
Manasseh Joshua spoke, saying, 13 "Remember the word which Moses
the servant of the Lord commanded you, saying, 'The Lord your God
is giving you rest and is giving you this land.' 14 Your wives, your little
ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land which Moses gave
you on this side of the Jordan. But you shall pass before your brethren
armed, all your mighty men of valor, and help them, 15 until the Lord
has given your brethren rest, as He *gave* you, and they also have taken
possession of the land which the Lord your God is giving them. Then
you shall return to the land of your possession and enjoy it, which
Moses the Lord's servant gave you on this side of the Jordan toward
the sunrise."

16 So they answered Joshua, saying, "All that you command us we
will do, and wherever you send us we will go. 17 Just as we heeded
Moses in all things, so we will heed you. Only the Lord your God be
with you, as He was with Moses. 18 Whoever rebels against your com-
mand and does not heed your words, in all that you command him,
shall be put to death. Only be strong and of good courage."

Rahab Hides the Spies

2 Now Joshua the son of Nun sent out two men from Acacia Grove[a]
to spy secretly, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho."

So they went, and came to the house of a harlot named Rahab, and
lodged there. 2 And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, "Behold,
men have come here tonight from the children of Israel to search out
the country."

3 So the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men
who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have
come to search out all the country."

4 Then the woman took the two men and hid them. So she said,
"Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they *were* from.
5 And it happened as the gate was being shut, when it was dark, that
the men went out. Where the men went I do not know; pursue them
quickly, for you may overtake them." 6 (But she had brought them up
to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid
in order on the roof.) 7 Then the men pursued them by the road to
the Jordan, to the fords. And as soon as those who pursued them had
gone out, they shut the gate.

8 Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, 9 and
said to the men: "I know that the Lord has given you the land, that the
terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land
are fainthearted because of you. 10 For we have heard how the Lord
dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt,
and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who *were* on the
other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.
11 And as soon as we heard *these things,* our hearts melted; neither did
there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the Lord
your God, He *is* God in heaven above and on earth beneath. 12 Now
therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the Lord, since I have shown you
kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father's house, and

2:1 [a]Hebrew *Shittim*

give me a true token, 13 and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death."

14 So the men answered her, "Our lives for yours, if none of you tell this business of ours. And it shall be, when the Lord has given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with you."

15 Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house *was* on the city wall; she dwelt on the wall. 16 And she said to them, "Get to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you. Hide there three days, until the pursuers have returned. Afterward you may go your way."

17 So the men said to her: "We *will be* blameless of this oath of yours which you have made us swear, 18 unless, *when* we come into the land, you bind this line of scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you bring your father, your mother, your brothers, and all your father's household to your own home. 19 So it shall be *that* whoever goes outside the doors of your house into the street, his blood *shall be* on his own head, and we *will be* guiltless. And whoever is with you in the house, his blood *shall be* on our head if a hand is laid on him. 20 And if you tell this business of ours, then we will be free from your oath which you made us swear."

21 Then she said, "According to your words, so *be* it." And she sent them away, and they departed. And she bound the scarlet cord in the window.

22 They departed and went to the mountain, and stayed there three days until the pursuers returned. The pursuers sought *them* all along the way, but did not find *them*. 23 So the two men returned, descended from the mountain, and crossed over; and they came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all that had befallen them. 24 And they said to Joshua, "Truly the Lord has delivered all the land into our hands, for indeed all the inhabitants of the country are fainthearted because of us."

Israel Crosses the Jordan

3 Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and they set out from Acacia Grove[a] and came to the Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they crossed over. 2 So it was, after three days, that the officers went through the camp; 3 and they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests, the Levites, bearing it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it. 4 Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you must go, for you have not passed *this* way before."

5 And Joshua said to the people, "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you." 6 Then Joshua spoke to the priests, saying, "Take up the ark of the covenant and cross over before the people."

So they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people.

7 And the Lord said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, *so*

3:1 [a]Hebrew *Shittim*

Life LESSONS

Joshua 3:1—5:12

SITUATION

As God guided the Israelites into the Promised Land, He instructed them to purify themselves before crossing the Jordan River. In another powerful miracle, God stopped the Jordan River in flood stage so that the people easily crossed into Canaan. The ark of the covenant and the priests led this procession.

OBSERVATION

God guided the Israelites into the Promised Land as they continued to trust in Him.

INSPIRATION

Make friends with whatever's next.

Embrace it. Accept it. Don't resist it. Change is not only a part of life; change is a necessary part of God's strategy. To use us to change the world, He alters our assignments. Gideon: from farmer to general; Mary: from peasant girl to the mother of Christ; Paul: from local rabbi to world evangelist. God transitioned Joseph from a baby brother to an Egyptian prince. He changed David from a shepherd to a king. Peter wanted to fish the Sea of Galilee. God called him to lead the first church. God makes reassignments.

But, someone might ask, what about the tragic changes God permits? Some seasons make no sense. Who can find a place in life's puzzle for the deformity of a child or the enormity of an earthquake's devastation? When a company discontinues a position or a parent is

deployed . . . do such moments serve a purpose?

They do if we see them from an eternal perspective. What makes no sense in this life will make perfect sense in the next. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What steps are you taking to fulfill God's will? Often our efforts seem uncertain or risky. Put your trust in God to guide.

EXPLORATION

Faith Defined—Matthew 13:44; Romans 10:9; 12:3; Ephesians 3:16, 17; 6:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 5:8; Hebrews 11:1; Jude 20, 21.

The oak indwells the acorn. Read your life backward and check your supplies. Rerelish your moments of success and satisfaction. For in the merger of the two, you find your uniqueness.

—Max Lucado (Cure for the Common Life)

I will be with you. 8 You shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, saying, 'When you have come to the edge of the water of the Jordan, you shall stand in the Jordan.' "

9 So Joshua said to the children of Israel, "Come here, and hear the words of the Lord your God." 10 And Joshua said, "By this you shall know that the living God *is* among you, and *that* He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Hivites and the Perizzites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Jebusites: 11 Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over before you into the Jordan. 12 Now therefore, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man from every tribe. 13 And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, *that* the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that come down from upstream, and they shall stand as a heap."

14 So it was, when the people set out from their camp to cross over the Jordan, with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, 15 and as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest), 16 that the waters which came down from upstream stood *still, and* rose in a heap very far away at Adam, the city that *is* beside Zaretan. So the waters that went down into the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, failed, *and* were cut off; and the people crossed over opposite Jericho. 17 Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan; and all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan.

The Memorial Stones

4 And it came to pass, when all the people had completely crossed over the Jordan, that the Lord spoke to Joshua, saying: 2 "Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from every tribe, 3 and command them, saying, 'Take for yourselves twelve stones from here, out of the midst of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet stood firm. You shall carry them over with you and leave them in the lodging place where you lodge tonight.' "

4 Then Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the children of Israel, one man from every tribe; 5 and Joshua said to them: "Cross over before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of the Jordan, and each one of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, 6 that this may be a sign among you when your children ask in time to come, saying, 'What do these stones *mean* to you?' 7 Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. And these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever."

8 And the children of Israel did so, just as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones from the midst of the Jordan, as the Lord had spoken to Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the children

of Israel, and carried them over with them to the place where they lodged, and laid them down there. 9Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests who bore the ark of the covenant stood; and they are there to this day.

10So the priests who bore the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished that the Lord had commanded Joshua to speak to the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua; and the people hurried and crossed over. 11Then it came to pass, when all the people had completely crossed over, that the ark of the Lord and the priests crossed over in the presence of the people. 12And the men of Reuben, the men of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh crossed over armed before the children of Israel, as Moses had spoken to them. 13About forty thousand prepared for war crossed over

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: The Commander of the Lord's Army

An intriguing verse is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first."

Have you ever wondered what that command will be? It will be the inaugural word of heaven. It will be the first audible message most have heard from God. It will be the word which closes one age and opens a new one.

I think I know what the command will be. I could very well be wrong, but I think the command which puts an end to the pains of the earth and initiates the joys of heaven will be two words:

"No more."

The King of kings will raise His pierced hand and proclaim, "No more."

The angels will stand and the Father will speak, "No more."

Every person who lives and who ever lived will turn toward the sky and hear God announce, "No more."

No more loneliness. No more tears. No more death. No more sadness. No more crying. No more pain.

As John sat on the Island of Patmos surrounded by sea and separated from friends he dreamt of the day when God would say, "No more."

This same disciple who had heard Jesus speak these words of assurance over a half a century before now knew what they meant. I wonder if he could hear the voice of Jesus in his memory.

"The end will come."

For those who live for this world, that's bad news. But for those who live for the world to come, it's an encouraging promise.

You're on a land mine, my friend, and it's only a matter of time: "In the world you will have tribulation . . ." Next time you are tossed into a river as you ride the rapids of life, remember his words of assurance.

Those who endure will be saved. The gospel will be preached. The end will come.

You can count on it. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 287.

Life Lessons

Joshua 5:13—6:27

SITUATION
The commander of the Lord's army appeared to Joshua, which showed Joshua that he didn't have to bear the responsibility alone of conquering Jericho. After Jericho was taken, a curse was put on the city for anyone trying to rebuild it.

OBSERVATION
Rahab the prostitute and her family were spared by Joshua and his men because she had spared the spies earlier. She is mentioned by the author of the Book of Hebrews as an example of faith (11:31) and by James as someone who demonstrated good works (2:25). She had a choice to make, and she chose to help the spies.

INSPIRATION
There are times when God sends thunder to stir us. There are times when God sends blessings to lure us. But then there are times when God sends nothing but silence as He honors us with the freedom to choose where we spend eternity.

And what an honor it is! In so many areas of life we have no choice. Think about it. You didn't choose your gender. You didn't choose your siblings. You didn't choose your race or place of birth.

Sometimes our lack of choices angers us. "It's not fair," we say. It's not fair that I was born in poverty or that I sing so poorly or that I run so slowly. But the scales of life were forever tipped on the side of fairness when God planted a tree in the Garden of Eden. All complaints were silenced

before the Lord for battle, to the plains of Jericho. 14 On that day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they had feared Moses, all the days of his life.

15 Then the Lord spoke to Joshua, saying, 16 "Command the priests who bear the ark of the Testimony to come up from the Jordan." 17 Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, "Come up from the Jordan." 18 And it came to pass, when the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord had come from the midst of the Jordan, *and* the soles of the priests' feet touched the dry land, that the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks as before.

19 Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth *day* of the first month, and they camped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. 20 And those twelve stones which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal. 21 Then he spoke to the children of Israel, saying: "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What *are* these stones?' 22 then you shall let your children know, saying, 'Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land'; 23 for the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over, 24 that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the Lord, that it *is* mighty, that you may fear the Lord your God forever."

The Second Generation Circumcised

5 So it was, when all the kings of the Amorites who *were* on the west side of the Jordan, and all the kings of the Canaanites who *were* by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel until we[a] had crossed over, that their heart melted; and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel.

2 At that time the Lord said to Joshua, "Make flint knives for yourself, and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time." 3 So Joshua made flint knives for himself, and circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins.[a] 4 And this *is* the reason why Joshua circumcised them: All the people who came out of Egypt *who were* males, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way, after they had come out of Egypt. 5 For all the people who came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness, on the way as they came out of Egypt, had not been circumcised. 6 For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people *who were* men of war, who came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they did not obey the voice of the Lord—to whom the Lord swore that He would not show them the land which the Lord had sworn to their fathers that He would give us, "a land flowing with milk and honey."[a] 7 Then Joshua circumcised their sons *whom* He raised up in their place; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way.

8 So it was, when they had finished circumcising all the people, that they stayed in their places in the camp till they were healed. 9 Then the

5:1 [a]Following Kethib; Qere, some Hebrew manuscripts and editions, Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate read *they.* **5:3** [a]Hebrew *Gibeath Haaraloth*
5:6 [a]Exodus 3:8

Lord said to Joshua, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." Therefore the name of the place is called Gilgal[a] to this day.

10 Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. 11 And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. 12 Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.

The Commander of the Army of the Lord

13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "*Are* You for us or for our adversaries?"

14 So He said, "No, but *as* Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come."

And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?"

15 Then the Commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand *is* holy." And Joshua did so.

The Destruction of Jericho

6 Now Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out, and none came in. 2 And the Lord said to Joshua: "See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, *and* the mighty men of valor. 3 You shall march around the city, all *you* men of war; you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days. 4 And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. 5 It shall come to pass, when they make a long *blast* with the ram's horn, *and* when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him."

6 Then Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord." 7 And he said to the people, "Proceed, and march around the city, and let him who is armed advance before the ark of the Lord."

8 So it was, when Joshua had spoken to the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the Lord advanced and blew the trumpets, and the ark of the covenant of the Lord followed them. 9 The armed men went before the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard came after the ark, while *the priests* continued blowing the trumpets. 10 Now Joshua had commanded the people, saying, "You shall not shout or make any noise with your voice, nor shall a word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I say to you, 'Shout!' Then you shall shout." 11 So he had the ark of

5:9 [a] Literally *Rolling*

when Adam and his descendants were given free will, the freedom to make whatever eternal choice we desire. Any injustice in this life is offset by the honor of choosing our destiny in the next.

Wouldn't you agree? Would you have wanted otherwise? Would you have preferred the opposite? You choose everything in this life, and he chooses where you spend the next? You choose the size of your nose, the color of your hair, and your DNA structure, and he chooses where you spend eternity? Is that what you would prefer?

It would have been nice if God had let us order life like we order a meal. I'll take good health and a high IQ. I'll pass on the music skills, but give me a fast metabolism . . . Would've been nice. But it didn't happen. When it came to your life on earth, you weren't given a voice or a vote.

But when it comes to life after death, you were. In my book that seems like a good deal. Wouldn't you agree?

Have we been given any greater privilege than that of choice? Not only does this privilege offset any injustice, the gift of free will can offset any mistakes.

Think about the thief who repented. Though we know little about him, we know this: He made some bad mistakes in life. He chose the wrong crowd, the wrong morals, the wrong behavior. But would you consider his life a waste? Is he spending eternity reaping the fruit of all the bad choices he made? No, just the opposite. He is enjoying the fruit of the one good choice he made. In the end all his bad choices were redeemed by a solitary good one.

You've made some bad choices in life, haven't you? You've chosen the wrong friends, maybe the wrong career, even the wrong spouse. You look back over your life and say, "If only . . . if only I could make up for those bad choices." You can. One good choice for eternity offsets a thousand bad ones on earth.

The choice is yours. (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Have you made some bad choices in your life? Confess any sins you may need to confess . . . then make today a new beginning. Just like Rahab, you can leave behind your former life or behavior, and concentrate now on following the King of kings.

EXPLORATION

Making Choices—Deuteronomy 30:19, 20; Joshua 24:15; 1 Kings 18:21.

the Lord circle the city, going around *it* once. Then they came into the camp and lodged in the camp.

12 And Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the Lord. 13 Then seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord went on continually and blew with the trumpets. And the armed men went before them. But the rear guard came after the ark of the Lord, while *the priests* continued blowing the trumpets. 14 And the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. So they did six days.

15 But it came to pass on the seventh day that they rose early, about the dawning of the day, and marched around the city seven times in the same manner. On that day only they marched around the city seven times. 16 And the seventh time it happened, when the priests blew the trumpets, that Joshua said to the people: "Shout, for the Lord has given you the city! 17 Now the city shall be doomed by the Lord to destruction, it and all who *are* in it. Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all who *are* with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. 18 And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things, lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. 19 But all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, *are* consecrated to the Lord; they shall come into the treasury of the Lord."

20 So the people shouted when *the priests* blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. 21 And they utterly destroyed all that *was* in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.

22 But Joshua had said to the two men who had spied out the country, "Go into the harlot's house, and from there bring out the woman and all that she has, as you swore to her." 23 And the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, her mother, her brothers, and all that she had. So they brought out all her relatives and left them outside the camp of Israel. 24 But they burned the city and all that *was* in it with fire. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord. 25 And Joshua spared Rahab the harlot, her father's household, and all that she had. So she dwells in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

26 Then Joshua charged *them* at that time, saying, "Cursed *be* the man before the Lord who rises up and builds this city Jericho; he shall lay its foundation with his firstborn, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates."

27 So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout all the country.

Defeat at Ai

7 But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi,[a] the

7:1 [a]Called *Zimri* in 1 Chronicles 2:6

son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the Lord burned against the children of Israel.

2 Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which *is* beside Beth Aven, on the east side of Bethel, and spoke to them, saying, "Go up and spy out the country." So the men went up and spied out Ai. 3 And they returned to Joshua and said to him, "Do not let all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not weary all the people there, for *the people of Ai are* few." 4 So about three thousand men went up there from the people, but they fled before the men of Ai. 5 And the men of Ai struck down about thirty-six men, for they chased them *from* before the gate as far as Shebarim, and struck them down on the descent; therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water.

6 Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord until evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads. 7 And Joshua said, "Alas, Lord God, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all—to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan! 8 O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies? 9 For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear *it,* and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?"

The Sin of Achan

10 So the Lord said to Joshua: "Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? 11 Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put *it* among their own stuff. 12 Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, *but* turned *their* backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you. 13 Get up, sanctify the people, and say, 'Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, because thus says the Lord God of Israel: "*There is* an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you." 14 In the morning therefore you shall be brought according to your tribes. And it shall be *that* the tribe which the Lord takes shall come according to families; and the family which the Lord takes shall come by households; and the household which the Lord takes shall come man by man. 15 Then it shall be *that* he who is taken with the accursed thing shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and because he has done a disgraceful thing in Israel.'"

16 So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel by their tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken. 17 He brought the clan of Judah, and he took the family of the Zarhites; and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man, and Zabdi was taken. 18 Then he brought his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

19 Now Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I beg you, give glory to the

Life Lessons

Joshua 7:1–26

SITUATION

After dreaming of a homeland for forty years and tasting victory in Jericho, Israel suffered a stunning defeat at Ai. One man, Achan, stole plunder from Jericho and brought God's judgment on all the people. God helped Israel conquer Ai after the sinful man and his family were destroyed.

OBSERVATION

God insists on obedience to His commands no matter how small or strict they may seem. Only then can we enjoy His blessing.

INSPIRATION

Equipped with the right tools, we can learn to listen to God. What are those tools? Here are the ones I have found helpful.

A regular time and place. Select a slot on your schedule and a corner of your world, and claim it for God. For some it may be the best to do this in the morning. . . . Others prefer the evening. . . .

A second tool you need [is] *an open Bible.* God speaks to us through his Word. The first step in reading the Bible is to ask God to help you understand it. . . . Don't go to the Scripture looking for your own idea; go searching for God's. . . .

There is a third tool. . . . Not only do we need a regular time and an open Bible, we also need a listening heart. . . . If you want to be just like Jesus, let God have you. Spend time listening for Him and you receive your lesson for the day—then apply it.

(From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
God does not seek partial compliance with His instructions. We must obey Him completely. Did you participate in a questionable activity during the last week? Was it sin? Evaluate honestly. If you are unsure, avoid the activity next time. Use the tools He gives to know what He wants you to do.

EXPLORATION
Obedience—Genesis 3:11–13; 17:1; 22:3; 2 Kings 23:4–8, 25; John 14:23, 24; 2 John 1:6.

Life LESSONS

Joshua 8:1–35

SITUATION
After Achan's sin, Joshua carefully obeyed all of God's instructions. Joshua completely destroyed Ai and built an altar to the Lord.

OBSERVATION
After the defeat at Ai, the Israelites could have given up and retreated. But after judging Achan's crime, God gave Israel a second chance. As Israel confessed and turned from sin, God's favor was restored, and Israel won a great victory.

INSPIRATION
I would like to confess a fall. I've kept it secret long enough. I can't deny the stumble; nor can I dismiss the truth. I fell. There were witnesses to my slip. They can tell you. Graciously, they have told no one. Out of concern for my reputation, they kept the event a secret. But it has been a secret long enough. The time has come for my mistake to be shared.

LORD God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide *it* from me."

20 And Achan answered Joshua and said, "Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I have done: 21 When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it."

22 So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver under it. 23 And they took them from the midst of the tent, brought them to Joshua and to all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD. 24 Then Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the garment, the wedge of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had, and they brought them to the Valley of Achor. 25 And Joshua said, "Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day." So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones.

26 Then they raised over him a great heap of stones, still there to this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of Achor[a] to this day.

The Fall of Ai

8 Now the LORD said to Joshua: "Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; take all the people of war with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land. 2 And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its cattle you shall take as booty for yourselves. Lay an ambush for the city behind it."

3 So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai; and Joshua chose thirty thousand mighty men of valor and sent them away by night. 4 And he commanded them, saying: "Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind the city. Do not go very far from the city, but all of you be ready. 5 Then I and all the people who *are* with me will approach the city; and it will come about, when they come out against us as at the first, that we shall flee before them. 6 For they will come out after us till we have drawn them from the city, for they will say, '*They are* fleeing before us as at the first.' Therefore we will flee before them. 7 Then you shall rise from the ambush and seize the city, for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand. 8 And it will be, when you have taken the city, *that* you shall set the city on fire. According to the commandment of the LORD you shall do. See, I have commanded you."

9 Joshua therefore sent them out; and they went to lie in ambush, and stayed between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai; but Joshua lodged that night among the people. 10 Then Joshua rose up early in the morning and mustered the people, and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai. 11 And all the people of war who *were* with him went up and drew near; and they came before the city and camped on the north side of Ai. Now a valley *lay* between them and

7:26 [a] Literally *Trouble*

Ai. 12 So he took about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city. 13 And when they had set the people, all the army that *was* on the north of the city, and its rear guard on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley.

14 Now it happened, when the king of Ai saw *it,* that the men of the city hurried and rose early and went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at an appointed place before the plain. But he did not know that *there was* an ambush against him behind the city. 15 And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. 16 So all the people who *were* in Ai were called together to pursue them. And they pursued Joshua and were drawn away from the city. 17 There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel. So they left the city open and pursued Israel.

18 Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Stretch out the spear that *is* in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand." And Joshua stretched out the spear that *was* in his hand toward the city. 19 So *those in* ambush arose quickly out of their place; they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand, and they entered the city and took it, and hurried to set the city on fire. 20 And when the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw, and behold, the smoke of the city ascended to heaven. So they had no power to flee this way or that way, and the people who had fled to the wilderness turned back on the pursuers.

21 Now when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that the smoke of the city ascended, they turned back and struck down the men of Ai. 22 Then the others came out of the city against them; so they were *caught* in the midst of Israel, some on this side and some on that side. And they struck them down, so that they let none of them remain or escape. 23 But the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua.

24 And it came to pass when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness where they pursued them, and when they all had fallen by the edge of the sword until they were consumed, that all the Israelites returned to Ai and struck it with the edge of the sword. 25 So it was *that* all who fell that day, both men and women, *were* twelve thousand—all the people of Ai. 26 For Joshua did not draw back his hand, with which he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai. 27 Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took as booty for themselves, according to the word of the Lord which He had commanded Joshua. 28 So Joshua burned Ai and made it a heap forever, a desolation to this day. 29 And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until evening. And as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his corpse down from the tree, cast it at the entrance of the gate of the city, and raise over it a great heap of stones *that remains* to this day.

Joshua Renews the Covenant

30 Now Joshua built an altar to the Lord God of Israel in Mount Ebal, 31 as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses: "an altar of

I lost my footing at a family camp.

My daughters and I chose to climb a wall—a simulated rock climb. The wall is made of wood with occasional rock-shaped fingerholds bolted into the surface. For safety, the climber wears a harness around his waist. The harness is attached to a rope that runs up through a pulley and then down into the hands of a guide who secures it as the climber climbs.

I gave it a go. What's a fifty-foot wall for a middle-aged author? I gave the guide the "thumbs-up" and began. The first half of the trip I did well. About midway, however, I began to get tired. These hands and feet are not accustomed to climbing.

With about twenty feet left to go, I honestly began to wonder if I would make it. I gave serious thought to telling the guide just to pull me up the rest of the way. My fingers were sore, and my legs were starting to tremble, and I was regretting every Big Mac I'd ever eaten, but the thought of surrender was lost in the cheers of my daughters who were already on the top.

"Come on, Dad. You can make it!"

So I gave it all I had. But all I had was not enough. My feet slipped, my hands slipped, and down I fell. I fell hard. But I didn't fall far. My guide had a firm hold on the rope. Because he was alert and because he was strong, my tumble lasted only a couple of seconds. I bounced and swung in the harness, suspended in midair. Everyone watching let out a sigh, and I gulped and resumed the climb.

Guess what I did when I made it to the top? Do you think I boasted? Do you think I bragged about

conquering the wall? No way. I looked down at the one who kept me from falling. "Thanks, pal," I told him. I didn't pat myself on the back or raise my fist in triumph. I didn't ask everybody if they'd seen what I did. I did the only thing that was right; I said thanks to the one who held me.

Would that all my tumbles were so simple. So brief. So harmless. They haven't been. I've been known to let go of much more than imitation rocks. I've let go of promises and convictions. There have been times when my fingers slipped off the very stones of truth I treasure. And I can't tell you how many times I've expected to hit the bottom only to find myself suspended in midair, secured by a pair of nail-pierced hands.

"Try again," he urges. And so I resume.

You and I are on a great climb. The wall is high, and the stakes are higher. You took your first step the day you confessed Christ as the Son of God. He gave you His harness—the Holy Spirit. In your hands He placed a rope—his Word.

Your first steps were confident and strong, but with the journey came weariness, and with the height came fear. You lost your footing. You lost your focus. You lost your grip, and you fell. For a moment, which seemed like forever, you tumbled wildly. Out of control. Out of self-control. Disoriented. Dislodged. Falling.

But then the rope tightened, and the tumble ceased. You hung in the harness and found it to be strong. You grasped the rope and found it to be true. You looked at your guide and found Jesus

whole stones over which no man has wielded an iron *tool*."[a] And they offered on it burnt offerings to the Lord, and sacrificed peace offerings. 32 And there, in the presence of the children of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written. 33 Then all Israel, with their elders and officers and judges, stood on either side of the ark before the priests, the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, the stranger as well as he who was born among them. Half of them *were* in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel. 34 And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. 35 There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.

The Treaty with the Gibeonites

9 And it came to pass when all the kings who *were* on this side of the Jordan, in the hills and in the lowland and in all the coasts of the Great Sea toward Lebanon—the Hittite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite—heard *about it,* 2 that they gathered together to fight with Joshua and Israel with one accord.

3 But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, 4 they worked craftily, and went and pretended to be ambassadors. And they took old sacks on their donkeys, old wineskins torn and mended, 5 old and patched sandals on their feet, and old garments on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry *and* moldy. 6 And they went to Joshua, to the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us."

7 Then the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you dwell among us; so how can we make a covenant with you?"

8 But they said to Joshua, "We *are* your servants."

And Joshua said to them, "Who *are* you, and where do you come from?"

9 So they said to him: "From a very far country your servants have come, because of the name of the Lord your God; for we have heard of His fame, and all that He did in Egypt, 10 and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who *were* beyond the Jordan—to Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who was at Ashtaroth. 11 Therefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us, saying, 'Take provisions with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say to them, "We *are* your servants; now therefore, make a covenant with us."' 12 This bread of ours we took hot *for* our provision from our houses on the day we departed to come to you. But now look, it is dry and moldy. 13 And these wineskins which we filled *were* new, and see, they are torn; and these our garments and our sandals have become old because of the very long journey."

14 Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the Lord. 15 So Joshua made peace with them,

8:31 [a] Deuteronomy 27:5, 6

and made a covenant with them to let them live; and the rulers of the congregation swore to them.

16 And it happened at the end of three days, after they had made a covenant with them, that they heard that they *were* their neighbors who dwelt near them. 17 Then the children of Israel journeyed and came to their cities on the third day. Now their cities *were* Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath Jearim. 18 But the children of Israel did not attack them, because the rulers of the congregation had sworn to them by the Lord God of Israel. And all the congregation complained against the rulers.

19 Then all the rulers said to all the congregation, "We have sworn to them by the Lord God of Israel; now therefore, we may not touch them. 20 This we will do to them: We will let them live, lest wrath be upon us because of the oath which we swore to them." 21 And the rulers said to them, "Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for all the congregation, as the rulers had promised them."

22 Then Joshua called for them, and he spoke to them, saying, "Why have you deceived us, saying, 'We *are* very far from you,' when you dwell near us? 23 Now therefore, you *are* cursed, and none of you shall be freed from being slaves—woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God."

24 So they answered Joshua and said, "Because your servants were clearly told that the Lord your God commanded His servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you; therefore we were very much afraid for our lives because of you, and have done this thing. 25 And now, here we are, in your hands; do with us as it seems good and right to do to us." 26 So he did to them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, so that they did not kill them. 27 And that day Joshua made them woodcutters and water carriers for the congregation and for the altar of the Lord, in the place which He would choose, even to this day.

The Sun Stands Still

10 Now it came to pass when Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem heard how Joshua had taken Ai and had utterly destroyed it—as he had done to Jericho and its king, so he had done to Ai and its king—and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were among them, 2 that they feared greatly, because Gibeon *was* a great city, like one of the royal cities, and because it *was* greater than Ai, and all its men *were* mighty. 3 Therefore Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem sent to Hoham king of Hebron, Piram king of Jarmuth, Japhia king of Lachish, and Debir king of Eglon, saying, 4 "Come up to me and help me, that we may attack Gibeon, for it has made peace with Joshua and with the children of Israel." 5 Therefore the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, *and* the king of Eglon, gathered together and went up, they and all their armies, and camped before Gibeon and made war against it.

6 And the men of Gibeon sent to Joshua at the camp at Gilgal, saying, "Do not forsake your servants; come up to us quickly, save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites who dwell in the mountains have gathered together against us."

securing your soul. With a sheepish confession, you smiled at Him and He smiled at you, and the journey resumed.

Now you are wiser. You have learned to go slowly. You are careful. You are cautious, but you are also confident. You trust the rope. You rely on the harness. And though you can't see your guide, you know Him. You know He is strong. You know He is able to keep you from falling.

And you know you are only a few more steps from the top. So whatever you do, don't quit. Though your falls are great, His strength is greater. You will make it. You will see the summit. You will stand at the top. And when you get there, the first thing you'll do is join with all the others who have made the climb and sing this verse:

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen" (Jude 24, 25). (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Think of a time when you needed a second chance. How did it feel when you were given that opportunity? Remember, our God is a God of great mercy and grace, a God of third and fourth and fifth chances. Don't let your sins or your past keep you from enjoying a strong relationship with Him. Look to God to forgive you, to strengthen you, and to give you another chance.

EXPLORATION
Restoration—Psalm 19:7; 23:3; Hebrews 12:12, 13; James 5:13–16; 1 Peter 2:24.

Life Lessons

Joshua 9:1—10:43

SITUATION
God did not promise the Israelites the land without giving them the strength to conquer it. God helped Joshua lead the people into possession of their land.

OBSERVATION
God does not give us commands or lead us to decisions and leave us to fight the obstacles in our own strength. He strengthens us and guides us in every detail.

INSPIRATION
You get impatient with your own life, trying to master a habit or control a sin—and in your frustration begin to wonder where the power of God is. Be patient. God is using today's difficulties to strengthen you for tomorrow. He is *equipping* you. The God who makes things grow will help you bear fruit.

God did not leave you as an orphan. He says He will be with you always. All of us could use some more strength—who isn't trying to tackle an attitude or put away a bad habit or overcome guilt? We can't see the power, but it's real—we're not alone.

As long as we have hope, as long as we recognize that this world is not our home, as long as we recognize that someday all of our problems will be solved, that is where we will gather our strength. (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "Strength")

7 So Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he and all the people of war
with him, and all the mighty men of valor. 8 And the Lord said to
Joshua, "Do not fear them, for I have delivered them into your hand;
not a man of them shall stand before you." 9 Joshua therefore came
upon them suddenly, having marched all night from Gilgal. 10 So the
Lord routed them before Israel, killed them with a great slaughter at
Gibeon, chased them along the road that goes to Beth Horon, and
struck them down as far as Azekah and Makkedah. 11 And it hap-
pened, as they fled before Israel *and* were on the descent of Beth
Horon, that the Lord cast down large hailstones from heaven on them
as far as Azekah, and they died. *There were* more who died from the
hailstones than the children of Israel killed with the sword.

12 Then Joshua spoke to the Lord in the day when the Lord deliv-
ered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the
sight of Israel:

"Sun, stand still over Gibeon;
And Moon, in the Valley of Aijalon."
13 So the sun stood still,
And the moon stopped,
Till the people had revenge
Upon their enemies.

Is this not written in the Book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the
midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go *down* for about a whole day.
14 And there has been no day like that, before it or after it, that the Lord
heeded the voice of a man; for the Lord fought for Israel.

15 Then Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at
Gilgal.

The Amorite Kings Executed

16 But these five kings had fled and hidden themselves in a cave at
Makkedah. 17 And it was told Joshua, saying, "The five kings have been
found hidden in the cave at Makkedah."

18 So Joshua said, "Roll large stones against the mouth of the cave,
and set men by it to guard them. 19 And do not stay *there* yourselves,
but pursue your enemies, and attack their rear *guard*. Do not allow
them to enter their cities, for the Lord your God has delivered them
into your hand." 20 Then it happened, while Joshua and the children of
Israel made an end of slaying them with a very great slaughter, till they
had finished, that those who escaped entered fortified cities. 21 And
all the people returned to the camp, to Joshua at Makkedah, in peace.
No one moved his tongue against any of the children of Israel.

22 Then Joshua said, "Open the mouth of the cave, and bring out
those five kings to me from the cave." 23 And they did so, and brought
out those five kings to him from the cave: the king of Jerusalem, the
king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, *and* the king
of Eglon.

24 So it was, when they brought out those kings to Joshua, that
Joshua called for all the men of Israel, and said to the captains of
the men of war who went with him, "Come near, put your feet on
the necks of these kings." And they drew near and put their feet on

their necks. 25 Then Joshua said to them, "Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; be strong and of good courage, for thus the Lord will do to all your enemies against whom you fight." 26 And afterward Joshua struck them and killed them, and hanged them on five trees; and they were hanging on the trees until evening. 27 So it was at the time of the going down of the sun *that* Joshua commanded, and they took them down from the trees, cast them into the cave where they had been hidden, and laid large stones against the cave's mouth, *which remain* until this very day.

Conquest of the Southland

28 On that day Joshua took Makkedah, and struck it and its king with the edge of the sword. He utterly destroyed them[a]—all the people who *were* in it. He let none remain. He also did to the king of Makkedah as he had done to the king of Jericho.

10:28 [a]Following Masoretic Text and most authorities; many Hebrew manuscripts, some manuscripts of the Septuagint, and some manuscripts of the Targum read *it*.

APPLICATION
If you are struggling right now with an attitude or bad habit, stop and focus on the promise of God's strength and His presence. As God did with the Israelites, He will go with you into battle and will equip you for whatever you may face this day. Remember that God is in charge and controls everything.

EXPLORATION
God's Strength for Us—Exodus 15:2; 2 Samuel 22:33; Psalm 28:8; 73:26; 81:1; 89:21.

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: Authority and Power

There are many examples of Jesus' authority, but I'll just mention one of my favorites. Jesus and the disciples are in a boat crossing the sea of Galilee. A storm arises suddenly and what was placid becomes violent—monstrous waves rise out of the sea and slap the boat. . . .

. . . The very storm which made the disciples panic made Him drowsy. What put fear in their eyes put Him to sleep. The boat was a tomb to the followers and a cradle to Christ. How could He sleep through the storm? Simple, He was in charge of it.

"Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace, be still!' And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, 'Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?'" (Mark 4:39, 40).

Incredible. He doesn't chant a mantra or wave a wand. No angels are called, no help is needed. The raging water becomes a stilled sea, instantly. Immediate calm. Not a ripple. Not a drop. Not a gust. In a moment the sea goes from a churning torrent to a peaceful pond. The reaction of the disciples? Read it in verse 41: "they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, 'Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!'" (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 408.

Every broken heart, every unwanted child, every war and tragedy can be traced back to our rebellion against God.

—Max Lucado (In the Grip of Grace)

Life LESSONS

Joshua 11:1—12:24

SITUATION
Joshua led Israel's army to many victories over the Canaanites. Though the Israelites were outnumbered, God is never outnumbered. He encouraged, supported, and brought victory to them. After seven years of campaigning, the Israelites destroyed the alliance of Canaanite tribes.

OBSERVATION
The world sees "victory" in a different light than the Bible does. The Bible sees victory as the finished work of Jesus Christ at Calvary and His resurrection. It has a future look and understanding.

INSPIRATION
Sometimes life doesn't seem fair, does it? Have you ever wondered why good people have to hurt? Why the innocent suffer? Often it seems that those who have been most battered by life seem to understand Jesus best, and His assurance finds its way into the darkest corners of life, because regardless of our circumstances, God meets our needs. By surrendering to Him, the ultimate victory is ours.

What is unique about the kingdom of God is that you are assured of victory. You have won! You are assured that you will someday stand before the face of God and see the King of kings. You are assured that someday you will enter a world where there will be no more pain, no more tears, nor more sorrow.

If you have no faith in the future, then you have

29 Then Joshua passed from Makkedah, and all Israel with him, to
Libnah; and they fought against Libnah. 30 And the Lord also delivered
it and its king into the hand of Israel; he struck it and all the people
who *were* in it with the edge of the sword. He let none remain in it, but
did to its king as he had done to the king of Jericho.
31 Then Joshua passed from Libnah, and all Israel with him, to
Lachish; and they encamped against it and fought against it. 32 And
the Lord delivered Lachish into the hand of Israel, who took it on the
second day, and struck it and all the people who *were* in it with the
edge of the sword, according to all that he had done to Libnah. 33 Then
Horam king of Gezer came up to help Lachish; and Joshua struck him
and his people, until he left him none remaining.
34 From Lachish Joshua passed to Eglon, and all Israel with him;
and they encamped against it and fought against it. 35 They took it on
that day and struck it with the edge of the sword; all the people who
were in it he utterly destroyed that day, according to all that he had
done to Lachish.
36 So Joshua went up from Eglon, and all Israel with him, to Hebron;
and they fought against it. 37 And they took it and struck it with the
edge of the sword—its king, all its cities, and all the people who *were*
in it; he left none remaining, according to all that he had done to
Eglon, but utterly destroyed it and all the people who *were* in it.
38 Then Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to Debir; and
they fought against it. 39 And he took it and its king and all its cities;
they struck them with the edge of the sword and utterly destroyed all
the people who *were* in it. He left none remaining; as he had done to
Hebron, so he did to Debir and its king, as he had done also to Libnah
and its king.
40 So Joshua conquered all the land: the mountain country and the
South[a] and the lowland and the wilderness slopes, and all their kings;
he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the
Lord God of Israel had commanded. 41 And Joshua conquered them
from Kadesh Barnea as far as Gaza, and all the country of Goshen,
even as far as Gibeon. 42 All these kings and their land Joshua took
at one time, because the Lord God of Israel fought for Israel. 43 Then
Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal.

The Northern Conquest

11 And it came to pass, when Jabin king of Hazor heard *these*
things, that he sent to Jobab king of Madon, to the king of
Shimron, to the king of Achshaph, 2 and to the kings who *were* from
the north, in the mountains, in the plain south of Chinneroth, in the
lowland, and in the heights of Dor on the west, 3 to the Canaanites in
the east and in the west, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the
Jebusite in the mountains, and the Hivite below Hermon in the land
of Mizpah. 4 So they went out, they and all their armies with them, *as*
many people *as* the sand that *is* on the seashore in multitude, with
very many horses and chariots. 5 And when all these kings had met
together, they came and camped together at the waters of Merom to
fight against Israel.

10:40 [a]Hebrew *Negev,* and so throughout this book

6 But the Lord said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid because of them, for
tomorrow about this time I will deliver all of them slain before Israel.
You shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire."
7 So Joshua and all the people of war with him came against them
suddenly by the waters of Merom, and they attacked them. 8 And the
Lord delivered them into the hand of Israel, who defeated them and
chased them to Greater Sidon, to the Brook Misrephoth,[a] and to the
Valley of Mizpah eastward; they attacked them until they left none of
them remaining. 9 So Joshua did to them as the Lord had told him: he
hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots with fire.

10 Joshua turned back at that time and took Hazor, and struck its
king with the sword; for Hazor was formerly the head of all those king-
doms. 11 And they struck all the people who *were* in it with the edge
of the sword, utterly destroying *them.* There was none left breathing.
Then he burned Hazor with fire.

12 So all the cities of those kings, and all their kings, Joshua took
and struck with the edge of the sword. He utterly destroyed them, as
Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded. 13 But *as for* the cit-
ies that stood on their mounds,[a] Israel burned none of them, except
Hazor only, *which* Joshua burned. 14 And all the spoil of these cities
and the livestock, the children of Israel took as booty for themselves;
but they struck every man with the edge of the sword until they had
destroyed them, and they left none breathing. 15 As the Lord had
commanded Moses his servant, so Moses commanded Joshua, and
so Joshua did. He left nothing undone of all that the Lord had com-
manded Moses.

Summary of Joshua's Conquests

16 Thus Joshua took all this land: the mountain country, all the
South, all the land of Goshen, the lowland, and the Jordan plain[a]—the
mountains of Israel and its lowlands, 17 from Mount Halak and the
ascent to Seir, even as far as Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below
Mount Hermon. He captured all their kings, and struck them down
and killed them. 18 Joshua made war a long time with all those kings.
19 There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel,
except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. All *the others* they took
in battle. 20 For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they
should come against Israel in battle, that He might utterly destroy
them, *and* that they might receive no mercy, but that He might
destroy them, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

21 And at that time Joshua came and cut off the Anakim from the
mountains: from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, from all the moun-
tains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel; Joshua utterly
destroyed them with their cities. 22 None of the Anakim were left in
the land of the children of Israel; they remained only in Gaza, in Gath,
and in Ashdod.

23 So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord had
said to Moses; and Joshua gave it as an inheritance to Israel according
to their divisions by their tribes. Then the land rested from war.

11:8 [a]Hebrew *Misrephoth Maim* **11:13** [a]Hebrew *tel,* a heap of successive city ruins **11:16** [a]Hebrew *arabah*

no power in the present. If you have no faith in the life beyond this life, then your present life is going to be powerless. But if you believe in the future and are assured of victory, then there should be a dance in your step and a smile on your face. (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "Victory")

APPLICATION

Do you believe that God has your best interests at heart? Recognize that you have been assured of victory, both in the future and in the present. Ask God for faith to believe Him and His works.

EXPLORATION

Victory—Psalm 98:1; Matthew 12:20; 1 Corinthians 15:54, 55; 1 John 5:4.

Life Lessons

Joshua 13:1—17:18

SITUATION
The twelve tribes of Israel divided the conquered lands according to God's wishes. Joshua dismissed the army, leaving additional conquests as each tribe's responsibility.

OBSERVATION
God rewards His people for following through on what He says. In these chapters, the Israelites were rewarded with a homeland.

INSPIRATION
As heaven's advertising agency, we promote God in every area of life, including success.

That's right—even your success is intended to reflect God. Listen to the reminder Moses gave the children of Israel: "And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day" (Deuteronomy 8:18).

From where does success come? God. "It is He who gives you power to get wealth."

And why does He give it? For His reputation. "That He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers."

God blessed Israel in order to billboard His faithfulness. When foreigners saw the fruitful farms of the Promised Land, God did not want them to think about the farmer but the farmer's Maker. Their success advertised God. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What "promised lands" have you inherited in recent

The Kings Conquered by Moses

12 These *are* the kings of the land whom the children of Israel defeated, and whose land they possessed on the other side of the Jordan toward the rising of the sun, from the River Arnon to Mount Hermon, and all the eastern Jordan plain: 2 *One king was* Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon *and* ruled half of Gilead, from Aroer, which is on the bank of the River Arnon, from the middle of that river, even as far as the River Jabbok, *which is* the border of the Ammonites, 3 and the eastern Jordan plain from the Sea of Chinneroth as far as the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea), the road to Beth Jeshimoth, and southward below the slopes of Pisgah. 4 *The other king was* Og king of Bashan and his territory, *who was* of the remnant of the giants, who dwelt at Ashtaroth and at Edrei, 5 and reigned over Mount Hermon, over Salcah, over all Bashan, as far as the border of the Geshurites and the Maachathites, and over half of Gilead *to* the border of Sihon king of Heshbon.

6 These Moses the servant of the Lord and the children of Israel had conquered; and Moses the servant of the Lord had given it *as* a possession to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh.

The Kings Conquered by Joshua

7 And these *are* the kings of the country which Joshua and the children of Israel conquered on this side of the Jordan, on the west, from Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon as far as Mount Halak and the ascent to Seir, which Joshua gave to the tribes of Israel *as* a possession according to their divisions, 8 in the mountain country, in the lowlands, in the *Jordan* plain, in the slopes, in the wilderness, and in the South—the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: 9 the king of Jericho, one; the king of Ai, which *is* beside Bethel, one; 10 the king of Jerusalem, one; the king of Hebron, one; 11 the king of Jarmuth, one; the king of Lachish, one; 12 the king of Eglon, one; the king of Gezer, one; 13 the king of Debir, one; the king of Geder, one; 14 the king of Hormah, one; the king of Arad, one; 15 the king of Libnah, one; the king of Adullam, one; 16 the king of Makkedah, one; the king of Bethel, one; 17 the king of Tappuah, one; the king of Hepher, one; 18 the king of Aphek, one; the king of Lasharon, one; 19 the king of Madon, one; the king of Hazor, one; 20 the king of Shimron Meron, one; the king of Achshaph, one; 21 the king of Taanach, one; the king of Megiddo, one; 22 the king of Kedesh, one; the king of Jokneam in Carmel, one; 23 the king of Dor in the heights of Dor, one; the king of the people of Gilgal, one; 24 the king of Tirzah, one—all the kings, thirty-one.

Remaining Land to Be Conquered

13 Now Joshua was old, advanced in years. And the Lord said to him: "You are old, advanced in years, and there remains very much land yet to be possessed. 2 This is the land that yet remains: all the territory of the Philistines and all *that of* the Geshurites, 3 from Sihor, which *is* east of Egypt, as far as the border of Ekron northward (*which* is counted as Canaanite); the five lords of the Philistines—the Gazites, the Ashdodites, the Ashkelonites, the Gittites, and the Ekronites; also the Avites; 4 from the south, all the land of the

Canaanites, and Mearah that belongs to the Sidonians as far as Aphek, to the border of the Amorites; 5 the land of the Gebalites,[a] and all Lebanon, toward the sunrise, from Baal Gad below Mount Hermon as far as the entrance to Hamath; 6 all the inhabitants of the mountains from Lebanon as far as the Brook Misrephoth,[a] *and* all the Sidonians—them I will drive out from before the children of Israel; only divide it by lot to Israel as an inheritance, as I have commanded you. 7 Now therefore, divide this land as an inheritance to the nine tribes and half the tribe of Manasseh."

The Land Divided East of the Jordan

8 With the other half-tribe the Reubenites and the Gadites received their inheritance, which Moses had given them, beyond the Jordan eastward, as Moses the servant of the Lord had given them: 9 from Aroer which *is* on the bank of the River Arnon, and the town that *is* in the midst of the ravine, and all the plain of Medeba as far as Dibon; 10 all the cities of Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon, as far as the border of the children of Ammon; 11 Gilead, and the border of the Geshurites and Maachathites, all Mount Hermon, and all Bashan as far as Salcah; 12 all the kingdom of Og in Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth and Edrei, who remained of the remnant of the giants; for Moses had defeated and cast out these.

13 Nevertheless the children of Israel did not drive out the Geshurites or the Maachathites, but the Geshurites and the Maachathites dwell among the Israelites until this day.

14 Only to the tribe of Levi he had given no inheritance; the sacrifices of the Lord God of Israel made by fire *are* their inheritance, as He said to them.

The Land of Reuben

15 And Moses had given to the tribe of the children of Reuben *an inheritance* according to their families. 16 Their territory was from Aroer, which *is* on the bank of the River Arnon, and the city that *is* in the midst of the ravine, and all the plain by Medeba; 17 Heshbon and all its cities that *are* in the plain: Dibon, Bamoth Baal, Beth Baal Meon, 18 Jahaza, Kedemoth, Mephaath, 19 Kirjathaim, Sibmah, Zereth Shahar on the mountain of the valley, 20 Beth Peor, the slopes of Pisgah, and Beth Jeshimoth— 21 all the cities of the plain and all the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon, whom Moses had struck with the princes of Midian: Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, who *were* princes of Sihon dwelling in the country. 22 The children of Israel also killed with the sword Balaam the son of Beor, the soothsayer, among those who were killed by them. 23 And the border of the children of Reuben was the bank of the Jordan. This *was* the inheritance of the children of Reuben according to their families, the cities and their villages.

The Land of Gad

24 Moses also had given *an inheritance* to the tribe of Gad, to the children of Gad according to their families. 25 Their territory was Jazer,

13:5 [a]Or *Giblites* **13:6** [a]Hebrew *Misrephoth Maim*

years: Studies completed? Relationships secured? Reflect on God's help. Thank Him today. Stretch your faith for tomorrow.

EXPLORATION

Promises—Genesis 21:7; Exodus 2:23–25; Joshua 21:43–45; 23:14; Psalm 119:65; Hebrews 10:35–39.

If your God is mighty enough to ignite the sun, could it be that He is mighty enough to light your path?

—Max Lucado (The Great House of God)

and all the cities of Gilead, and half the land of the Ammonites as far as Aroer, which *is* before Rabbah, 26 and from Heshbon to Ramath Mizpah and Betonim, and from Mahanaim to the border of Debir, 27 and in the valley Beth Haram, Beth Nimrah, Succoth, and Zaphon, the rest of the kingdom of Sihon king of Heshbon, with the Jordan as *its* border, as far as the edge of the Sea of Chinnereth, on the other side of the Jordan eastward. 28 This *is* the inheritance of the children of Gad according to their families, the cities and their villages.

Half the Tribe of Manasseh (East)

29 Moses also had given *an inheritance* to half the tribe of Manasseh; it was for half the tribe of the children of Manasseh according to their families: 30 Their territory was from Mahanaim, all Bashan, all the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, and all the towns of Jair which are in Bashan, sixty cities; 31 half of Gilead, and Ashtaroth and Edrei, cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan, *were* for the children of Machir the son of Manasseh, for half of the children of Machir according to their families.

32 These *are the areas* which Moses had distributed as an inheritance in the plains of Moab on the other side of the Jordan, by Jericho eastward. 33 But to the tribe of Levi Moses had given no inheritance; the Lord God of Israel *was* their inheritance, as He had said to them.

The Land Divided West of the Jordan

14 These *are the areas* which the children of Israel inherited in the land of Canaan, which Eleazar the priest, Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel distributed as an inheritance to them. 2 Their inheritance *was* by lot, as the Lord had commanded by the hand of Moses, for the nine tribes and the half-tribe. 3 For Moses had given the inheritance of the two tribes and the half-tribe on the other side of the Jordan; but to the Levites he had given no inheritance among them. 4 For the children of Joseph were two tribes: Manasseh and Ephraim. And they gave no part to the Levites in the land, except cities to dwell *in,* with their common-lands for their livestock and their property. 5 As the Lord had commanded Moses, so the children of Israel did; and they divided the land.

Caleb Inherits Hebron

6 Then the children of Judah came to Joshua in Gilgal. And Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him: "You know the word which the Lord said to Moses the man of God concerning you and me in Kadesh Barnea. 7 I *was* forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh Barnea to spy out the land, and I brought back word to him as *it was* in my heart. 8 Nevertheless my brethren who went up with me made the heart of the people melt, but I wholly followed the Lord my God. 9 So Moses swore on that day, saying, 'Surely the land where your foot has trodden shall be your inheritance and your children's forever, because you have wholly followed the Lord my God.' 10 And now, behold, the Lord has kept me alive, as He said, these forty-five years, ever since the Lord spoke this word to Moses while Israel wandered in the wilderness; and now, here I am this day, eighty-five years old. 11 As yet I *am as* strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength *was* then, so now *is* my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in. 12 Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the Lord spoke in that day; for you heard in that day how the Anakim *were* there, and *that* the cities *were* great *and* fortified. It may be that the Lord *will be* with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the Lord said."

13 And Joshua blessed him, and gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh as an inheritance. 14 Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite to this day, because he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel. 15 And the name of Hebron formerly was Kirjath Arba (*Arba was* the greatest man among the Anakim).

Then the land had rest from war.

The Land of Judah

15 So *this* was the lot of the tribe of the children of Judah according to their families:

The border of Edom at the Wilderness of Zin southward *was* the extreme southern boundary. 2 And their southern border began at the shore of the Salt Sea, from the bay that faces

southward. 3 Then it went out to the southern
side of the Ascent of Akrabbim, passed along
to Zin, ascended on the south side of Kadesh
Barnea, passed along to Hezron, went up to
Adar, and went around to Karkaa. 4 *From there*
it passed toward Azmon and went out to the
Brook of Egypt; and the border ended at the
sea. This shall be your southern border.

5 The east border *was* the Salt Sea as far as
the mouth of the Jordan.

And the border on the northern quarter
began at the bay of the sea at the mouth of the
Jordan. 6 The border went up to Beth Hoglah
and passed north of Beth Arabah; and the
border went up to the stone of Bohan the son
of Reuben. 7 Then the border went up toward
Debir from the Valley of Achor, and it turned
northward toward Gilgal, which *is* before the
Ascent of Adummim, which *is* on the south
side of the valley. The border continued toward
the waters of En Shemesh and ended at En
Rogel. 8 And the border went up by the Valley
of the Son of Hinnom to the southern slope of
the Jebusite *city* (which *is* Jerusalem). The bor-
der went up to the top of the mountain that *lies*
before the Valley of Hinnom westward, which
is at the end of the Valley of Rephaim[a] north-
ward. 9 Then the border went around from the
top of the hill to the fountain of the water of
Nephtoah, and extended to the cities of Mount
Ephron. And the border went around to Baalah
(which *is* Kirjath Jearim). 10 Then the border
turned westward from Baalah to Mount Seir,
passed along to the side of Mount Jearim on the
north (which *is* Chesalon), went down to Beth
Shemesh, and passed on to Timnah. 11 And the
border went out to the side of Ekron north-
ward. Then the border went around to Shicron,
passed along to Mount Baalah, and extended to
Jabneel; and the border ended at the sea.

12 The west border *was* the coastline of the
Great Sea. This *is* the boundary of the children
of Judah all around according to their families.

Caleb Occupies Hebron and Debir

13 Now to Caleb the son of Jephunneh he
gave a share among the children of Judah,
according to the commandment of the Lord to
Joshua, *namely,* Kirjath Arba, which *is* Hebron
(*Arba was* the father of Anak). 14 Caleb drove
out the three sons of Anak from there: Sheshai,
Ahiman, and Talmai, the children of Anak.
15 Then he went up from there to the inhabit-
ants of Debir (formerly the name of Debir *was*
Kirjath Sepher).

16 And Caleb said, "He who attacks Kirjath
Sepher and takes it, to him I will give Achsah
my daughter as wife." 17 So Othniel the son of
Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, took it; and he
gave him Achsah his daughter as wife. 18 Now
it was so, when she came *to him,* that she per-
suaded him to ask her father for a field. So she
dismounted from *her* donkey, and Caleb said
to her, "What do you wish?" 19 She answered,
"Give me a blessing; since you have given
me land in the South, give me also springs of
water." So he gave her the upper springs and
the lower springs.

The Cities of Judah

20 This *was* the inheritance of the tribe
of the children of Judah according to their
families:

21 The cities at the limits of the tribe of the
children of Judah, toward the border of Edom
in the South, were Kabzeel, Eder, Jagur, 22 Kinah,
Dimonah, Adadah, 23 Kedesh, Hazor, Ithnan,
24 Ziph, Telem, Bealoth, 25 Hazor, Hadattah,
Kerioth, Hezron (which *is* Hazor), 26 Amam,
Shema, Moladah, 27 Hazar Gaddah, Heshmon,
Beth Pelet, 28 Hazar Shual, Beersheba, Bizjoth-
jah, 29 Baalah, Ijim, Ezem, 30 Eltolad, Chesil,
Hormah, 31 Ziklag, Madmannah, Sansannah,
32 Lebaoth, Shilhim, Ain, and Rimmon: all the
cities *are* twenty-nine, with their villages.

33 In the lowland: Eshtaol, Zorah, Ashnah,
34 Zanoah, En Gannim, Tappuah, Enam, 35 Jar-
muth, Adullam, Socoh, Azekah, 36 Sharaim,
Adithaim, Gederah, and Gederothaim: four-
teen cities with their villages; 37 Zenan, Ha-
dashah, Migdal Gad, 38 Dilean, Mizpah, Jok-
theel, 39 Lachish, Bozkath, Eglon, 40 Cabbon,
Lahmas,[a] Kithlish, 41 Gederoth, Beth Dagon,
Naamah, and Makkedah: sixteen cities with
their villages; 42 Libnah, Ether, Ashan, 43 Jiphtah,
Ashnah, Nezib, 44 Keilah, Achzib, and Mare-
shah: nine cities with their villages; 45 Ekron,
with its towns and villages; 46 from Ekron to the
sea, all that *lay* near Ashdod, with their vil-
lages; 47 Ashdod with its towns and villages,

15:8 [a]Literally *Giants* **15:40** [a]Or *Lahmam*

Gaza with its towns and villages—as far as the Brook of Egypt and the Great Sea with *its* coastline.

48 And in the mountain country: Shamir, Jattir, Sochoh, 49 Dannah, Kirjath Sannah (which *is* Debir), 50 Anab, Eshtemoh, Anim, 51 Goshen, Holon, and Giloh: eleven cities with their villages; 52 Arab, Dumah, Eshean, 53 Janum, Beth Tappuah, Aphekah, 54 Humtah, Kirjath Arba (which *is* Hebron), and Zior: nine cities with their villages; 55 Maon, Carmel, Ziph, Juttah, 56 Jezreel, Jokdeam, Zanoah, 57 Kain, Gibeah, and Timnah: ten cities with their villages; 58 Halhul, Beth Zur, Gedor, 59 Maarath, Beth Anoth, and Eltekon: six cities with their villages; 60 Kirjath Baal (which *is* Kirjath Jearim) and Rabbah: two cities with their villages.

61 In the wilderness: Beth Arabah, Middin, Secacah, 62 Nibshan, the City of Salt, and En Gedi: six cities with their villages.

63 As for the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem to this day.

Ephraim and West Manasseh

16 The lot fell to the children of Joseph from the Jordan, by Jericho, to the waters of Jericho on the east, to the wilderness that goes up from Jericho through the mountains to Bethel, 2 then went out from Bethel to Luz,[a] passed along to the border of the Archites at Ataroth, 3 and went down westward to the boundary of the Japhletites, as far as the boundary of Lower Beth Horon to Gezer; and it ended at the sea.

4 So the children of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, took their inheritance.

The Land of Ephraim

5 The border of the children of Ephraim, according to their families, was *thus:* The border of their inheritance on the east side was Ataroth Addar as far as Upper Beth Horon.

6 And the border went out toward the sea on the north side of Michmethath; then the border went around eastward to Taanath Shiloh, and passed by it on the east of Janohah. 7 Then it went down from Janohah to Ataroth and Naarah,[a] reached to Jericho, and came out at the Jordan.

8 The border went out from Tappuah westward to the Brook Kanah, and it ended at the sea. This *was* the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Ephraim according to their families. 9 The separate cities for the children of Ephraim *were* among the inheritance of the children of Manasseh, all the cities with their villages.

10 And they did not drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwell among the Ephraimites to this day and have become forced laborers.

The Other Half-Tribe of Manasseh (West)

17 There was also a lot for the tribe of Manasseh, for he *was* the firstborn of Joseph: *namely* for Machir the firstborn of Manasseh, the father of Gilead, because he was a man of war; therefore he was given Gilead and Bashan. 2 And there was *a lot* for the rest of the children of Manasseh according to their families: for the children of Abiezer,[a] the children of Helek, the children of Asriel, the children of Shechem, the children of Hepher, and the children of Shemida; these *were* the male children of Manasseh the son of Joseph according to their families.

3 But Zelophehad the son of Hepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, had no sons, but only daughters. And these *are* the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. 4 And they came near before Eleazar the priest, before Joshua the son of Nun, and before the rulers, saying, "The Lord commanded Moses to give us an inheritance among our brothers." Therefore, according to the commandment of the Lord, he gave them an inheritance among their father's brothers. 5 Ten shares fell to Manasseh, besides the land of Gilead and Bashan, which *were* on the other side of the Jordan, 6 because the daughters of Manasseh received an inheritance among his sons; and the rest of Manasseh's sons had the land of Gilead.

7 And the territory of Manasseh was from

16:2 [a]Septuagint reads *Bethel* (that is, Luz). **16:7** [a]Or *Naaran* (compare 1 Chronicles 7:28) **17:2** [a]Called *Jeezer* in Numbers 26:30

Asher to Michmethath, that *lies* east of Shechem; and the border went
along south to the inhabitants of En Tappuah. 8 Manasseh had the
land of Tappuah, but Tappuah on the border of Manasseh *belonged*
to the children of Ephraim. 9 And the border descended to the Brook
Kanah, southward to the brook. These cities of Ephraim *are* among
the cities of Manasseh. The border of Manasseh *was* on the north side
of the brook; and it ended at the sea.

10 Southward *it was* Ephraim's, northward *it was* Manasseh's, and
the sea was its border. Manasseh's territory was adjoining Asher on
the north and Issachar on the east. 11 And in Issachar and in Asher,
Manasseh had Beth Shean and its towns, Ibleam and its towns, the
inhabitants of Dor and its towns, the inhabitants of En Dor and its
towns, the inhabitants of Taanach and its towns, and the inhabitants
of Megiddo and its towns—three hilly regions. 12 Yet the children of
Manasseh could not drive out *the inhabitants of* those cities, but the
Canaanites were determined to dwell in that land. 13 And it happened,
when the children of Israel grew strong, that they put the Canaanites
to forced labor, but did not utterly drive them out.

More Land for Ephraim and Manasseh

14 Then the children of Joseph spoke to Joshua, saying, "Why have
you given us *only* one lot and one share to inherit, since we *are* a great
people, inasmuch as the Lord has blessed us until now?"

15 So Joshua answered them, "If you *are* a great people, *then* go up
to the forest *country* and clear a place for yourself there in the land of
the Perizzites and the giants, since the mountains of Ephraim are too
confined for you."

16 But the children of Joseph said, "The mountain country is not
enough for us; and all the Canaanites who dwell in the land of the
valley have chariots of iron, *both those* who *are* of Beth Shean and its
towns and *those* who *are* of the Valley of Jezreel."

17 And Joshua spoke to the house of Joseph—to Ephraim and
Manasseh—saying, "You *are* a great people and have great power;
you shall not have *only* one lot, 18 but the mountain country shall be
yours. Although it *is* wooded, you shall cut it down, and its farthest
extent shall be yours; for you shall drive out the Canaanites, though
they have iron chariots *and* are strong."

The Remainder of the Land Divided

18 Now the whole congregation of the children of Israel assem-
bled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of meeting
there. And the land was subdued before them. 2 But there remained
among the children of Israel seven tribes which had not yet received
their inheritance.

3 Then Joshua said to the children of Israel: "How long will you
neglect to go and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers
has given you? 4 Pick out from among you three men for *each* tribe,
and I will send them; they shall rise and go through the land, survey it
according to their inheritance, and come *back* to me. 5 And they shall
divide it into seven parts. Judah shall remain in their territory on the
south, and the house of Joseph shall remain in their territory on the
north. 6 You shall therefore survey the land in seven parts and bring

Life Lessons

Joshua 18:1—19:51

SITUATION

Seven more tribes received their inheritance, which was administered by Joshua. He also took possession of the town, Timnath.

OBSERVATION

The children of Israel could not exercise full dominion over the land as its new tenants until each tribe had been assigned its portions. When this occurred, then the nation as a whole began to rule and have authority on the earth as God's representatives.

INSPIRATION

Your cup overflows with joy. Overflows with grace. Shouldn't your heart overflow with gratitude?

The heart of the boy did. Not at first, mind you. Initially he was full of envy. But, in time, he was full of gratitude.

According to the fable, he lived with his father in a valley at the base of a large dam. Every day the father would go to work on the mountain behind their house and return home with a wheelbarrow full of dirt. "Pour the dirt in the sacks, Son," the father would say. "And stack them in front of the house."

And though the boy would obey, he also complained. He was tired of dirt. He was weary of bags. Why didn't his father give him what other fathers gave their sons? They had toys and games; he had dirt. When he saw what the others had, he grew mad at them. "It's not fair," he said to himself.

And when he saw his

father, he objected. "They have fun. I have dirt."

The father would smile and place his arm on the boy's shoulders and say, "Trust me, Son. I'm doing what is best."

But it was so hard for the boy to trust. Every day the father would bring the load. Every day the boy would fill bags. "Stack them as high as you can," the father would say as he went for more. And so the boy filled the bags and piled them high. So high he couldn't see over them.

"Work hard, Son," the father said one day. "We're running out of time." As the father spoke, he looked at the darkening sky. The boy stared at the clouds and turned to ask about them, but when he did, the thunder cracked and the sky opened. The rain poured so hard he could scarcely see his father through the water. "Keep stacking, Son!" And as he did, the boy heard a mighty crash.

The water of the river poured through the dam and toward the little village. In a moment the tide swept everything in its path, but the dike of dirt gave the boy and the father the time they needed. "Hurry, Son. Follow me."

They ran to the side of the mountain behind their house and into a tunnel. In a matter of moments they exited the other side and scampered up the hill and came upon a new cottage.

"We'll be safe here," the father said to the boy.

Only then did the son realize what the father had done. He had burrowed an exit. Rather than give him what he wanted, the father gave his boy what he needed. He gave him a safe passage and a safe place.

Hasn't our Father given us the same? A strong wall

the survey here to me, that I may cast lots for you here before the Lord our God. 7 But the Levites have no part among you, for the priesthood of the Lord *is* their inheritance. And Gad, Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasseh have received their inheritance beyond the Jordan on the east, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave them."

8 Then the men arose to go away; and Joshua charged those who went to survey the land, saying, "Go, walk through the land, survey it, and come back to me, that I may cast lots for you here before the Lord in Shiloh." 9 So the men went, passed through the land, and wrote the survey in a book in seven parts by cities; and they came to Joshua at the camp in Shiloh. 10 Then Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the Lord, and there Joshua divided the land to the children of Israel according to their divisions.

The Land of Benjamin

11 Now the lot of the tribe of the children of Benjamin came up according to their families, and the territory of their lot came out between the children of Judah and the children of Joseph. 12 Their border on the north side began at the Jordan, and the border went up to the side of Jericho on the north, and went up through the mountains westward; it ended at the Wilderness of Beth Aven. 13 The border went over from there toward Luz, to the side of Luz (which *is* Bethel) southward; and the border descended to Ataroth Addar, near the hill that *lies* on the south side of Lower Beth Horon.

14 Then the border extended around the west side to the south, from the hill that *lies* before Beth Horon southward; and it ended at Kirjath Baal (which *is* Kirjath Jearim), a city of the children of Judah. This *was* the west side.

15 The south side *began* at the end of Kirjath Jearim, and the border extended on the west and went out to the spring of the waters of Nephtoah. 16 Then the border came down to the end of the mountain that *lies* before the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, which *is* in the Valley of the Rephaim[a] on the north, descended to the Valley of Hinnom, to the side of the Jebusite *city* on the south, and descended to En Rogel. 17 And it went around from the north, went out to En Shemesh, and extended toward Geliloth, which is before the Ascent of Adummim, and descended to the stone of Bohan the son of Reuben. 18 Then it passed along toward the north side of Arabah,[a] and went down to Arabah. 19 And the border passed along to the north side of Beth Hoglah; then the border ended at the north bay at the Salt Sea, at the south end of the Jordan. This *was* the southern boundary.

20 The Jordan was its border on the east side. This *was* the inheritance of the children of Benjamin, according to its boundaries all around, according to their families.

21 Now the cities of the tribe of the children of Benjamin, according to their families, were Jericho, Beth Hoglah, Emek Keziz, 22 Beth Arabah, Zemaraim, Bethel, 23 Avim, Parah, Ophrah, 24 Chephar Haammoni, Ophni, and Gaba: twelve cities with their villages; 25 Gibeon, Ramah, Beeroth, 26 Mizpah, Chephirah, Mozah, 27 Rekem, Irpeel, Taralah, 28 Zelah, Eleph, Jebus (which *is* Jerusalem), Gibeath, *and* Kirjath: four-

18:16 [a] Literally *Giants* **18:18** [a] Or *Beth Arabah* (compare 15:6 and 18:22)

teen cities with their villages. This was the inheritance of the children of Benjamin according to their families.

Simeon's Inheritance with Judah

19 The second lot came out for Simeon, for the tribe of the children of Simeon according to their families. And their inheritance was within the inheritance of the children of Judah. 2 They had in their inheritance Beersheba (Sheba), Moladah, 3 Hazar Shual, Balah, Ezem, 4 Eltolad, Bethul, Hormah, 5 Ziklag, Beth Marcaboth, Hazar Susah, 6 Beth Lebaoth, and Sharuhen: thirteen cities and their villages; 7 Ain, Rimmon, Ether, and Ashan: four cities and their villages; 8 and all the villages that *were* all around these cities as far as Baalath Beer, Ramah of the South. This *was* the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Simeon according to their families.

9 The inheritance of the children of Simeon *was included* in the share of the children of Judah, for the share of the children of Judah was too much for them. Therefore the children of Simeon had *their* inheritance within the inheritance of that people.

The Land of Zebulun

10 The third lot came out for the children of Zebulun according to their families, and the border of their inheritance was as far as Sarid. 11 Their border went toward the west and to Maralah, went to Dabbasheth, and extended along the brook that is east of Jokneam. 12 Then from Sarid it went eastward toward the sunrise along the border of Chisloth Tabor, and went out toward Daberath, bypassing Japhia. 13 And from there it passed along on the east of Gath Hepher, toward Eth Kazin, and extended to Rimmon, which borders on Neah. 14 Then the border went around it on the north side of Hannathon, and it ended in the Valley of Jiphthah El. 15 Included were Kattath, Nahallal, Shimron, Idalah, and Bethlehem: twelve cities with their villages. 16 This *was* the inheritance of the children of Zebulun according to their families, these cities with their villages.

The Land of Issachar

17 The fourth lot came out to Issachar, for the children of Issachar according to their families. 18 And their territory went to Jezreel, and *included* Chesulloth, Shunem, 19 Haphraim, Shion, Anaharath, 20 Rabbith, Kishion, Abez, 21 Remeth, En Gannim, En Haddah, and Beth Pazzez. 22 And the border reached to Tabor, Shahazimah, and Beth Shemesh; their border ended at the Jordan: sixteen cities with their villages. 23 This *was* the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Issachar according to their families, the cities and their villages.

The Land of Asher

24 The fifth lot came out for the tribe of the children of Asher according to their families. 25 And their territory included Helkath, Hali, Beten, Achshaph, 26 Alammelech, Amad, and Mishal; it reached to Mount Carmel westward, along *the Brook* Shihor Libnath. 27 It turned toward the sunrise to Beth Dagon; and it reached to Zebulun and to the Valley of Jiphthah El, then northward beyond Beth Emek and Neiel, bypassing Cabul *which was* on the left, 28 including

of grace to protect us? A sure exit to deliver us? Of whom can we be envious? Who has more than we do? Rather than want what others have, shouldn't we wonder if they have what we do? Instead of being jealous of them, how about zealous for them? . . .

One thing is certain. When the final storm comes and you are safe in your Father's house, you won't regret what He didn't give. You'll be stunned at what He did. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What has God given you? What have you said thank you to Him for today? Take a moment to write down the many things that God has given and provided. You may be surprised at all that He has done and continues to do for you.

EXPLORATION

Man's Dominion—Genesis 1:26; 9:2; Daniel 2:38; Hebrews 2:7.

Life LESSONS

Joshua 20:1—21:45

SITUATION
God set up cities of safety to protect the innocent and consecrated the Levites for service to Him. Because of the Levites' position, they were not eligible to inherit land, but Joshua assigned them towns and pasturelands to provide for their needs.

OBSERVATION
The Lord, in justice and love for His people, provides for all their needs, even for unforeseen accidents.

INSPIRATION
To recognize God as Lord is to acknowledge that He is sovereign and supreme in the universe. To accept Him as Savior is to accept His gift of salvation offered on the Cross. To regard him as a Father is to go a step further. Ideally, a father is the one in your life who provides and protects. That is exactly what God has done.

He has provided for your needs. He has protected you from harm. He has adopted you. And He has given you His name.

God has proven Himself as a faithful father. Now it falls to us to be trusting children. Let God give you what your family doesn't. Let Him fill the void others have left. Rely upon Him for your affirmation and encouragement. Look at Paul's words: "You are God's child, and *God will give you the blessing he promised,* because you are his child" (Galatians 4:7, NCV, emphasis added). (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

Ebron,[a] Rehob, Hammon, and Kanah, as far as Greater Sidon. [29] And the border turned to Ramah and to the fortified city of Tyre; then the border turned to Hosah, and ended at the sea by the region of Achzib. [30] Also Ummah, Aphek, and Rehob *were included:* twenty-two cities with their villages. [31] This *was* the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Asher according to their families, these cities with their villages.

The Land of Naphtali

[32] The sixth lot came out to the children of Naphtali, for the children of Naphtali according to their families. [33] And their border began at Heleph, enclosing the territory from the terebinth tree in Zaanannim, Adami Nekeb, and Jabneel, as far as Lakkum; it ended at the Jordan. [34] From Heleph the border extended westward to Aznoth Tabor, and went out from there toward Hukkok; it adjoined Zebulun on the south side and Asher on the west side, and ended at Judah by the Jordan toward the sunrise. [35] And the fortified cities *are* Ziddim, Zer, Hammath, Rakkath, Chinnereth, [36] Adamah, Ramah, Hazor, [37] Kedesh, Edrei, En Hazor, [38] Iron, Migdal El, Horem, Beth Anath, and Beth Shemesh: nineteen cities with their villages. [39] This *was* the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Naphtali according to their families, the cities and their villages.

The Land of Dan

[40] The seventh lot came out for the tribe of the children of Dan according to their families. [41] And the territory of their inheritance was Zorah, Eshtaol, Ir Shemesh, [42] Shaalabbin, Aijalon, Jethlah, [43] Elon, Timnah, Ekron, [44] Eltekeh, Gibbethon, Baalath, [45] Jehud, Bene Berak, Gath Rimmon, [46] Me Jarkon, and Rakkon, with the region near Joppa. [47] And the border of the children of Dan went beyond these, because the children of Dan went up to fight against Leshem and took it; and they struck it with the edge of the sword, took possession of it, and dwelt in it. They called Leshem, Dan, after the name of Dan their father. [48] This *is* the inheritance of the tribe of the children of Dan according to their families, these cities with their villages.

Joshua's Inheritance

[49] When they had made an end of dividing the land as an inheritance according to their borders, the children of Israel gave an inheritance among them to Joshua the son of Nun. [50] According to the word of the Lord they gave him the city which he asked for, Timnath Serah in the mountains of Ephraim; and he built the city and dwelt in it.

[51] These *were* the inheritances which Eleazar the priest, Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel divided as an inheritance by lot in Shiloh before the Lord, at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. So they made an end of dividing the country.

19:28 [a] Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; a few Hebrew manuscripts read *Abdon* (compare 21:30 and 1 Chronicles 6:74).

The Cities of Refuge

20 The Lord also spoke to Joshua, saying, 2"Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'Appoint for yourselves cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you through Moses, 3that the slayer who kills a person accidentally *or* unintentionally may flee there; and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood. 4And when he flees to one of those cities, and stands at the entrance of the gate of the city, and declares his case in the hearing of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city as one of them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them. 5Then if the avenger of blood pursues him, they shall not deliver the slayer into his hand, because he struck his neighbor unintentionally, but did not hate him beforehand. 6And he shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgment, *and* until the death of the one who is high priest in those days. Then the slayer may return and come to his own city and his own house, to the city from which he fled.' "

7So they appointed Kedesh in Galilee, in the mountains of Naphtali, Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, and Kirjath Arba (which *is* Hebron) in the mountains of Judah. 8And on the other side of the Jordan, by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness on the plain, from the tribe of Reuben, Ramoth in Gilead, from the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan, from the tribe of Manasseh. 9These were the cities appointed for all the children of Israel and for the stranger who dwelt among them, that whoever killed a person accidentally might flee there, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood until he stood before the congregation.

Cities of the Levites

21 Then the heads of the fathers' *houses* of the Levites came near to Eleazar the priest, to Joshua the son of Nun, and to the heads of the fathers' *houses* of the tribes of the children of Israel. 2And they spoke to them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, saying, "The Lord commanded through Moses to give us cities to dwell in, with their common-lands for our livestock." 3So the children of Israel gave to the Levites from their inheritance, at the commandment of the Lord, these cities and their common-lands:

4Now the lot came out for the families of the Kohathites. And the children of Aaron the priest, *who were* of the Levites, had thirteen cities by lot from the tribe of Judah, from the tribe of Simeon, and from the tribe of Benjamin. 5The rest of the children of Kohath had ten cities by lot from the families of the tribe of Ephraim, from the tribe of Dan, and from the half-tribe of Manasseh.

6And the children of Gershon had thirteen cities by lot from the families of the tribe of Issachar, from the tribe of Asher, from the tribe of Naphtali, and from the half-tribe of Manasseh in Bashan.

7The children of Merari according to their families had twelve cities from the tribe of Reuben, from the tribe of Gad, and from the tribe of Zebulun.

8And the children of Israel gave these cities with their common-lands by lot to the Levites, as the Lord had commanded by the hand of Moses.

9So they gave from the tribe of the children of Judah and from the

APPLICATION
As God's children we have confidence in His provision for all our needs. We know that He even notices the unforeseen problems and our smallest concerns. Approach God as you would a loving father.

EXPLORATION
God Provides—Psalm 103:3; 128:2; Proverbs 10:22; Isaiah 43:20; Matthew 6:26.

Our obedience pulls the ropes which ring the bells in heaven's belfries.

—Max Lucado (Just Like Jesus)

tribe of the children of Simeon these cities which are designated by name, 10 which were for the children of Aaron, one of the families of the Kohathites, *who were* of the children of Levi; for the lot was theirs first. 11 And they gave them Kirjath Arba (*Arba was* the father of Anak), which *is* Hebron, in the mountains of Judah, with the common-land surrounding it. 12 But the fields of the city and its villages they gave to Caleb the son of Jephunneh as his possession.

13 Thus to the children of Aaron the priest they gave Hebron with its common-land (a city of refuge for the slayer), Libnah with its common-land, 14 Jattir with its common-land, Eshtemoa with its common-land, 15 Holon with its common-land, Debir with its common-land, 16 Ain with its common-land, Juttah with its common-land, and Beth Shemesh with its common-land: nine cities from those two tribes; 17 and from the tribe of Benjamin, Gibeon with its common-land, Geba with its common-land, 18 Anathoth with its common-land, and Almon with its common-land: four cities. 19 All the cities of the children of Aaron, the priests, *were* thirteen cities with their common-lands.

20 And the families of the children of Kohath, the Levites, the rest of the children of Kohath, even they had the cities of their lot from the tribe of Ephraim. 21 For they gave them Shechem with its common-land in the mountains of Ephraim (a city of refuge for the slayer), Gezer with its common-land, 22 Kibzaim with its common-land, and Beth Horon with its common-land: four cities; 23 and from the tribe of Dan, Eltekeh with its common-land, Gibbethon with its common-land, 24 Aijalon with its common-land, *and* Gath Rimmon with its common-land: four cities; 25 and from the half-tribe of Manasseh, Tanach with its common-land and Gath Rimmon with its common-land: two cities. 26 All the ten cities with their common-lands were for the rest of the families of the children of Kohath.

27 Also to the children of Gershon, of the families of the Levites, from the *other* half-tribe of Manasseh, *they gave* Golan in Bashan with its common-land (a city of refuge for the slayer), and Be Eshterah with its common-land: two cities; 28 and from the tribe of Issachar, Kishion with its common-land, Daberath with its common-land, 29 Jarmuth with its common-land, *and* En Gannim with its common-land: four cities; 30 and from the tribe of Asher, Mishal with its common-land, Abdon with its common-land, 31 Helkath with its common-land, and Rehob with its common-land: four cities; 32 and from the tribe of Naphtali, Kedesh in Galilee with its common-land (a city of refuge for the slayer), Hammoth Dor with its common-land, and Kartan with its common-land: three cities. 33 All the cities of the Gershonites according to their families *were* thirteen cities with their common-lands.

34 And to the families of the children of Merari, the rest of the Levites, from the tribe of Zebulun, Jokneam with its common-land, Kartah with its common-land, 35 Dimnah with its common-land, *and* Nahalal with its common-land: four cities; 36 and from the tribe of Reuben, Bezer with its common-land, Jahaz with its common-land, 37 Kedemoth with its common-land, and Mephaath with its common-land: four cities;[a] 38 and from the tribe of Gad, Ramoth in Gilead with its common-land (a city of refuge for the slayer), Mahanaim with its common-land, 39 Heshbon with its common-land, *and* Jazer with its common-land: four cities in all. 40 So all the cities for the children of Merari according to their families, the rest of the families of the Levites, were *by* their lot twelve cities.

41 All the cities of the Levites within the possession of the children of Israel *were* forty-eight cities with their common-lands. 42 Every one of these cities had its common-land surrounding it; thus *were* all these cities.

The Promise Fulfilled

43 So the Lord gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. 44 The Lord gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the Lord delivered all their ene-

21:37 [a] Following Septuagint and Vulgate (compare 1 Chronicles 6:78, 79); Masoretic Text, Bomberg, and Targum omit verses 36 and 37.

mies into their hand. 45 Not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.

Eastern Tribes Return to Their Lands

22 Then Joshua called the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh, 2 and said to them: "You have kept all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you. 3 You have not left your brethren these many days, up to this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the Lord your God. 4 And now the Lord your God has given rest to your brethren, as He promised them; now therefore, return and go to your tents *and* to the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side of the Jordan. 5 But take careful heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to keep His commandments, to hold fast to Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul." 6 So Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their tents.

7 Now to half the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given a possession in Bashan, but to the *other* half of it Joshua gave *a possession* among their brethren on this side of the Jordan, westward. And indeed, when Joshua sent them away to their tents, he blessed them, 8 and spoke to them, saying, "Return with much riches to your tents, with very much livestock, with silver, with gold, with bronze, with iron, and with very much clothing. Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren."

9 So the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh returned, and departed from the children of Israel at Shiloh, which *is* in the land of Canaan, to go to the country of Gilead, to the land of their possession, which they had obtained according to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses.

An Altar by the Jordan

10 And when they came to the region of the Jordan which *is* in the land of Canaan, the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh built an altar there by the Jordan—a great, impressive altar. 11 Now the children of Israel heard *someone* say, "Behold, the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh have built an altar on the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region of the Jordan—on the children of Israel's side." 12 And when the children of Israel heard *of it,* the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered together at Shiloh to go to war against them.

13 Then the children of Israel sent Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest to the children of Reuben, to the children of Gad, and to half the tribe of Manasseh, into the land of Gilead, 14 and with him ten rulers, one ruler each from the chief house of every tribe of Israel; and each one *was* the head of the house of his father among the divisions[a] of Israel. 15 Then they came to the children of Reuben, to the children of Gad, and to half the tribe of Manasseh, to the land of Gilead, and they spoke with them, saying, 16 "Thus says the whole congregation

22:14 [a] Literally *thousands*

Life LESSONS

Joshua 22:1–34

SITUATION

The Israelites conquered and possessed the land. Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh fulfilled their obligations to conquer the western side of Jordan. Returning to the eastern side, the three tribes built an altar patterned after the Lord's altar. They were accused of idolatry and rebellion. But Phinehas declared that the altar was a token of solidarity with the rest of Israel and a reminder to the rest of the tribes that they all worshiped one God.

OBSERVATION

When conflict occurs we must not jump to a hasty conclusion, but listen to both sides of the story in order to make a wise decision.

INSPIRATION

To those who still struggle, God says, "Wait on Me." And wait in the right place. Jesus doesn't tell us to stay in Jerusalem, but He does tell us to stay honest, stay faithful, stay true. "If you do not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you, as it was against your fathers" (1 Samuel 12:15). Are you illegally padding your pocket? Are you giving your body to someone who doesn't share your name and wear your ring? Is your mouth a Mississippi River of gossip? If you intentionally hang out at the bus stop of disobedience, you need to know something—God's bus doesn't stop there. Go to the place of obedience. "The Holy Spirit . . . is God's

gift to those who obey him" (Acts 5:32 TEV).

While you're waiting in the right place, get along with people. Would the Holy Spirit have anointed contentious disciples? According to Peter, disharmony hinders prayers. He tells husbands, "Husbands, likewise, dwell with [*your wives*] with understanding . . . that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Peter 3:7). Waiting on God means working through conflicts, forgiving offenses, resolving disputes. "Make every effort to continue together in this way" (Ephesians 4:3 NCV).

Some years ago our family had a backyard trampoline. One Saturday afternoon I noticed all three of our girls bouncing on it. My daughters, like all siblings, don't always get along. But for some reason, that afternoon they were one another's biggest fans. When one jumped, the other two applauded. If one fell, the other two helped her stand. My chest swelled with pride. After a few moments, you know what I did? I joined them. I couldn't resist. Their alliance pleased me. Our alliance pleases Christ. Jesus promised, "When two or three of you are together because of me, you can be sure that I'll be there" (Matthew 18:20 MSG).

Desire power for your life? It will come as you "do your best to live in peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18 NCV). (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you facing a difficult conflict with someone? How can you resolve it in a way that honors God? Do you think it's possible to live in peace with everyone? What part can you do?

of the Lord: 'What treachery *is* this that you have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the Lord, in that you have built for yourselves an altar, that you might rebel this day against the Lord? 17 *Is* the iniquity of Peor not enough for us, from which we are not cleansed till this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the Lord, 18 but that you must turn away this day from following the Lord? And it shall be, if you rebel today against the Lord, that tomorrow He will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel. 19 Nevertheless, if the land of your possession *is* unclean, *then* cross over to the land of the possession of the Lord, where the Lord's tabernacle stands, and take possession among us; but do not rebel against the Lord, nor rebel against us, by building yourselves an altar besides the altar of the Lord our God. 20 Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass in the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel? And that man did not perish alone in his iniquity.' "

21 Then the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh answered and said to the heads of the divisions[a] of Israel: 22 "The Lord God of gods, the Lord God of gods, He knows, and let Israel itself know—if *it is* in rebellion, or if in treachery against the Lord, do not save us this day. 23 If we have built ourselves an altar to turn from following the Lord, or if to offer on it burnt offerings or grain offerings, or if to offer peace offerings on it, let the Lord Himself require *an account.* 24 But in fact we have done it for fear, for a reason, saying, 'In time to come your descendants may speak to our descendants, saying, "What have you to do with the Lord God of Israel? 25 For the Lord has made the Jordan a border between you and us, *you* children of Reuben and children of Gad. You have no part in the Lord." So your descendants would make our descendants cease fearing the Lord.' 26 Therefore we said, 'Let us now prepare to build ourselves an altar, not for burnt offering nor for sacrifice, 27 but *that* it *may be* a witness between you and us and our generations after us, that we may perform the service of the Lord before Him with our burnt offerings, with our sacrifices, and with our peace offerings; that your descendants may not say to our descendants in time to come, "You have no part in the Lord." ' 28 Therefore we said that it will be, when they say *this* to us or to our generations in time to come, that we may say, 'Here is the replica of the altar of the Lord which our fathers made, though not for burnt offerings nor for sacrifices; but it *is* a witness between you and us.' 29 Far be it from us that we should rebel against the Lord, and turn from following the Lord this day, to build an altar for burnt offerings, for grain offerings, or for sacrifices, besides the altar of the Lord our God which *is* before His tabernacle."

30 Now when Phinehas the priest and the rulers of the congregation, the heads of the divisions[a] of Israel who *were* with him, heard the words that the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and the children of Manasseh spoke, it pleased them. 31 Then Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said to the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and the children of Manasseh, "This day we perceive that the Lord *is* among us, because you have not committed this treachery

22:21 [a]Literally *thousands* **22:30** [a]Literally *thousands*

against the Lord. Now you have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the Lord."

32 And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and the rulers, returned from the children of Reuben and the children of Gad, from the land of Gilead to the land of Canaan, to the children of Israel, and brought back word to them. 33 So the thing pleased the children of Israel, and the children of Israel blessed God; they spoke no more of going against them in battle, to destroy the land where the children of Reuben and Gad dwelt.

34 The children of Reuben and the children of Gad[a] called the altar, *Witness,* "For *it is* a witness between us that the Lord *is* God."

Joshua's Farewell Address

23 Now it came to pass, a long time after the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua was old, advanced in age. 2 And Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers, and said to them:

"I am old, advanced in age. 3 You have seen all that the Lord your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the Lord your God *is* He who has fought for you. 4 See, I have divided to you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from the Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, as far as the Great Sea westward. 5 And the Lord your God will expel them from before you and drive them out of your sight. So you shall possess their land, as the Lord your God promised you. 6 Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, 7 *and* lest you go among these nations, these who remain among you. You shall not make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause *anyone* to swear *by them;* you shall not serve them nor bow down to them, 8 but you shall hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have done to this day. 9 For the Lord has driven out from before you great and strong nations; but *as for* you, no one has been able to stand against you to this day. 10 One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the Lord your God *is* He who fights for you, as He promised you. 11 Therefore take careful heed to yourselves, that you love the Lord your God. 12 Or else, if indeed you do go back, and cling to the remnant of these nations—these that remain among you—and make marriages with them, and go in to them and they to you, 13 know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you. But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the Lord your God has given you.

14 "Behold, this day I *am* going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed. 15 Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all the good things have come upon you which the Lord your God promised you, so the Lord will bring upon you all harmful things, until He has destroyed you from

22:34 [a] Septuagint adds *and half the tribe of Manasseh.*

EXPLORATION
Decisions—Proverbs 18:13, 15, 17; Matthew 1:19; James 1:5–8.

Joshua 23:1—24:33

SITUATION
God gave the people of Israel rest from all their enemies. In his farewell address, Joshua reminded the people of God's bountiful grace and mercy. He gave the Israelites commands to help them avoid falling into the most likely areas of temptation.

OBSERVATION
We must resist the temptation to sin and live in loving obedience to God.

INSPIRATION
What's the cure for selfishness?

Get your self out of your eye by getting your eye off your self. Quit staring at that little self, and focus on your great Savior.

A friend who is an Episcopalian minister explains the reason he closes his prayers with the sign of the Cross. "The touching of my forehead and chest makes a capital 'I.' The gesture of touching first one shoulder, then the other, cuts the 'I' in half."

Isn't that a work of the Cross? A smaller "I" and a greater Christ? Don't focus on yourself; focus on all that you have in Christ. Focus on the fellowship of the Spirit, the affection and compassion of heaven. (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Have your abundant resources kept you from depending on God? Have

you lost your grip on God's help? Focus on a special need that only God can meet. Seek His help today.

EXPLORATION
Dependence—2 Chronicles 13:18; 16:8; Psalm 34:4–7; John 8:26.

God is for you. Had He a calendar, your birthday would be circled.

—Max Lucado (In the Grip of Grace)

this good land which the Lord your God has given you. 16 When you have transgressed the covenant of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed down to them, then the anger of the Lord will burn against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land which He has given you."

The Covenant at Shechem

24 Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and called for the elders of Israel, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God. 2 And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Your fathers, *including* Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River[a] in old times; and they served other gods. 3 Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac. 4 To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. To Esau I gave the mountains of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. 5 Also I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt, according to what I did among them. Afterward I brought you out.

6 'Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea; and the Egyptians pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. 7 So they cried out to the Lord; and He put darkness between you and the Egyptians, brought the sea upon them, and covered them. And your eyes saw what I did in Egypt. Then you dwelt in the wilderness a long time. 8 And I brought you into the land of the Amorites, who dwelt on the other side of the Jordan, and they fought with you. But I gave them into your hand, that you might possess their land, and I destroyed them from before you. 9 Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose to make war against Israel, and sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you. 10 But I would not listen to Balaam; therefore he continued to bless you. So I delivered you out of his hand. 11 Then you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho. And the men of Jericho fought against you—*also* the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. But I delivered them into your hand. 12 I sent the hornet before you which drove them out from before you, *also* the two kings of the Amorites, *but* not with your sword or with your bow. 13 I have given you a land for which you did not labor, and cities which you did not build, and you dwell in them; you eat of the vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.'

14 "Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! 15 And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

16 So the people answered and said: "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; 17 for the Lord our God *is* He who

24:2 [a] Hebrew *Nahar,* the Euphrates, and so in verses 3, 14, and 15

brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way that we went and among all the people through whom we passed. 18 And the Lord drove out from before us all the people, including the Amorites who dwelt in the land. We also will serve the Lord, for He *is* our God."

19 But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the Lord, for He *is* a holy God. He *is* a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. 20 If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good."

21 And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the Lord!"

22 So Joshua said to the people, "You *are* witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord for yourselves, to serve Him."

And they said, "*We are* witnesses!"

23 "Now therefore," *he said,* "put away the foreign gods which *are* among you, and incline your heart to the Lord God of Israel."

24 And the people said to Joshua, "The Lord our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey!"

25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.

26 Then Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak that *was* by the sanctuary of the Lord. 27 And Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be a witness to us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord which He spoke to us. It shall therefore be a witness to you, lest you deny your God." 28 So Joshua let the people depart, each to his own inheritance.

Death of Joshua and Eleazar

29 Now it came to pass after these things that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, *being* one hundred and ten years old. 30 And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Serah, which *is* in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash.

31 Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the Lord which He had done for Israel.

32 The bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel had brought up out of Egypt, they buried at Shechem, in the plot of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of silver, and which had become an inheritance of the children of Joseph.

33 And Eleazar the son of Aaron died. They buried him in a hill *belonging to* Phinehas his son, which was given to him in the mountains of Ephraim.

THE BOOK OF

JUDGES

INTRODUCTION

It was a nation born out of a passion for religious freedom. Free practice of faith had been oppressed and forbidden in the old country. The people longed to be in a place where they could worship God as they desired.

So they left. Willing to battle the fears of the unknown in exchange for freedom. Only a small portion of those who began the journey survived it.

When the travelers reached the new country they celebrated. They gave thanks to God and praised Him for guiding them to their new home.

But their new home was not a peaceful place. Nearby enemies attacked and years of battles ensued. The settlers, however, were men and women of faith and courage. With time they sank their roots in the new land and began a new life.

The first generation of settlers were hearty people. Though the hardships were great, their faith was greater. God answered their prayers and established them in the new land.

With time the new land was divided into states, and leaders were assigned to each region. The population grew, and the boundary of the country expanded.

But with the growth of the land and the passage of the decades, two troubling trends began.

The first was the disappearance of values. Early settlers had a common conviction as to what was right and wrong. The family was the core of society. Religion was the source of faith. Education was the highest task.

But by the end of the first hundred years in the new land, these virtues had begun to wane . . . the family was under attack; sophisticated thinkers mocked religion.

The second alarming trend was the inconsistency of moral leadership. Early leaders—capable military and skillful politicians—were also men of God. Men prone to spend time in prayer and meditation. Men who listened to God and earnestly tried to follow His will.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Probably Samuel, but possibly another prophet

Date Written: 1050–1043 B.C.

Key Themes:

- Israel continued to fall in and out of disobedience to God.
- God continued to call Israel back and save them from destruction.
- Without a moral leader and center, Israel went the way of nations who didn't know God.

Key Verse:

"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

Contents:

I. Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar 1:1—3:31
II. Deborah 4:1—5:31
III. Gideon 6:1—8:35
IV. From Abimelech to Jephthah 9:1—12:7
V. From Ibzan to Samson 12:8—16:31
VI. Civil Strife and Spiritual Disobedience 17:1—21:25

INTRODUCTION
THE BOOK OF JUDGES

Such leadership became rare, however. The nation we look at now lacks moral leadership. Leaders squabble and steal. Others are lazy and spoiled. There are even cases of national leaders accused of making sexual advances to women.

Though the nation has a glorious past, it is hidden in a cloudy present.

Sound familiar? Sound like any nation you know? Sound like us? It sounds like ours, could be ours, might be ours, but I didn't get the profile out of the newspaper. I read it in the Bible. In the Book of Judges.

Judges chronicles the dark ages of Israel, the death of Israel. The death of the heart. A three hundred-year era in which "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

Not a pretty story. Not intended to be. It's intended to be a warning. A warning of what happens when God is ignored and passions are worshiped.

A warning for our times.

The Continuing Conquest of Canaan

Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, "Who shall be first to go up for us against the Canaanites to fight against them?"

2 And the LORD said, "Judah shall go up. Indeed I have delivered the land into his hand."

3 So Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me to my allotted territory, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I will likewise go with you to your allotted territory." And Simeon went with him. 4 Then Judah went up, and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand; and they killed ten thousand men at Bezek. 5 And they found Adoni-Bezek in Bezek, and fought against him; and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. 6 Then Adoni-Bezek fled, and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. 7 And Adoni-Bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to gather *scraps* under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me." Then they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.

8 Now the children of Judah fought against Jerusalem and took it; they struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire. 9 And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who dwelt in the mountains, in the South,[a] and in the lowland. 10 Then Judah went against the Canaanites who dwelt in Hebron. (Now the name of Hebron *was* formerly Kirjath Arba.) And they killed Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai.

11 From there they went against the inhabitants of Debir. (The name of Debir *was* formerly Kirjath Sepher.)

12 Then Caleb said, "Whoever attacks Kirjath Sepher and takes it, to

1:9 [a] Hebrew *Negev*, and so throughout this book

Life Lessons

JUDGES 1:1—2:5

SITUATION
God commanded Israel to destroy every enemy in the Promised Land. Yet, Israel decided to leave some "harmless" enemies alone. Not only was Israel disobedient, but the "harmless" residents of the land of Israel rose up to become dangerous enemies.

OBSERVATION
God foresees potential danger in our lives. He gives commands that, if followed, can protect us from dangerous consequences. If we neglect certain commands, we may reap painful consequences later.

INSPIRATION
Why anyone would pester Hannah Lake is beyond me. If the sweet face of this ten-year-old doesn't de-starch your shirt, her cherubic voice will. But, according

him I will give my daughter Achsah as wife." 13 And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah as wife. 14 Now it happened, when she came *to him,* that she urged him[a] to ask her father for a field. And she dismounted from *her* donkey, and Caleb said to her, "What do you wish?" 15 So she said to him, "Give me a blessing; since you have given me land in the South, give me also springs of water."

And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.

16 Now the children of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up from the City of Palms with the children of Judah into the Wilderness of Judah, which *lies* in the South *near* Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people. 17 And Judah went with his brother Simeon, and they attacked the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. So the name of the city was called Hormah. 18 Also Judah took Gaza with its territory, Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory. 19 So the Lord was with Judah. And they drove out the mountaineers, but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the lowland, because they had chariots of iron. 20 And they gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had said. Then he expelled from there the three sons of Anak. 21 But the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem; so the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.

22 And the house of Joseph also went up against Bethel, and the Lord *was* with them. 23 So the house of Joseph sent men to spy out Bethel. (The name of the city *was* formerly Luz.) 24 And when the spies saw a man coming out of the city, they said to him, "Please show us the entrance to the city, and we will show you mercy." 25 So he showed them the entrance to the city, and they struck the city with the edge of the sword; but they let the man and all his family go. 26 And the man went to the land of the Hittites, built a city, and called its name Luz, which *is* its name to this day.

Incomplete Conquest of the Land

27 However, Manasseh did not drive out *the inhabitants of* Beth Shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; for the Canaanites were determined to dwell in that land. 28 And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites under tribute, but did not completely drive them out.

29 Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer; so the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them.

30 Nor did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron or the inhabitants of Nahalol; so the Canaanites dwelt among them, and were put under tribute.

31 Nor did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Acco or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik, or Rehob. 32 So the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out.

33 Nor did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh or

1:14 [a] Septuagint and Vulgate read *he urged her.*

to her dad, a grade school bully tried to stir some trouble. Intimidation tactics, pressure—the pest tried it all. But Hannah didn't fold. And in the end, it was not her dimples or tender voice but her faith that pulled her through.

The older student warned Hannah to prepare for battle. "Any day now I'm coming after you." Hannah didn't flinch or cry. She simply informed the perpetrator about the facts. "Do whatever you need to do," she explained. "But just know this: God is on my side."

Last word has it that no more threats have been made.

Elementary school bullies don't await you, but funeral homes do. Job transfers and fair-weather friends do. Challenges pockmark the pathway of your life. Where do you find energy to face them? God never promises an absence of distress. But He does promise the assuring presence of His Holy Spirit.

At first blush, a person might assume that the Holy Spirit is all about the spectacular and stupendous. We've seen the television images of sweating preachers, fainting and falling audiences, unintelligible tongue speaking, and questionable miracle working. While no one would deny the pupil-popping nature of the Holy Spirit's work (tongues of fire over the apostles' heads), a focus on the phenomenal might lead you to miss His quieter stabilizing work.

The Holy Spirit invisibly, yet indispensably, serves as a rudder for the ship of your soul, keeping you afloat and on track. (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What sin did you purposely

the inhabitants of Beth Anath; but they dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land. Nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath were put under tribute to them.

34 And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountains, for they would not allow them to come down to the valley; 35 and the Amorites were determined to dwell in Mount Heres, in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim;[a] yet when the strength of the house of Joseph became greater, they were put under tribute.

36 Now the boundary of the Amorites *was* from the Ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela, and upward.

Israel's Disobedience

2 Then the Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: "I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you. 2 And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? 3 Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be *thorns* in your side,[a] and their gods shall be a snare to you.'" 4 So it was, when the Angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept.

5 Then they called the name of that place Bochim;[a] and they sacrificed there to the Lord. 6 And when Joshua had dismissed the people, the children of Israel went each to his own inheritance to possess the land.

Death of Joshua

7 So the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord which He had done for Israel. 8 Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died *when he was* one hundred and ten years old. 9 And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Heres, in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash. 10 When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel.

Israel's Unfaithfulness

11 Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals; 12 and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from *among* the gods of the people who *were* all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger. 13 They forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.[a] 14 And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. 15 Wherever they went out, the

1:35 [a]Spelled *Shaalabbin* in Joshua 19:42 **2:3** [a]Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate read *enemies to you*. **2:5** [a]Literally *Weeping* **2:13** [a]Canaanite goddesses

commit yesterday or today? Learn from Israel: Compromise can be deadly! Decide today to be totally faithful and obedient to God.

EXPLORATION
Compromise—Genesis 19; Exodus 8:25–29; Numbers 25:1; 1 Kings 11:4; Proverbs 12:3; Daniel 1:8–16; Mark 15:15; 2 Corinthians 6:14–18; Galatians 2:11–14; Revelation 2:2, 3.

Judges 2:6—3:6

SITUATION
A new generation of Israelites neglected their relationship with God. They did not see God's hand at work like their parents had. When they turned away from God, God disciplined them.

OBSERVATION
Failing to teach our children to love and obey God will bring disaster on them.

INSPIRATION
Frightening thing, this pride. It would rather kill the truth than consider it.

Doesn't it sneak up on us? We begin spiritual journeys as small people. The act of conversion is a humbling one. We confess sins, beg for mercy, bend our knees. We let someone lower us into the waters of baptism. We begin as self-effacing souls. Timid children who extend muddy hands to our sinless God. We relate to the thief on the cross, identify with David's forgiven adultery, and find hope in Peter's forgiven betrayal. We challenge Paul's claim to the chief-

of-sinners title, wondering if anyone could need or treasure grace as much as we do.

We come to God humbly. No swagger, no boasts, no "all by myself" declarations. We flex no muscles and claim no achievements. We cup sullied hearts in hands and offer them to God as we would a crushed, scentless flower: "Can You bring life to this?"

And He does. *He* does. We don't. He works the miracle of salvation. He immerses us in mercy. He stitches together our shredded souls. He deposits His Spirit and implants heavenly gifts. Our big God blesses our small faith.

We understand the roles. He is the Milky Way galaxy. We are the sand flea. He is U2, and we are the neighborhood garage band, and that's okay. We need a big God because we've made a big mess of our lives. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Your children can benefit from your successes as well as from your mistakes. Pray daily with your children and discipline them. Speak to them from your heart about the Lord.

EXPLORATION

Handing Down Your Faith—Deuteronomy 6:4–7; 11:18–21; 32:46; Proverbs 20:7; 22:6; Isaiah 38:19; Ephesians 6:4; 2 Timothy 1:1–9; 3:14, 15.

hand of the Lord was against them for calamity, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed.

16 Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges who delivered them
out of the hand of those who plundered them. 17 Yet they would not
listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and
bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which
their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the Lord; they
did not do so. 18 And when the Lord raised up judges for them, the
Lord was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their
enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord was moved to pity by
their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed
them. 19 And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they
reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following
other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease
from their own doings nor from their stubborn way.

20 Then the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel; and He said,
"Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I com-
manded their fathers, and has not heeded My voice, 21 I also will no
longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left
when he died, 22 so that through them I may test Israel, whether they
will keep the ways of the Lord, to walk in them as their fathers kept
them, or not." 23 Therefore the Lord left those nations, without driv-
ing them out immediately; nor did He deliver them into the hand of
Joshua.

The Nations Remaining in the Land

3 Now these *are* the nations which the Lord left, that He might test
Israel by them, *that is,* all who had not known any of the wars in
Canaan 2 (*this was* only so that the generations of the children of Israel
might be taught to know war, at least those who had not formerly
known it), 3 *namely,* five lords of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the
Sidonians, and the Hivites who dwelt in Mount Lebanon, from Mount
Baal Hermon to the entrance of Hamath. 4 And they were *left, that He
might* test Israel by them, to know whether they would obey the com-
mandments of the Lord, which He had commanded their fathers by
the hand of Moses.

5 Thus the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, the
Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.
6 And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their
daughters to their sons; and they served their gods.

Othniel

7 So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. They for-
got the Lord their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs.[a] 8 There-
fore the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He sold them
into the hand of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the
children of Israel served Cushan-Rishathaim eight years. 9 When the
children of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer
for the children of Israel, who delivered them: Othniel the son of
Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. 10 The Spirit of the Lord came upon

3:7 [a] Name or symbol for Canaanite goddesses

him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the Lord delivered Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-Rishathaim. 11 So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

Ehud

12 And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord strengthened Eglon king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord. 13 Then he gathered to himself the people of Ammon and Amalek, went and defeated Israel, and took possession of the City of Palms. 14 So the children of Israel served Eglon king of Moab eighteen years.

15 But when the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for them: Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man. By him the children of Israel sent tribute to Eglon king of Moab. 16 Now Ehud made himself a dagger (it was double-edged and a cubit in length) and fastened it under his clothes on his right thigh. 17 So he brought the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. (Now Eglon *was* a very fat man.) 18 And when he had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who had carried the tribute. 19 But he himself turned back from the stone images that *were* at Gilgal, and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king."

He said, "Keep silence!" And all who attended him went out from him.

20 So Ehud came to him (now he was sitting upstairs in his cool private chamber). Then Ehud said, "I have a message from God for you." So he arose from *his* seat. 21 Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly. 22 Even the hilt went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the dagger out of his belly; and his entrails came out. 23 Then Ehud went out through the porch and shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them.

24 When he had gone out, *Eglon's*[a] servants came to look, and *to their* surprise, the doors of the upper room were locked. So they said, "He is probably attending to his needs in the cool chamber." 25 So they waited till they were embarrassed, and still he had not opened the doors of the upper room. Therefore they took the key and opened *them*. And there was their master, fallen dead on the floor.

26 But Ehud had escaped while they delayed, and passed beyond the stone images and escaped to Seirah. 27 And it happened, when he arrived, that he blew the trumpet in the mountains of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mountains; and he led them. 28 Then he said to them, "Follow *me,* for the Lord has delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand." So they went down after him, seized the fords of the Jordan leading to Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross over. 29 And at that time they killed about ten thousand men of Moab, all stout men of valor; not a man escaped. 30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for eighty years.

3:24 [a] Literally *his*

Life Lessons

Judges 3:7–31

SITUATION
The Israelites rebelled against God. He used their enemies to exercise His discipline.

OBSERVATION
Despite their disobedience, God provided deliverers for the people of Israel in Othniel and later, Ehud. God is willing to provide safety and forgiveness for His people as long as they turn to Him.

INSPIRATION
Think of your mind as a computer made to store and process massive amounts of data (no comments about your neighbor's hard-drive capacity, please). Think of your strengths as software. Pianists are loaded with music programs. Accountants seem to be born with spreadsheet capacity. Fun lovers come with games installed. We are different, but we each have a computer and software, and, sadly, we have viruses. You and I are infected by destructive thoughts.

Computer viruses have names like Klez, Anna Kournikova, and ILOVEYOU. Mental viruses are known as anxiety, bitterness, anger, guilt, shame, greed, and insecurity. They worm their way into your system and diminish, even disable, your mind. We call these DTPs: destructive thought patterns. (Actually, I'm the only one to call them DTPs.)

Do you have any DTPs?

When you see the successful, are you jealous?

When you see the struggler, are you pompous?

If someone gets on your

bad side, is that person as likely to get on your good side as I am to win the Tour-de-France?

Ever argue with someone in your mind? Rehash or rehearse your hurts? Do you assume the worst about the future?

If so, you suffer from DTPs.

What would your world be like without them? Had no dark or destructive thought ever entered your mind, how would you be different? Suppose you could relive your life sans any guilt, lust, vengeance, insecurity, or fear. Never wasting mental energy on gossip or scheming. Would you be different? . . .

Oh, to be DTP-free. No energy lost, no time wasted. Wouldn't such a person be energetic and wise? A lifetime of healthy and holy thoughts would render anyone a joyful genius. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

In a small group, explore the topic: "I am most likely to be disobedient when I. . . ." Then talk about what safeguards you can establish to insure obedience to God. In what ways are DTPs affecting your life? How might you become DTP-free?

EXPLORATION

Disobedience—Genesis 3:14–19; Numbers 20:12; 1 Samuel 15:17–23; Matthew 23:23, 24; 1 John 2:3–6.

Shamgar

31 After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed six hundred
men of the Philistines with an ox goad; and he also delivered Israel.

Deborah

4 When Ehud was dead, the children of Israel again did evil in the
sight of the Lord. 2 So the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin
king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army *was*
Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth Hagoyim. 3 And the children of Israel
cried out to the Lord; for Jabin had nine hundred chariots of iron, and
for twenty years he had harshly oppressed the children of Israel.

4 Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging
Israel at that time. 5 And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah
between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the
children of Israel came up to her for judgment. 6 Then she sent and
called for Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said
to him, "Has not the Lord God of Israel commanded, 'Go and deploy
troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons
of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun; 7 and against you I will deploy
Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multi-
tude at the River Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hand'?"

8 And Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if
you will not go with me, I will not go!"

9 So she said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no
glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the Lord will sell Sisera
into the hand of a woman." Then Deborah arose and went with Barak
to Kedesh. 10 And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; he
went up with ten thousand men under his command,[a] and Deborah
went up with him.

11 Now Heber the Kenite, of the children of Hobab the father-in-law
of Moses, had separated himself from the Kenites and pitched his tent
near the terebinth tree at Zaanaim, which *is* beside Kedesh.

12 And they reported to Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had
gone up to Mount Tabor. 13 So Sisera gathered together all his chariots,
nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people who *were* with him,
from Harosheth Hagoyim to the River Kishon.

14 Then Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this *is* the day in which
the Lord has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the Lord gone
out before you?" So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten
thousand men following him. 15 And the Lord routed Sisera and all *his*
chariots and all *his* army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and
Sisera alighted from *his* chariot and fled away on foot. 16 But Barak
pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth Hagoyim, and
all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left.

17 However, Sisera had fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife
of Heber the Kenite; for *there was* peace between Jabin king of Hazor
and the house of Heber the Kenite. 18 And Jael went out to meet Sisera,
and said to him, "Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me; do not fear."
And when he had turned aside with her into the tent, she covered him
with a blanket.

4:10 [a] Literally *at his feet*

19 Then he said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink, for I
am thirsty." So she opened a jug of milk, gave him a drink, and cov-
ered him. 20 And he said to her, "Stand at the door of the tent, and if
any man comes and inquires of you, and says, 'Is there any man here?'
you shall say, 'No.' "
21 Then Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and took a hammer in her
hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and
it went down into the ground; for he was fast asleep and weary. So he
died. 22 And then, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him,
and said to him, "Come, I will show you the man whom you seek."
And when he went into her *tent,* there lay Sisera, dead with the peg
in his temple.
23 So on that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan in the pres-
ence of the children of Israel. 24 And the hand of the children of Israel
grew stronger and stronger against Jabin king of Canaan, until they
had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

The Song of Deborah

5 Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day,
saying:

2 "When leaders lead in Israel,
When the people willingly offer themselves,
Bless the Lord!

3 "Hear, O kings! Give ear, O princes!
I, *even* I, will sing to the Lord;
I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel.

4 "Lord, when You went out from Seir,
When You marched from the field of Edom,
The earth trembled and the heavens poured,
The clouds also poured water;
5 The mountains gushed before the Lord,
This Sinai, before the Lord God of Israel.

6 "In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath,
In the days of Jael,
The highways were deserted,
And the travelers walked along the byways.
7 Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel,
Until I, Deborah, arose,
Arose a mother in Israel.
8 They chose new gods;
Then *there was* war in the gates;
Not a shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel.
9 My heart *is* with the rulers of Israel
Who offered themselves willingly with the people.
Bless the Lord!

10 "Speak, you who ride on white donkeys,
Who sit in judges' attire,

Life Lessons

Judges 4:1—5:31

SITUATION
Now the Israelites' enemy (the Canaanites) came from within their own territory. Deborah rose to national leadership.

OBSERVATION
God chooses the person with the strongest character to lead His people to victory at crucial times. The key elements for such leadership are faith, trust, and worship.

INSPIRATION
Two types of thoughts continually vie for your attention. One says, "Yes you can." The other says, "No you can't." One says, "God will help you." The other lies, "God has left you." One speaks the language of heaven; the other deceives in the vernacular. . . . One proclaims God's strengths; the other lists your failures. One longs to build you up; the other seeks to tear you down.

And here's the great news: you select the voice you hear. Why listen to the mockers? Why heed their voices? Why give ear to pea-brains and scoffers when you can, with the same ear, listen to the voice of God? (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Take time this week to study a leader in the Bible (Esther, Elijah, Paul . . .). What made that person successful? How did that leader honor God? What made that individual unique? As you develop your own character, imitate the godly characteristics you find.

EXPLORATION
Women Leaders—Exodus 15:20; 2 Kings 11:1–16; 22:14–20; Esther 2:17; Luke 1:41–45; 2:36–38.

The power of the prayer . . . does not depend on the one who makes the prayer, but on the one who hears the prayer.

—Max Lucado (The Great House of God)

And who walk along the road.
11 Far from the noise of the archers, among the watering places,
There they shall recount the righteous acts of the Lord,
The righteous acts *for* His villagers in Israel;
Then the people of the Lord shall go down to the gates.

12 "Awake, awake, Deborah!
Awake, awake, sing a song!
Arise, Barak, and lead your captives away,
O son of Abinoam!

13 "Then the survivors came down, the people against the nobles;
The Lord came down for me against the mighty.
14 From Ephraim *were* those whose roots were in Amalek.
After you, Benjamin, with your peoples,
From Machir rulers came down,
And from Zebulun those who bear the recruiter's staff.
15 And the princes of Issachar[a] *were* with Deborah;
As Issachar, so *was* Barak
Sent into the valley under his command;[b]
Among the divisions of Reuben
There were great resolves of heart.
16 Why did you sit among the sheepfolds,
To hear the pipings for the flocks?
The divisions of Reuben have great searchings of heart.
17 Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan,
And why did Dan remain on ships?[a]
Asher continued at the seashore,
And stayed by his inlets.
18 Zebulun *is* a people *who* jeopardized their lives to the point of death,
Naphtali also, on the heights of the battlefield.

19 "The kings came *and* fought,
Then the kings of Canaan fought
In Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo;
They took no spoils of silver.
20 They fought from the heavens;
The stars from their courses fought against Sisera.
21 The torrent of Kishon swept them away,
That ancient torrent, the torrent of Kishon.
O my soul, march on in strength!
22 Then the horses' hooves pounded,
The galloping, galloping of his steeds.
23 'Curse Meroz,' said the angel[a] of the Lord,
'Curse its inhabitants bitterly,
Because they did not come to the help of the Lord,
To the help of the Lord against the mighty.'

5:15 [a]Following Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text reads *And my princes in Issachar.* [b]Literally *at his feet* **5:17** [a]Or *at ease* **5:23** [a]Or *Angel*

24 "Most blessed among women is Jael,
The wife of Heber the Kenite;
Blessed is she among women in tents.
25 He asked for water, she gave milk;
She brought out cream in a lordly bowl.
26 She stretched her hand to the tent peg,
Her right hand to the workmen's hammer;
She pounded Sisera, she pierced his head,
She split and struck through his temple.
27 At her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still;
At her feet he sank, he fell;
Where he sank, there he fell dead.

28 "The mother of Sisera looked through the window,
And cried out through the lattice,
'Why is his chariot *so* long in coming?
Why tarries the clatter of his chariots?'
29 Her wisest ladies answered her,
Yes, she answered herself,
30 'Are they not finding and dividing the spoil:
To every man a girl *or* two;
For Sisera, plunder of dyed garments,
Plunder of garments embroidered and dyed,
Two pieces of dyed embroidery for the neck of the looter?'

31 "Thus let all Your enemies perish, O Lord!
But *let* those who love Him *be* like the sun
When it comes out in full strength."

So the land had rest for forty years.

Midianites Oppress Israel

6 Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years, 2 and the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which *are* in the mountains. 3 So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up; also Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them. 4 Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey. 5 For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts; both they and their camels were without number; and they would enter the land to destroy it. 6 So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord.

7 And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried out to the Lord because of the Midianites, 8 that the Lord sent a prophet to the children of Israel, who said to them, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'I brought you up from Egypt and brought you out of the house of bondage; 9 and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of all who oppressed you, and drove them out before

Life Lessons

Judges 6:1—7:25

SITUATION
The Midianites were desert marauders related to the Israelites through Abraham's second wife, Keturah, and her son, Midian. For centuries they were at odds with Israel, especially during the period of the judges.

OBSERVATION
At one point, when the Midianites and their allies were about to invade Israel again, God raised up the judge, Gideon. As a test, God asked Gideon to destroy his father's altar to Baal and offer one of his father's bulls as a burnt offering to the Lord. This step of obedience was the first step toward the defeat of the Midianites.

INSPIRATION
No one is happier than the one who has sincerely repented of wrong. Repentance is the decision to turn from selfish desires and seek God. It is a genuine, sincere regret that creates sorrow and moves us to admit wrong and desire to do better.

Genuine repentance is a moving condition of the heart that is testified and demonstrated by our deeds. It's an inward conviction that expresses itself in outward actions.

You look at the love of God and you can't believe He's loved you like He has, and it motivates you to change your life. That is the nature of repentance. (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "Repentance")

APPLICATION
What change is the love of God motivating you to make? The Lord wants you

to be obedient to Him and to make your life a sacrifice to Him.

EXPLORATION
Repentance—Leviticus 26:40–42; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Job 22:23; Proverbs 1:23–33; Malachi 3:7; Acts 17:30; James 4:8–10; 1 John 1:9.

you and gave you their land. 10 Also I said to you, "I *am* the Lord your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell." But you have not obeyed My voice.' "

Gideon

11 Now the Angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth tree which *was* in Ophrah, which *belonged* to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide *it* from the Midianites. 12 And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him, and said to him, "The Lord *is* with you, you mighty man of valor!"

13 Gideon said to Him, "O my lord,[a] if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where *are* all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."

14 Then the Lord turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?"

15 So he said to Him, "O my Lord,[a] how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan *is* the weakest in Manasseh, and I *am* the least in my father's house."

16 And the Lord said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man."

17 Then he said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who talk with me. 18 Do not depart from here, I pray, until I come to You and bring out my offering and set *it* before You."

And He said, "I will wait until you come back."

19 So Gideon went in and prepared a young goat, and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot; and he brought *them* out to Him under the terebinth tree and presented *them.* 20 The Angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay *them* on this rock, and pour out the broth." And he did so.

21 Then the Angel of the Lord put out the end of the staff that *was* in His hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire rose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. And the Angel of the Lord departed out of his sight.

22 Now Gideon perceived that He *was* the Angel of the Lord. So Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord God! For I have seen the Angel of the Lord face to face."

23 Then the Lord said to him, "Peace *be* with you; do not fear, you shall not die." 24 So Gideon built an altar there to the Lord, and called it The-Lord-*Is*-Peace.[a] To this day it *is* still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

25 Now it came to pass the same night that the Lord said to him, "Take your father's young bull, the second bull of seven years old, and tear down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the wooden image[a] that *is* beside it; 26 and build an altar to the Lord your God on top of this rock in the proper arrangement, and take the

6:13 [a]Hebrew *adoni,* used of man **6:15** [a]Hebrew *Adonai,* used of God
6:24 [a]Hebrew *YHWH Shalom* **6:25** [a]Hebrew *Asherah,* a Canaanite goddess

second bull and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the image which you shall cut down."
27 So Gideon took ten men from among his servants and did as the Lord had said to him. But because he feared his father's household and the men of the city too much to do *it* by day, he did *it* by night.

Gideon Destroys the Altar of Baal

28 And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, there was the altar of Baal, torn down; and the wooden image that *was* beside it was cut down, and the second bull was being offered on the altar *which had been* built. 29 So they said to one another, "Who has done this thing?" And when they had inquired and asked, they said, "Gideon the son of Joash has done this thing." 30 Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son, that he may die, because he has torn down the altar of Baal, and because he has cut down the wooden image that *was* beside it."

31 But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Would you plead for Baal? Would you save him? Let the one who would plead for him be put to death by morning! If he *is* a god, let him plead for himself, because his altar has been torn down!" 32 Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal,[a] saying, "Let Baal plead against him, because he has torn down his altar."

33 Then all the Midianites and Amalekites, the people of the East, gathered together; and they crossed over and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel. 34 But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon; then he blew the trumpet, and the Abiezrites gathered behind him. 35 And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh, who also gathered behind him. He also sent messengers to Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali; and they came up to meet them.

The Sign of the Fleece

36 So Gideon said to God, "If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said— 37 look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and *it is* dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said." 38 And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowlful of water. 39 Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew." 40 And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground.

Gideon's Valiant Three Hundred

7 Then Jerubbaal (that *is,* Gideon) and all the people who *were* with him rose early and encamped beside the well of Harod, so that the camp of the Midianites was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley.

2 And the Lord said to Gideon, "The people who *are* with you *are* too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' 3 Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever *is* fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead.' " And twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained.

4 But the Lord said to Gideon, "The people *are* still *too* many; bring them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. Then it will be, *that* of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' the same shall go with you; and of whomever I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' the same shall not go." 5 So he brought the people down to the water. And the Lord said to Gideon, "Everyone who laps from the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set apart by himself; likewise everyone who gets down on his knees to drink." 6 And the number of those who lapped, *putting* their hand to their mouth, was three hundred men; but all the rest of the people got down on their knees to drink water. 7 Then the Lord said to Gideon, "By the three hundred men who lapped I will save you, and deliver the Midianites into your hand. Let all the *other* people go, every man to his place." 8 So the people took provisions and their trumpets in their hands. And he sent away all *the rest*

6:32 [a] Literally *Let Baal Plead*

of Israel, every man to his tent, and retained those three hundred men. Now the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

9 It happened on the same night that the Lord said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have delivered it into your hand. 10 But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant, 11 and you shall hear what they say; and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp." Then he went down with Purah his servant to the outpost of the armed men who *were* in the camp. 12 Now the Midianites and Amalekites, all the people of the East, were lying in the valley as numerous as locusts; and their camels *were* without number, as the sand by the seashore in multitude.

13 And when Gideon had come, there was a man telling a dream to his companion. He said, "I have had a dream: *To my* surprise, a loaf of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian; it came to a tent and struck it so that it fell and overturned, and the tent collapsed."

14 Then his companion answered and said, "This *is* nothing else but the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel! Into his hand God has delivered Midian and the whole camp."

15 And so it was, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation, that he worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel, and said, "Arise, for the Lord has delivered the camp of Midian into your hand." 16 Then he divided the three hundred men *into* three companies, and he put a trumpet into every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and torches inside the pitchers. 17 And he said to them, "Look at me and do likewise; watch, and when I come to the edge of the camp you shall do as I do: 18 When I blow the trumpet, I and all who *are* with me, then you also blow the trumpets on every side of the whole camp, and say, '*The sword of* the Lord and of Gideon!' "

19 So Gideon and the hundred men who *were* with him came to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just as they had posted the watch; and they blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers that *were* in their hands. 20 Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers—they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing—and they cried, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" 21 And every man stood in his place all around the camp; and the whole army ran and cried out and fled. 22 When the three hundred blew the trumpets, the Lord set every man's sword against his companion throughout the whole camp; and the army fled to Beth Acacia,[a] toward Zererah, as far as the border of Abel Meholah, by Tabbath.

23 And the men of Israel gathered together from Naphtali, Asher, and all Manasseh, and pursued the Midianites.

24 Then Gideon sent messengers throughout all the mountains of Ephraim, saying, "Come down against the Midianites, and seize from them the watering places as far as Beth Barah and the Jordan." Then all the men of Ephraim gathered together and seized the watering places as far as Beth Barah and the Jordan. 25 And they captured two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb they killed at the winepress of Zeeb. They pursued Midian and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon on the other side of the Jordan.

Gideon Subdues the Midianites

8 Now the men of Ephraim said to him, "Why have you done this to us by not calling us when you went to fight with the Midianites?" And they reprimanded him sharply.

2 So he said to them, "What have I done now in comparison with you? *Is* not the gleaning *of the grapes* of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? 3 God has delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. And what was I able to do in comparison with you?" Then their anger toward him subsided when he said that.

4 When Gideon came to the Jordan, he and the three hundred men who *were* with him crossed over, exhausted but still in pursuit. 5 Then he said to the men of Succoth, "Please give loaves of bread to the people who follow me, for they are exhausted, and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian."

6 And the leaders of Succoth said, "*Are* the

7:22 [a] Hebrew *Beth Shittah*

hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your hand, that we should give bread to your army?"

7 So Gideon said, "For this cause, when the Lord has delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers!" 8 Then he went up from there to Penuel and spoke to them in the same way. And the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered. 9 So he also spoke to the men of Penuel, saying, "When I come back in peace, I will tear down this tower!"

10 Now Zebah and Zalmunna *were* at Karkor, and their armies with them, about fifteen thousand, all who were left of all the army of the people of the East; for one hundred and twenty thousand men who drew the sword had fallen. 11 Then Gideon went up by the road of those who dwell in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah; and he attacked the army while the camp felt secure. 12 When Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued them; and he took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and routed the whole army.

13 Then Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle, from the Ascent of Heres. 14 And he caught a young man of the men of Succoth and interrogated him; and he wrote down for him the leaders of Succoth and its elders, seventy-seven men. 15 Then he came to the men of Succoth and said, "Here are Zebah and Zalmunna, about whom you ridiculed me, saying, '*Are* the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in your hand, that we should give bread to your weary men?' " 16 And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth. 17 Then he tore down the tower of Penuel and killed the men of the city.

18 And he said to Zebah and Zalmunna, "What kind of men *were they* whom you killed at Tabor?"

So they answered, "As you *are,* so *were* they; each one resembled the son of a king."

19 Then he said, "They *were* my brothers, the sons of my mother. *As* the Lord lives, if you had let them live, I would not kill you." 20 And he said to Jether his firstborn, "Rise, kill them!" But the youth would not draw his sword; for he was afraid, because he *was* still a youth.

21 So Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Rise yourself, and kill us; for as a man *is, so is* his strength." So Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and took the crescent ornaments that *were* on their camels' necks.

Gideon's Ephod

22 Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, both you and your son, and your grandson also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian."

23 But Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you." 24 Then Gideon said to them, "I would like to make a request of you, that each of you would give me the earrings from his plunder." For they had golden earrings, because they *were* Ishmaelites.

25 So they answered, "We will gladly give *them.*" And they spread out a garment, and each man threw into it the earrings from his plunder. 26 Now the weight of the gold earrings that he requested was

Life Lessons

Judges 8:1—9:57

SITUATION

Gideon and his army, though greatly outnumbered, defeated the Midianite invaders with God's blessing. Yet after Gideon died, the Israelites again abandoned God and worshiped Baal. The Israelites foolishly made Abimelech the king, helping him murder sixty-nine of his seventy brothers. God repaid the treachery and idolatry of Abimelech and the town of Shechem with death and destruction.

OBSERVATION

Sin will always be judged by God. Consequences from our past sins often come back to haunt us.

INSPIRATION

God's answer lies in scripture's first parable. Long before readers pondered the stories of the prodigal son and the good Samaritan, they reflected on the parable of the trees.

Jotham tells the story. He is a son of Gideon and the sole survivor of a seventy-man massacre. Abimelech authorized the slaughter. He sought to kill any person who might keep him from the throne. Jotham comes out of hiding just long enough to address the citizens of Israel and tell them the story [recorded in Judges 9:8–15].

Via the parable, Jotham warns the Israelites against thorny Abimelech. Via the parable, God warns us against greed-driven promotions.

The trees entice the olive tree, fig tree, and grapevine with a throne-room invitation: "Reign over us!"

one thousand seven hundred *shekels* of gold, besides the crescent ornaments, pendants, and purple robes which *were* on the kings of Midian, and besides the chains that *were* around their camels' necks. 27 Then Gideon made it into an ephod and set it up in his city, Ophrah. And all Israel played the harlot with it there. It became a snare to Gideon and to his house.

28 Thus Midian was subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted their heads no more. And the country was quiet for forty years in the days of Gideon.

Death of Gideon

29 Then Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house. 30 Gideon had seventy sons who were his own offspring, for he had many wives. 31 And his concubine who *was* in Shechem also bore him a son, whose name he called Abimelech. 32 Now Gideon the son of Joash died at a good old age, and was buried in the tomb of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

33 So it was, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-Berith their god. 34 Thus the children of Israel did not remember the Lord their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side; 35 nor did they show kindness to the house of Jerubbaal (Gideon) in accordance with the good he had done for Israel.

Abimelech's Conspiracy

9 Then Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem, to his mother's brothers, and spoke with them and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying, 2 "Please speak in the hearing of all the men of Shechem: 'Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal reign over you, or that one reign over you?' Remember that I *am* your own flesh and bone."

3 And his mother's brothers spoke all these words concerning him in the hearing of all the men of Shechem; and their heart was inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our brother." 4 So they gave him seventy *shekels* of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith, with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless men; and they followed him. 5 Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers, the seventy sons of Jerubbaal, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, because he hid himself. 6 And all the men of Shechem gathered together, all of Beth Millo, and they went and made Abimelech king beside the terebinth tree at the pillar that *was* in Shechem.

The Parable of the Trees

7 Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice and cried out. And he said to them:

"Listen to me, you men of Shechem,
That God may listen to you!

8 "The trees once went forth to anoint a king over them.
And they said to the olive tree,

One by one they refuse the offer. The olive tree wants to keep giving oil. The fig tree wants to keep giving figs, and the vine wants to keep bearing grapes. All refuse to pay the price of promotion.

These plants take pride in their posts. Why abandon fruitfulness? In the end, only the thornbush takes the offer.

Be careful, the story instructs. *In a desire to be great, one might cease being any good.*

Not every teacher is equipped to be a principal. Not every carpenter has the skill to head a crew. Not every musician should conduct an orchestra. Promotions might promote a person right out of his or her sweet spot. For the love of more, we might lose our purpose. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Sin brings judgment. Turn away from the sin that you enjoy. Seek help to remove the sin that reoccurs in your life. Don't let patterns of sinfulness destroy your life; repent and seek Christ's help.

EXPLORATION

Sin—Genesis 3:6, 7; 9:20–27; Exodus 2:12–14; 34:7; Deuteronomy 7:2; Nehemiah 13:14–18.

'Reign over us!'
9 But the olive tree said to them,
'Should I cease giving my oil,
With which they honor God and men,
And go to sway over trees?'

10 "Then the trees said to the fig tree,
'You come *and* reign over us!'
11 But the fig tree said to them,
'Should I cease my sweetness and my good fruit,
And go to sway over trees?'

12 "Then the trees said to the vine,
'You come *and* reign over us!'
13 But the vine said to them,
'Should I cease my new wine,
Which cheers *both* God and men,
And go to sway over trees?'

14 "Then all the trees said to the bramble,
'You come *and* reign over us!'
15 And the bramble said to the trees,
'If in truth you anoint me as king over you,
Then come *and* take shelter in my shade;
But if not, let fire come out of the bramble
And devour the cedars of Lebanon!'

16 "Now therefore, if you have acted in truth and sincerity in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done to him as he deserves— 17 for my father fought for you, risked his life, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian; 18 but you have risen up against my father's house this day, and killed his seventy sons on one stone, and made Abimelech, the son of his female servant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother— 19 if then you have acted in truth and sincerity with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, *then* rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you. 20 But if not, let fire come from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem and Beth Millo; and let fire come from the men of Shechem and from Beth Millo and devour Abimelech!" 21 And Jotham ran away and fled; and he went to Beer and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother.

Downfall of Abimelech

22 After Abimelech had reigned over Israel three years, 23 God sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, 24 that the crime *done* to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might be settled and their blood be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who aided him in the killing of his brothers. 25 And the men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all who passed by them along that way; and it was told Abimelech.

26 Now Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brothers and went over to Shechem; and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him. 27 So they went out into the fields, and gathered *grapes* from their vineyards and trod *them,* and made merry. And they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank, and cursed Abimelech. 28 Then Gaal the son of Ebed said, "Who *is* Abimelech, and who *is* Shechem, that we should serve him? *Is he* not the son of Jerubbaal, and *is not* Zebul his officer? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him? 29 If only this people were under my authority![a] Then I would remove Abimelech." So he[b] said to Abimelech, "Increase your army and come out!"

30 When Zebul, the ruler of the city, heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was aroused. 31 And he sent messengers to Abimelech secretly, saying, "Take note! Gaal the son of Ebed and his brothers have come to Shechem; and here they are, fortifying the city against you. 32 Now therefore, get up by night, you and the people who *are* with you, and lie in wait in the field. 33 And it shall be, as soon as the sun is up in the morning, *that* you shall rise early and rush upon the city; and *when* he and the people who are with him come out against you, you may then do to them as you find opportunity."

34 So Abimelech and all the people who *were* with him rose by night, and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies. 35 When Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance to the city gate, Abimelech and the

9:29 [a] Literally *hand* [b] Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Dead Sea Scrolls read *they;* Septuagint reads *I.*

people who *were* with him rose from lying in wait. 36 And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, "Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains!"

But Zebul said to him, "You see the shadows of the mountains as *if they were* men."

37 So Gaal spoke again and said, "See, people are coming down from the center of the land, and another company is coming from the Diviners' [a] Terebinth Tree."

38 Then Zebul said to him, "Where indeed *is* your mouth now, with which you said, 'Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?' *Are* not these the people whom you despised? Go out, if you will, and fight with them now."

39 So Gaal went out, leading the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech. 40 And Abimelech chased him, and he fled from him; and many fell wounded, to the *very* entrance of the gate. 41 Then Abimelech dwelt at Arumah, and Zebul drove out Gaal and his brothers, so that they would not dwell in Shechem.

42 And it came about on the next day that the people went out into the field, and they told Abimelech. 43 So he took his people, divided them into three companies, and lay in wait in the field. And he looked, and there were the people, coming out of the city; and he rose against them and attacked them. 44 Then Abimelech and the company that *was* with him rushed forward and stood at the entrance of the gate of the city; and the *other* two companies rushed upon all who *were* in the fields and killed them. 45 So Abimelech fought against the city all that day; he took the city and killed the people who *were* in it; and he demolished the city and sowed it with salt.

46 Now when all the men of the tower of Shechem had heard *that,* they entered the stronghold of the temple of the god Berith. 47 And it was told Abimelech that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together. 48 Then Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who *were* with him. And Abimelech took an ax in his hand and cut down a bough from the trees, and took it and laid *it* on his shoulder; then he said to the people who were with him, "What you have seen me do, make haste *and* do as I *have done.*" 49 So each of the people likewise cut down his own bough and followed Abimelech, put *them* against the stronghold, and set the stronghold on fire above them, so that all the people of the tower of Shechem died, about a thousand men and women.

50 Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he encamped against Thebez and took it. 51 But there was a strong tower in the city, and all the men and women—all the people of the city—fled there and shut themselves in; then they went up to the top of the tower. 52 So Abimelech came as far as the tower and fought against it; and he drew near the door of the tower to burn it with fire. 53 But a certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull. 54 Then he called quickly to the young man, his armorbearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, 'A woman killed him.' " So his young man thrust him through, and he died. 55 And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed, every man to his place.

56 Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he had done to his father by killing his seventy brothers. 57 And all the evil of the men of Shechem God returned on their own heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.

Tola

10 After Abimelech there arose to save Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in the mountains of Ephraim. 2 He judged Israel twenty-three years; and he died and was buried in Shamir.

Jair

3 After him arose Jair, a Gileadite; and he judged Israel twenty-two years. 4 Now he had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys; they also had thirty towns, which are called "Havoth Jair" [a] to this day, which *are* in the land of Gilead. 5 And Jair died and was buried in Camon.

Israel Oppressed Again

6 Then the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, the gods of Syria, the gods

9:37 [a] Hebrew *Meonenim* **10:4** [a] Literally *Towns of Jair* (compare Numbers 32:41 and Deuteronomy 3:14)

of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the people of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; and they forsook the Lord and did not serve Him. 7 So the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel; and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the people of Ammon. 8 From that year they harassed and oppressed the children of Israel for eighteen years—all the children of Israel who *were* on the other side of the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, in Gilead. 9 Moreover the people of Ammon crossed over the Jordan to fight against Judah also, against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was severely distressed.

10 And the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, saying, "We have sinned against You, because we have both forsaken our God and served the Baals!"

11 So the Lord said to the children of Israel, "*Did I* not *deliver you* from the Egyptians and from the Amorites and from the people of Ammon and from the Philistines? 12 Also the Sidonians and

New Life In Christ

"We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems best to You; only deliver us this day, we pray." —Judges 10:15

Confessed Sin Releases Joy

Confession does not create a relationship with God, it simply nourishes it. If you are a believer, admission of sins does not alter your position before God, but it does enhance your peace with God. When you confess, you agree; you quit arguing with God and agree with Him about your sin. Unconfessed sin leads to a state of disagreement. You may be God's child, but you don't want to talk to Him. He still loves you, but until you admit what you've done, there's going to be tension in the house.

But just as unconfessed sin hinders joy, confessed sin releases it. When we admit sin we are like a first grader standing before the teacher with a messy paper. "I colored outside the lines too many times. Could I start over on a clean sheet?" "Of course," says the teacher. Happy is the first grader who gets a second chance, or as David wrote, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Psalm 32:1). So we dash back to our seat and start over. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Question: What sins should you confess to restore a proper relationship with God?

For more on "New Life in Christ," see page 384.

Life LESSONS

Judges 10:1—12:15

SITUATION
Turning away from God, the idol-worshiping Israelites suffered foreign invasion and devastation. Finally, desperate for relief, they turned to God, and God raised up a deliverer, Jephthah.

OBSERVATION
The act of getting rid of foreign gods showed that Israel was serious about its confession.

INSPIRATION
God loves you just the way you are. If you think His love for you would be stronger if your faith were, you are wrong. If you think His love would be deeper if your thoughts were, wrong again. Don't confuse God's love with the love of people. The love of people often increases with performance and decreases with mistakes. Not so with God's love. He loves you right where you are. To quote my wife's favorite author:

God's love never ceases. Never. Though we spurn Him. Ignore Him. Reject Him. Despise Him. Disobey Him. He will not change. Our evil cannot diminish His love. Our goodness cannot increase it. Our faith does not earn it anymore than our stupidity jeopardizes it. God doesn't love us less if we fail or more if we succeed. God's love never ceases.

God loves you just the way you are, but He refuses to leave you that way.

When my daughter Jenna was a toddler, I used to take her to a park not far from our apartment. One day as she was playing in

a sandbox, an ice-cream salesman approached us. I purchased her a treat, and when I turned to give it to her, I saw her mouth was full of sand. Where I intended to put a delicacy, she had put dirt.

Did I love her with dirt in her mouth? Absolutely. Was she any less my daughter with dirt in her mouth? Of course not. Was I going to allow her to keep the dirt in her mouth? No way. I loved her right where she was, but I refused to leave her there. I carried her over to the water fountain and washed out her mouth. Why? Because I love her.

God does the same for us. He holds us over the fountain. "Spit out the dirt, honey," our Father urges. "I've got something better for you." And so He cleanses us of filth: immorality, dishonesty, prejudice, bitterness, greed. We don't enjoy the cleansing; sometimes we even opt for the dirt over the ice cream. "I can eat dirt if I want to!" we pout and proclaim. Which is true—we can. But if we do, the loss is ours. God has a better offer. He wants us to be just like Jesus.

Isn't that good news? You aren't stuck with today's personality. You aren't condemned to "grumpydom." You are tweakable. Even if you've worried each day of your life, you needn't worry the rest of your life. So what if you were born a bigot? You don't have to die one. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Isn't it good to know that God not only can change your heart but even desires to do so? Allow His cleansing to affect your life. Then ask the Lord to change

Amalekites and Maonites[a] oppressed you; and you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hand. 13 Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods. Therefore I will deliver you no more. 14 Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress."

15 And the children of Israel said to the Lord, "We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems best to You; only deliver us this day, we pray." 16 So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord. And His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel.

17 Then the people of Ammon gathered together and encamped in Gilead. And the children of Israel assembled together and encamped in Mizpah. 18 And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one another, "Who *is* the man who will begin the fight against the people of Ammon? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

Jephthah

11 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, but he *was* the son of a harlot; and Gilead begot Jephthah. 2 Gilead's wife bore sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out, and said to him, "You shall have no inheritance in our father's house, for you *are* the son of another woman." 3 Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and dwelt in the land of Tob; and worthless men banded together with Jephthah and went out *raiding* with him.

4 It came to pass after a time that the people of Ammon made war against Israel. 5 And so it was, when the people of Ammon made war against Israel, that the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob. 6 Then they said to Jephthah, "Come and be our commander, that we may fight against the people of Ammon."

7 So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me, and expel me from my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?"

8 And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "That is why we have turned again to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the people of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

9 So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you take me back home to fight against the people of Ammon, and the Lord delivers them to me, shall I be your head?"

10 And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The Lord will be a witness between us, if we do not do according to your words." 11 Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander over them; and Jephthah spoke all his words before the Lord in Mizpah.

12 Now Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon, saying, "What do you have against me, that you have come to fight against me in my land?"

13 And the king of the people of Ammon answered the messengers of Jephthah, "Because Israel took away my land when they came up out of Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok, and to the Jordan. Now therefore, restore those *lands* peaceably."

14 So Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the people of

10:12 [a] Some Septuagint manuscripts read *Midianites*.

Ammon, 15 and said to him, "Thus says Jephthah: 'Israel did not take
away the land of Moab, nor the land of the people of Ammon; 16 for
when Israel came up from Egypt, they walked through the wilder-
ness as far as the Red Sea and came to Kadesh. 17 Then Israel sent
messengers to the king of Edom, saying, "Please let me pass through
your land." But the king of Edom would not heed. And in like man-
ner they sent to the king of Moab, but he would not *consent.* So Israel
remained in Kadesh. 18 And they went along through the wilderness
and bypassed the land of Edom and the land of Moab, came to the
east side of the land of Moab, and encamped on the other side of
the Arnon. But they did not enter the border of Moab, for the Arnon
was the border of Moab. 19 Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king
of the Amorites, king of Heshbon; and Israel said to him, "Please let
us pass through your land into our place." 20 But Sihon did not trust
Israel to pass through his territory. So Sihon gathered all his people
together, encamped in Jahaz, and fought against Israel. 21 And the
Lord God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand
of Israel, and they defeated them. Thus Israel gained possession of
all the land of the Amorites, who inhabited that country. 22 They took
possession of all the territory of the Amorites, from the Arnon to the
Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan.

23 'And now the Lord God of Israel has dispossessed the Amorites
from before His people Israel; should you then possess it? 24 Will you
not possess whatever Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So
whatever the Lord our God takes possession of before us, we will pos-
sess. 25 And now, *are* you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king
of Moab? Did he ever strive against Israel? Did he ever fight against
them? 26 While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and its villages, in Aroer
and its villages, and in all the cities along the banks of the Arnon,
for three hundred years, why did you not recover *them* within that
time? 27 Therefore I have not sinned against you, but you wronged
me by fighting against me. May the Lord, the Judge, render judgment
this day between the children of Israel and the people of Ammon.' "
28 However, the king of the people of Ammon did not heed the words
which Jephthah sent him.

Jephthah's Vow and Victory

29 Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, and he passed
through Gilead and Manasseh, and passed through Mizpah of
Gilead; and from Mizpah of Gilead he advanced *toward* the people of
Ammon. 30 And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord, and said, "If You will
indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, 31 then it will be
that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I
return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's,
and I will offer it up as a burnt offering."

32 So Jephthah advanced toward the people of Ammon to fight
against them, and the Lord delivered them into his hands. 33 And
he defeated them from Aroer as far as Minnith—twenty cities—and
to Abel Keramim,[a] with a very great slaughter. Thus the people of
Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.

11:33 [a] Literally *Plain of Vineyards*

your heart so your desires match His.

EXPLORATION
Confessing Sin—Psalm 32:5; Proverbs 28:13; James 5:16; 1 John 1:9.

Your career consumes half your lifetime. Shouldn't it broadcast God? Don't those forty to sixty hours a week belong to Him as well?

—Max Lucado (Cure for the Common Life)

Jephthah's Daughter

34 When Jephthah came to his house at
Mizpah, there was his daughter, coming out to
meet him with timbrels and dancing; and she
was his only child. Besides her he had neither
son nor daughter. 35 And it came to pass, when
he saw her, that he tore his clothes, and said,
"Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very
low! You are among those who trouble me! For
I have given my word to the Lord, and I cannot
go back on it."

36 So she said to him, "My father, *if* you have
given your word to the Lord, do to me accord-
ing to what has gone out of your mouth,
because the Lord has avenged you of your
enemies, the people of Ammon." 37 Then she
said to her father, "Let this thing be done for
me: let me alone for two months, that I may go
and wander on the mountains and bewail my
virginity, my friends and I."

38 So he said, "Go." And he sent her away *for*
two months; and she went with her friends,
and bewailed her virginity on the mountains.
39 And it was so at the end of two months that
she returned to her father, and he carried out
his vow with her which he had vowed. She
knew no man.

And it became a custom in Israel 40 *that* the
daughters of Israel went four days each year to
lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

Jephthah's Conflict with Ephraim

12 Then the men of Ephraim gathered
together, crossed over toward Zaphon,
and said to Jephthah, "Why did you cross over
to fight against the people of Ammon, and did
not call us to go with you? We will burn your
house down on you with fire!"

2 And Jephthah said to them, "My people
and I were in a great struggle with the people
of Ammon; and when I called you, you did not
deliver me out of their hands. 3 So when I saw
that you would not deliver *me,* I took my life in
my hands and crossed over against the people
of Ammon; and the Lord delivered them into
my hand. Why then have you come up to me
this day to fight against me?" 4 Now Jephthah
gathered together all the men of Gilead and
fought against Ephraim. And the men of Gilead
defeated Ephraim, because they said, "You
Gileadites *are* fugitives of Ephraim among
the Ephraimites *and* among the Manassites."

5 The Gileadites seized the fords of the Jordan
before the Ephraimites *arrived.* And when
any Ephraimite who escaped said, "Let me
cross over," the men of Gilead would say to
him, "*Are* you an Ephraimite?" If he said,
"No," 6 then they would say to him, "Then say,
'Shibboleth'!" And he would say, "Sibboleth,"
for he could not pronounce *it* right. Then they
would take him and kill him at the fords of the
Jordan. There fell at that time forty-two thou-
sand Ephraimites.

7 And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then
Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried
among the cities of Gilead.

Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon

8 After him, Ibzan of Bethlehem judged
Israel. 9 He had thirty sons. And he gave away
thirty daughters in marriage, and brought in
thirty daughters from elsewhere for his sons.
He judged Israel seven years. 10 Then Ibzan
died and was buried at Bethlehem.

11 After him, Elon the Zebulunite judged
Israel. He judged Israel ten years. 12 And Elon
the Zebulunite died and was buried at Aijalon
in the country of Zebulun.

13 After him, Abdon the son of Hillel the
Pirathonite judged Israel. 14 He had forty sons
and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy
young donkeys. He judged Israel eight years.
15 Then Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite
died and was buried in Pirathon in the land of
Ephraim, in the mountains of the Amalekites.

The Birth of Samson

13 Again the children of Israel did evil
in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord
delivered them into the hand of the Philistines
for forty years.

2 Now there was a certain man from Zorah,
of the family of the Danites, whose name *was*
Manoah; and his wife *was* barren and had no
children. 3 And the Angel of the Lord appeared
to the woman and said to her, "Indeed now,
you are barren and have borne no children,
but you shall conceive and bear a son. 4 Now
therefore, please be careful not to drink wine
or *similar* drink, and not to eat anything
unclean. 5 For behold, you shall conceive and
bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his
head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God

from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines."

6 So the woman came and told her husband, saying, "A Man of God came to me, and His countenance *was* like the countenance of the Angel of God, very awesome; but I did not ask Him where He *was* from, and He did not tell me His name. 7 And He said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. Now drink no wine or *similar* drink, nor eat anything unclean, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.' "

8 Then Manoah prayed to the Lord, and said, "O my Lord, please let the Man of God whom You sent come to us again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born."

9 And God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the Angel of God came to the woman again as she was sitting in the field; but Manoah her husband *was* not with her. 10 Then the woman ran in haste and told her husband, and said to him, "Look, the Man who came to me the *other* day has just now appeared to me!"

11 So Manoah arose and followed his wife. When he came to the Man, he said to Him, "Are You the Man who spoke to this woman?"

And He said, "I *am*."

12 Manoah said, "Now let Your words come *to pass!* What will be the boy's rule of life, and his work?"

13 So the Angel of the Lord said to Manoah, "Of all that I said to the woman let her be careful. 14 She may not eat anything that comes from the vine, nor may she drink wine or *similar* drink, nor eat anything unclean. All that I commanded her let her observe."

15 Then Manoah said to the Angel of the Lord, "Please let us detain You, and we will prepare a young goat for You."

16 And the Angel of the Lord said to Manoah, "Though you detain Me, I will not eat your food. But if you offer a burnt offering, you must offer it to the Lord." (For Manoah did not know He *was* the Angel of the Lord.)

17 Then Manoah said to the Angel of the Lord, "What *is* Your name, that when Your words come *to pass* we may honor You?"

18 And the Angel of the Lord said to him, "Why do you ask My name, seeing it *is* wonderful?"

19 So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it upon the rock to the Lord. And He did a wondrous thing while Manoah and his wife looked on— 20 it happened as the flame went up toward heaven from the altar—the Angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar! When Manoah and his wife saw *this,* they fell on their faces to the ground. 21 When the Angel of the Lord appeared no more to Manoah and his wife, then Manoah knew that He *was* the Angel of the Lord.

22 And Manoah said to his wife, "We shall surely die, because we have seen God!"

23 But his wife said to him, "If the Lord had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these *things,* nor would He have told us *such things* as these at this time."

24 So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him. 25 And the Spirit of the Lord

Life LESSONS

Judges 13:1–25

SITUATION

As the Israelites settled into Palestine, they faced a struggle to retain their own identity as the chosen ones. Again and again they disregarded the commandments of God. Punishment often resulted. Yet, God retained His covenant with these obstinate people. At the time of the judges, He provided a deliverer. A baby was promised to a childless couple. He was to deliver his people from the oppression of the Philistines. When he was born, he was named Samson.

OBSERVATION

Pride makes us drift from God's commands. We feel "I can do it on my own," or we become confident in our own ability to handle each day. Yet, like Israel, we often remember to turn to God when life suddenly gets hard. Pride is idolatry—the idol is self.

INSPIRATION

Paul existed to deliver the message. How people remembered him was secondary. (Else why would he introduce himself as a slave? Romans 1:1). How people remembered Christ was primary. Paul's message was not about himself. His message was all about Christ.

How difficult for us to maintain this focus. Don't we tend to tinker with the message? Aren't we prone to insert lines of self-service?

A young guide in the art museum was. One sentence summarized his job: Lead people to the paintings, answer their questions, and

step out of the way. Initially he succeeded. He walked the clients to the framed treasures, identified the artists, and stepped out of view.

"This is a Monet," he would say and move back as people oohed and aahed and asked a question or two. When they were ready, he would lead them to the next masterpiece and repeat the sequence. "This is the work of Rembrandt." He stepped back; they leaned in. He stood; they stared.

Simple job. Delightful job. He took great pride in his work.

Too much pride, one might say. For in a short time, he forgot his role. He began thinking the people had come to see him. Rather than step away from the work of art, he lingered near it. As they oohed and aahed, he smiled. "Glad you like it," he replied, chest lifting, face blushing. He even responded with an occasional "thank you," taking credit for work he didn't do.

Visitors disregarded his comments. But they couldn't dismiss his movements. Lingering near a painting was no longer sufficient for the guide. Little by little he inched toward it. Initially extending his arm over the frame, then his torso over part of the canvas. Finally his body blocked the entire piece. People could see him but not the art. The very work he was sent to reveal he began to conceal.

That's when his Superior intervened. "This job isn't about you, Max. Don't obscure My masterpieces."

How many times has He had to remind me? The very first time I was called to display a painting, I was tempted to eclipse it. (From

began to move upon him at Mahaneh Dan[a] between Zorah and Eshtaol.

Samson's Philistine Wife

14 Now Samson went down to Timnah, and saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines. 2 So he went up and told his father and mother, saying, "I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife."

3 Then his father and mother said to him, "*Is there* no woman among the daughters of your brethren, or among all my people, that you must go and get a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?"

And Samson said to his father, "Get her for me, for she pleases me well."

4 But his father and mother did not know that it was of the Lord—that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines. For at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.

5 So Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came to the vineyards of Timnah.

Now *to his* surprise, a young lion *came* roaring against him. 6 And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat, though *he had* nothing in his hand. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done.

7 Then he went down and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well. 8 After some time, when he returned to get her, he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion. And behold, a swarm of bees and honey *were* in the carcass of the lion. 9 He took some of it in his hands and went along, eating. When he came to his father and mother, he gave *some* to them, and they also ate. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey out of the carcass of the lion.

10 So his father went down to the woman. And Samson gave a feast there, for young men used to do so. 11 And it happened, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him.

12 Then Samson said to them, "Let me pose a riddle to you. If you can correctly solve and explain it to me within the seven days of the feast, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing. 13 But if you cannot explain *it* to me, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing."

And they said to him, "Pose your riddle, that we may hear it."

14 So he said to them:

"Out of the eater came something to eat,
And out of the strong came something sweet."

Now for three days they could not explain the riddle.

15 But it came to pass on the seventh[a] day that they said to Samson's wife, "Entice your husband, that he may explain the riddle to us, or else we will burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us in order to take what is ours? *Is that* not *so?*"

13:25 [a] Literally *Camp of Dan* (compare 18:12) **14:15** [a] Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint and Syriac read *fourth.*

16 Then Samson's wife wept on him, and said, "You only hate me!
You do not love me! You have posed a riddle to the sons of my people,
but you have not explained *it* to me."

And he said to her, "Look, I have not explained *it* to my father or
my mother; so should I explain *it* to you?" 17 Now she had wept on
him the seven days while their feast lasted. And it happened on the
seventh day that he told her, because she pressed him so much. Then
she explained the riddle to the sons of her people. 18 So the men of the
city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down:

"What *is* sweeter than honey?
And what *is* stronger than a lion?"

And he said to them:

"If you had not plowed with my heifer,
You would not have solved my riddle!"

19 Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily, and he went
down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of their men, took their apparel,
and gave the changes *of clothing* to those who had explained the
riddle. So his anger was aroused, and he went back up to his father's
house. 20 And Samson's wife was *given* to his companion, who had
been his best man.

Samson Defeats the Philistines

15 After a while, in the time of wheat harvest, it happened that
Samson visited his wife with a young goat. And he said, "Let
me go in to my wife, into *her* room." But her father would not permit
him to go in.

2 Her father said, "I really thought that you thoroughly hated her;
therefore I gave her to your companion. *Is* not her younger sister bet-
ter than she? Please, take her instead."

3 And Samson said to them, "This time I shall be blameless regard-
ing the Philistines if I harm them!" 4 Then Samson went and caught
three hundred foxes; and he took torches, turned *the foxes* tail to
tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. 5 When he had set
the torches on fire, he let *the foxes* go into the standing grain of the
Philistines, and burned up both the shocks and the standing grain, as
well as the vineyards *and* olive groves.

6 Then the Philistines said, "Who has done this?"

And they answered, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite,
because he has taken his wife and given her to his companion." So the
Philistines came up and burned her and her father with fire.

7 Samson said to them, "Since you would do a thing like this, I will
surely take revenge on you, and after that I will cease." 8 So he attacked
them hip and thigh with a great slaughter; then he went down and
dwelt in the cleft of the rock of Etam.

9 Now the Philistines went up, encamped in Judah, and deployed
themselves against Lehi. 10 And the men of Judah said, "Why have you
come up against us?"

It's Not About Me by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Has your pride led you away from God? Have you become self-reliant rather than following God's advice? Follow His advice in every area of your life.

EXPLORATION
Obedience to God—Leviticus 25:18; 1 Samuel 15:22; Job 22:23–29.

Life Lessons

Judges 14:1–20

SITUATION
The Philistines ruled over Israel. The Israelites cried to God to save them. God provided a leader called Samson.

OBSERVATION
God always provides strength to do His will. In Samson's case, God supplied extraordinary physical power.

INSPIRATION
Small deeds can change the world. Sow the mustard seed. Bury the leaven lump. Make the call. Write the check. Organize the committee. Years from now someone might follow your example. . . .

Moses had a staff.
David had a sling.
Samson had a jawbone.
Rahab had a string.
Mary had some ointment.
Aaron had a rod.
Dorcas had a needle.
All were used by God.
What do you have?

God inhabits the tiny seed, empowers the tiny deed. He cures the common life by giving no common life, by offering no common gifts. . . . Don't discount the smallness of your deeds. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Pray for strength to do your work. Pray for yourself and others close to you: your family, pastor, friends. Let the Holy Spirit do extraordinary work in you.

EXPLORATION
Source of Strength—Psalm 28:7; Zechariah 4:6; Acts 1:8.

Life Lessons

Judges 15:1—16:31

SITUATION
Samson lost his betrothed wife to his best man. Obviously angry, Samson took revenge on the Philistines. Eventually, he died as a result of revealing the secret of his strength to Delilah.

OBSERVATION
Samson initiated a cycle of violence and revenge between himself and the Philistines. This vicious cycle continued to grow in scope.

INSPIRATION
Forgiveness is not foolishness.

Forgiveness is, at its core, choosing to see your offender with different eyes. . . .

To forgive is to move on, not to think about the offense anymore. You don't excuse him, endorse her, or embrace them. You just route thoughts about them through heaven. You see your enemy as God's child and revenge as God's job.

By the way, how can we grace-recipients do anything less? Dare we ask God for grace when we refuse to give it? This is a huge issue in Scripture. Jesus was tough on sinners who refused to forgive other sinners. Remember His story about the servant freshly

So they answered, "We have come up to arrest Samson, to do to him as he has done to us."

11 Then three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and said to Samson, "Do you not know that the Philistines rule over us? What *is* this you have done to us?"

And he said to them, "As they did to me, so I have done to them."

12 But they said to him, "We have come down to arrest you, that we may deliver you into the hand of the Philistines."

Then Samson said to them, "Swear to me that you will not kill me yourselves."

13 So they spoke to him, saying, "No, but we will tie you securely and deliver you into their hand; but we will surely not kill you." And they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock.

14 When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting against him. Then the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him; and the ropes that *were* on his arms became like flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds broke loose from his hands. 15 He found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it, and killed a thousand men with it. 16 Then Samson said:

"With the jawbone of a donkey,
Heaps upon heaps,
With the jawbone of a donkey
I have slain a thousand men!"

17 And so it was, when he had finished speaking, that he threw the jawbone from his hand, and called that place Ramath Lehi.[a]

18 Then he became very thirsty; so he cried out to the Lord and said, "You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant; and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?" 19 So God split the hollow place that *is* in Lehi,[a] and water came out, and he drank; and his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore he called its name En Hakkore,[b] which is in Lehi to this day. 20 And he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

Samson and Delilah

16 Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her. 2 *When* the Gazites *were told,* "Samson has come here!" they surrounded *the place* and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. They were quiet all night, saying, "In the morning, when it is daylight, we will kill him." 3 And Samson lay *low* till midnight; then he arose at midnight, took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two gateposts, pulled them up, bar and all, put *them* on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron.

4 Afterward it happened that he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name *was* Delilah. 5 And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Entice him, and find out where his great strength *lies,* and by what *means* we may overpower him, that

15:17 [a] Literally *Jawbone Height* **15:19** [a] Literally *Jawbone* (compare verse 14) [b] Literally *Spring of the Caller*

we may bind him to afflict him; and every one of us will give you eleven hundred *pieces* of silver."

6 So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me where your great strength *lies,* and with what you may be bound to afflict you."

7 And Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings, not yet dried, then I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man."

8 So the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings, not yet dried, and she bound him with them. 9 Now *men were* lying in wait, staying with her in the room. And she said to him, "The Philistines *are* upon you, Samson!" But he broke the bowstrings as a strand of yarn breaks when it touches fire. So the secret of his strength was not known.

10 Then Delilah said to Samson, "Look, you have mocked me and told me lies. Now, please tell me what you may be bound with."

11 So he said to her, "If they bind me securely with new ropes that have never been used, then I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man."

12 Therefore Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them, and said to him, "The Philistines *are* upon you, Samson!" And *men were* lying in wait, staying in the room. But he broke them off his arms like a thread.

13 Delilah said to Samson, "Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me what you may be bound with."

And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my head into the web of the loom"—

14 So she wove *it* tightly with the batten of the loom, and said to him, "The Philistines *are* upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep, and pulled out the batten and the web from the loom.

15 Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart *is* not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and have not told me where your great strength *lies.*" 16 And it came to pass, when she pestered him daily with her words and pressed him, *so* that his soul was vexed to death, 17 that he told her all his heart, and said to her, "No razor has ever come upon my head, for I *have been* a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaven, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man."

18 When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up once more, for he has told me all his heart." So the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hand. 19 Then she lulled him to sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him,[a] and his strength left him. 20 And she said, "The Philistines *are* upon you, Samson!" So he awoke from his sleep, and said, "I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!" But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him.

21 Then the Philistines took him and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza. They bound him with bronze fetters, and he

16:19 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *he began to be weak*.

forgiven a debt of millions who refused to forgive a debt equal to a few dollars? He stirred the wrath of God: "You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt. . . . Shouldn't you have mercy . . . just as I had mercy on you?" (Matthew 18:32, 33 NLT).

In the final sum, we give grace because we've been given grace. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Grudges can create emotional walls in families, between friends, at work or at church—places where people step on and over each other. Are you holding a grudge against someone? It is a negative factor in your life. Pray for God to help you change your attitude and find a way to forgive as you have been forgiven.

EXPLORATION

Revenge—Leviticus 19:18; Proverbs 24:29; Matthew 5:39; Romans 12:19, 20.

became a grinder in the prison. 22 However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven.

Samson Dies with the Philistines

23 Now the lords of the Philistines gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice. And they said:

"Our god has delivered into our hands
Samson our enemy!"

24 When the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said:

"Our god has delivered into our hands our enemy,
The destroyer of our land,
And the one who multiplied our dead."

25 So it happened, when their hearts were merry, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may perform for us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he performed for them. And they stationed him between the pillars. 26 Then Samson said to the lad who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars which support the temple, so that I can lean on them." 27 Now the temple was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines *were* there—about three thousand men and women on the roof watching while Samson performed.

28 Then Samson called to the Lord, saying, "O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one *blow* take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!" 29 And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against them, one on his right and the other on his left. 30 Then Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" And he pushed with *all his* might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who *were* in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life.

31 And his brothers and all his father's household came down and took him, and brought *him* up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had judged Israel twenty years.

Micah's Idolatry

17 Now there was a man from the mountains of Ephraim, whose name *was* Micah. 2 And he said to his mother, "The eleven hundred *shekels* of silver that were taken from you, and on which you put a curse, even saying it in my ears—here *is* the silver with me; I took it."

And his mother said, "*May you be* blessed by the Lord, my son!" 3 So when he had returned the eleven hundred *shekels* of silver to his mother, his mother said, "I had wholly dedicated the silver from my hand to the Lord for my son, to make a carved image and a molded image; now therefore, I will return it to you." 4 Thus he returned the silver to his mother. Then his mother took two hundred *shekels* of silver and gave them to the silversmith, and he made it into a carved image and a molded image; and they were in the house of Micah.

5 The man Micah had a shrine, and made an ephod and household

Life Lessons

Judges 17:1—18:31

SITUATION

Micah, a man who stole money from his mother, decided to confess when he heard his mother calling down curses upon the thief who stole her money. His mother blessed and forgave him. Micah's mother made an idol from the money to try to atone for the sin her son committed.

OBSERVATION

False religion seeks peace of heart through all the wrong ways. A true relationship with God requires wholehearted obedience, not a token sacrifice.

INSPIRATION

"Lord," I said, "I want to be Your man, not my own. So to You I give my money, my car—even my home."

Then, smug and content, I relaxed with a smile and whispered to God, "I bet it's been a while since anyone has given so much—so freely?" His answer surprised me. He replied, "Not really."

Not a day has gone by since the beginning of time, that someone hasn't offered meager nickels and dimes, golden altars and crosses, contributions and penance, stone monuments and steeples; but why not repentance?

"The money, the statues, the cathedrals you've built, do you really think I need your offering of guilt?

"What good is money that's meant only to salve the hurting conscience that so many of you have?

"Your lips know no prayers. Your eyes, no compassion.

But you will go to church

idols;[a] and he consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest. 6 In those days *there was* no king in Israel; everyone did *what was* right in his own eyes.

7 Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah; he *was* a Levite, and was staying there. 8 The man departed from the city of Bethlehem in Judah to stay wherever he could find *a place.* Then he came to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, as he journeyed. 9 And Micah said to him, "Where do you come from?"

So he said to him, "I *am* a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah, and I am on my way to find *a place* to stay."

10 Micah said to him, "Dwell with me, and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten *shekels* of silver per year, a suit of clothes, and your sustenance." So the Levite went in. 11 Then the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man became like one of his sons to him. 12 So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest, and lived in the house of Micah. 13 Then Micah said, "Now I know that the Lord will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest!"

The Danites Adopt Micah's Idolatry

18 In those days *there was* no king in Israel. And in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for itself to dwell in; for until that day *their* inheritance among the tribes of Israel had not fallen to them. 2 So the children of Dan sent five men of their family from their territory, men of valor from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and search it. They said to them, "Go, search the land." So they went to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there. 3 While they *were* at the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young Levite. They turned aside and said to him, "Who brought you here? What are you doing in this *place?* What do you have here?"

4 He said to them, "Thus and so Micah did for me. He has hired me, and I have become his priest."

5 So they said to him, "Please inquire of God, that we may know whether the journey on which we go will be prosperous."

6 And the priest said to them, "Go in peace. The presence of the Lord *be* with you on your way."

7 So the five men departed and went to Laish. They saw the people who *were* there, how they dwelt safely, in the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure. *There were* no rulers in the land who might put *them* to shame for anything. They *were* far from the Sidonians, and they had no ties with anyone.[a]

8 Then *the spies* came back to their brethren at Zorah and Eshtaol, and their brethren said to them, "What *is* your *report?*"

9 So they said, "Arise, let us go up against them. For we have seen the land, and indeed it *is* very good. *Would* you *do* nothing? Do not hesitate to go, *and* enter to possess the land. 10 When you go, you will come to a secure people and a large land. For God has given it into

17:5 [a]Hebrew *teraphim* **18:7** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *with Syria.*

(when church going's in fashion).

"Just give Me a tear—a heart ready to mold.

And I'll give you a mission, a message so bold—

That a fire will be stirred where there was only death,

And your heart will be flamed by My life and My breath."

I stuck my hands in my pockets and kicked at the dirt.

It's tough to be corrected (I guess my feelings were hurt).

But it was worth the struggle to realize the thought.

That the Cross isn't for sale and Christ's blood can't be bought. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you trying to win God's favor? Instead, accept His gift of salvation. God has no price tag attached to His mercy. Jesus paid the price Himself.

EXPLORATION

Obedience Not Sacrifice—1 Samuel 15:22; Proverbs 21:3; Hosea 6:6.

your hands, a place where *there is* no lack of anything that *is* on the earth."

11 And six hundred men of the family of the Danites went from there, from Zorah and Eshtaol, armed with weapons of war. 12 Then they went up and encamped in Kirjath Jearim in Judah. (Therefore they call that place Mahaneh Dan[a] to this day. There *it is,* west of Kirjath Jearim.) 13 And they passed from there to the mountains of Ephraim, and came to the house of Micah.

14 Then the five men who had gone to spy out the country of Laish answered and said to their brethren, "Do you know that there are in these houses an ephod, household idols, a carved image, and a molded image? Now therefore, consider what you should do." 15 So they turned aside there, and came to the house of the young Levite man—to the house of Micah—and greeted him. 16 The six hundred men armed with their weapons of war, who *were* of the children of Dan, stood by the entrance of the gate. 17 Then the five men who had gone to spy out the land went up. Entering there, they took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image. The priest stood at the entrance of the gate with the six hundred men *who were* armed with weapons of war.

18 When these went into Micah's house and took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?"

19 And they said to him, "Be quiet, put your hand over your mouth, and come with us; be a father and a priest to us. *Is it* better for you to be a priest to the household of one man, or that you be a priest to a tribe and a family in Israel?" 20 So the priest's heart was glad; and he took the ephod, the household idols, and the carved image, and took his place among the people.

21 Then they turned and departed, and put the little ones, the livestock, and the goods in front of them. 22 When they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men who *were* in the houses near Micah's house gathered together and overtook the children of Dan. 23 And they called out to the children of Dan. So they turned around and said to Micah, "What ails you, that you have gathered such a company?"

24 So he said, "You have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and you have gone away. Now what more do I have? How can you say to me, 'What ails you?' "

25 And the children of Dan said to him, "Do not let your voice be heard among us, lest angry men fall upon you, and you lose your life, with the lives of your household!" 26 Then the children of Dan went their way. And when Micah saw that they *were* too strong for him, he turned and went back to his house.

Danites Settle in Laish

27 So they took *the things* Micah had made, and the priest who had belonged to him, and went to Laish, to a people quiet and secure; and they struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire. 28 *There was* no deliverer, because it *was* far from Sidon, and they had no ties with anyone. It was in the valley that belongs to Beth Rehob. So they rebuilt the city and dwelt there. 29 And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born to Israel. However, the name of the city formerly *was* Laish.

30 Then the children of Dan set up for themselves the carved image; and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh,[a] and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. 31 So they set up for themselves Micah's carved image which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

The Levite's Concubine

19 And it came to pass in those days, when *there was* no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite staying in the remote mountains of Ephraim. He took for himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. 2 But his concubine played the harlot against him, and went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there four whole months. 3 Then her husband arose and went after her, to speak kindly to her *and* bring her back, having his servant and a couple of donkeys with him. So she brought him into her father's house; and when the father of the

18:12 [a]Literally *Camp of Dan* **18:30** [a]Septuagint and Vulgate read *Moses.*

young woman saw him, he was glad to meet him. 4Now his father-in-law, the young woman's father, detained him; and he stayed with him three days. So they ate and drank and lodged there.

5Then it came to pass on the fourth day that they arose early in the morning, and he stood to depart; but the young woman's father said to his son-in-law, "Refresh your heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way."

6So they sat down, and the two of them ate and drank together. Then the young woman's father said to the man, "Please be content to stay all night, and let your heart be merry." 7And when the man stood to depart, his father-in-law urged him; so he lodged there again. 8Then he arose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart, but the young woman's father said, "Please refresh your heart." So they delayed until afternoon; and both of them ate.

9And when the man stood to depart—he and his concubine and his servant—his father-in-law, the young woman's father, said to him, "Look, the day is now drawing toward evening; please spend the night. See, the day is coming to an end; lodge here, that your heart may be merry. Tomorrow go your way early, so that you may get home."

10However, the man was not willing to spend that night; so he rose and departed, and came opposite Jebus (that *is,* Jerusalem). With him were the two saddled donkeys; his concubine *was* also with him. 11They *were* near Jebus, and the day was far spent; and the servant said to his master, "Come, please, and let us turn aside into this city of the Jebusites and lodge in it."

12But his master said to him, "We will not turn aside here into a city of foreigners, who *are* not of the children of Israel; we will go on to Gibeah." 13So he said to his servant, "Come, let us draw near to one of these places, and spend the night in Gibeah or in Ramah." 14And they passed by and went their way; and the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin. 15They turned aside there to go in to lodge in Gibeah. And when he went in, he sat down in the open square of the city, for no one would take them into *his* house to spend the night.

16Just then an old man came in from his work in the field at evening, who also *was* from the mountains of Ephraim; he was staying in Gibeah, whereas the men of the place *were* Benjamites. 17And when he raised his eyes, he saw the traveler in the open square of the city; and the old man said, "Where are you going, and where do you come from?"

18So he said to him, "We *are* passing from Bethlehem in Judah toward the remote mountains of Ephraim; I *am* from there. I went to Bethlehem in Judah; *now* I am going to the house of the Lord. But there *is* no one who will take me into his house, 19although we have both straw and fodder for our donkeys, and bread and wine for myself, for your female servant, and for the young man *who is* with your servant; *there is* no lack of anything."

20And the old man said, "Peace *be* with you! However, *let* all your needs *be* my responsibility; only do not spend the night in the open square." 21So he brought him into his house, and gave fodder to the donkeys. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank.

Life Lessons

Judges 19:1—21:25

SITUATION

A Levite priest cruelly and unjustly handed over his concubine to be abused by wicked men living in Gibeah, a village of the Benjamites. When he got home, the priest cut her corpse into twelve parts and sent each tribe in Israel a part to dramatize the shamefulness of the act perpetrated by the men of Gibeah.

OBSERVATION

The nation had sunk to great depths, but God was preparing a change and a new leader to help bring the nation back to Himself.

INSPIRATION

One thousand BC was a bad era for this ramshackle collection of tribes called Israel. Joshua and Moses were history-class heroes. Three centuries of spiritual winter had frozen people's faith. One writer described the days between Joshua and Samuel with this terse sentence: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). Corruption fueled disruption. Immorality sired brutality. The people had demanded a king—but rather than save the ship, Saul had nearly sunk it. Israel's first monarch turned out to be a psychotic blunderer.

And then there were the Philistines: a warring, bloodthirsty, giant-breeding people, who monopolized iron and blacksmithing. They were grizzlies; Hebrews were salmon. Philistines built cities; Hebrews huddled in tribes

and tents. Philistines forged iron weapons; Hebrews fought with crude slings and arrows. Philistines thundered in flashing chariots; Israelites retaliated with farm tools and knives. Why, in one battle the entire Hebrew army owned only two swords—one for Saul and one for his son Jonathan (1 Samuel 13:22).

Corruption from within. Danger from without. Saul was weak. The nation, weaker. What did God do? He did what no one imagined. He issued a surprise invitation to the nobody from Nowheresville. . . .

And that's where we find David, in the pasture with the flock. Scripture dedicates sixty-six chapters to his story, more than anyone else in the Bible outside of Jesus. The New Testament mentions his name fifty-nine times. He will establish and inhabit the world's most famous city, Jerusalem. The Son of God will be called the Son of David. The greatest psalms will flow from his pen. We'll call him king, warrior, minstrel, and giant-killer. But today he's not even included in the family meeting; he's just a forgotten, uncredentialed kid, performing a menial task in a map-dot town.

What caused God to pick him? We want to know. We really want to know.

After all, we've walked David's pasture, the pasture of exclusion. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Sometimes when we look around at our world, we wonder if maybe God has forgotten or given up on us. Perhaps some of the Israelites wondered the same thing. But God is always there, always working to bring people

Gibeah's Crime

22 As they were enjoying themselves, suddenly certain men of the city, perverted men,[a] surrounded the house *and* beat on the door. They spoke to the master of the house, the old man, saying, "Bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him *carnally!*"

23 But the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brethren! I beg you, do not act *so* wickedly! Seeing this man has come into my house, do not commit this outrage. 24 Look, *here is* my virgin daughter and *the man's*[a] concubine; let me bring them out now. Humble them, and do with them as you please; but to this man do not do such a vile thing!" 25 But the men would not heed him. So the man took his concubine and brought *her* out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until morning; and when the day began to break, they let her go.

26 Then the woman came as the day was dawning, and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master *was,* till it was light.

27 When her master arose in the morning, and opened the doors of the house and went out to go his way, there was his concubine, fallen *at* the door of the house with her hands on the threshold. 28 And he said to her, "Get up and let us be going." But there was no answer. So the man lifted her onto the donkey; and the man got up and went to his place.

29 When he entered his house he took a knife, laid hold of his concubine, and divided her into twelve pieces, limb by limb,[a] and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel. 30 And so it was that all who saw it said, "No such deed has been done or seen from the day that the children of Israel came up from the land of Egypt until this day. Consider it, confer, and speak up!"

Israel's War with the Benjamites

20 So all the children of Israel came out, from Dan to Beersheba, as well as from the land of Gilead, and the congregation gathered together as one man before the Lord at Mizpah. 2 And the leaders of all the people, all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand foot soldiers who drew the sword. 3 (Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel had gone up to Mizpah.)

Then the children of Israel said, "Tell *us,* how did this wicked deed happen?"

4 So the Levite, the husband of the woman who was murdered, answered and said, "My concubine and I went into Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin, to spend the night. 5 And the men of Gibeah rose against me, and surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to kill me, but instead they ravished my concubine so that she died. 6 So I took hold of my concubine, cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of the inheritance of Israel, because they committed lewdness and outrage in Israel. 7 Look! All of you *are* children of Israel; give your advice and counsel here and now!"

8 So all the people arose as one man, saying, "None *of us* will go to his tent, nor will any turn back to his house; 9 but now this *is* the thing

19:22 [a]Literally *sons of Belial* **19:24** [a]Literally *his* **19:29** [a]Literally *with her bones*

which we will do to Gibeah: *We will go up* against it by lot. 10 We will take ten men out of *every* hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, a hundred out of *every* thousand, and a thousand out of *every* ten thousand, to make provisions for the people, that when they come to Gibeah in Benjamin, they may repay all the vileness that they have done in Israel." 11 So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united together as one man.

12 Then the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What *is* this wickedness that has occurred among you? 13 Now therefore, deliver up the men, the perverted men[a] who *are* in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and remove the evil from Israel!" But the children of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brethren, the children of Israel. 14 Instead, the children of Benjamin gathered together from their cities to Gibeah, to go to battle against the children of Israel. 15 And from their cities at that time the children of Benjamin numbered twenty-six thousand men who drew the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah, who numbered seven hundred select men. 16 Among all this people *were* seven hundred select men *who were* left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair's *breadth* and not miss. 17 Now besides Benjamin, the men of Israel numbered four hundred thousand men who drew the sword; all of these *were* men of war.

18 Then the children of Israel arose and went up to the house of God[a] to inquire of God. They said, "Which of us shall go up first to battle against the children of Benjamin?"

The Lord said, "Judah first!"

19 So the children of Israel rose in the morning and encamped against Gibeah. 20 And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin, and the men of Israel put themselves in battle array to fight against them at Gibeah. 21 Then the children of Benjamin came out of Gibeah, and on that day cut down to the ground twenty-two thousand men of the Israelites. 22 And the people, that is, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves and again formed the battle line at the place where they had put themselves in array on the first day. 23 Then the children of Israel went up and wept before the Lord until evening, and asked counsel of the Lord, saying, "Shall I again draw near for battle against the children of my brother Benjamin?"

And the Lord said, "Go up against him."

24 So the children of Israel approached the children of Benjamin on the second day. 25 And Benjamin went out against them from Gibeah on the second day, and cut down to the ground eighteen thousand more of the children of Israel; all these drew the sword.

26 Then all the children of Israel, that is, all the people, went up and came to the house of God[a] and wept. They sat there before the Lord and fasted that day until evening; and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. 27 So the children of Israel inquired of the Lord (the ark of the covenant of God *was* there in those days, 28 and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days), saying, "Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?"

20:13 [a]Literally *sons of Belial* **20:18** [a]Or *Bethel* **20:26** [a]Or *Bethel*

back to Himself. The coming stories in the Bible will show God's love and grace on His people. He called David. Is He calling you?

EXPLORATION

Injustice—Exodus 22:21; Psalm 43:1; Zephaniah 3:5; Luke 16:10.

And the Lord said, "Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand."

29 Then Israel set men in ambush all around Gibeah. 30 And the children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and put themselves in battle array against Gibeah as at the other times. 31 So the children of Benjamin went out against the people, *and* were drawn away from the city. They began to strike down *and* kill some of the people, as at the other times, in the highways (one of which goes up to Bethel and the other to Gibeah) and in the field, about thirty men of Israel. 32 And the children of Benjamin said, "They *are* defeated before us, as at first."

But the children of Israel said, "Let us flee and draw them away from the city to the highways." 33 So all the men of Israel rose from their place and put themselves in battle array at Baal Tamar. Then Israel's men in ambush burst forth from their position in the plain of Geba. 34 And ten thousand select men from all Israel came against Gibeah, and the battle was fierce. But *the Benjamites*[a] did not know that disaster *was* upon them. 35 The Lord defeated Benjamin before Israel. And the children of Israel destroyed that day twenty-five thousand one hundred Benjamites; all these drew the sword.

36 So the children of Benjamin saw that they were defeated. The men of Israel had given ground to the Benjamites, because they relied on the men in ambush whom they had set against Gibeah. 37 And the men in ambush quickly rushed upon Gibeah; the men in ambush spread out and struck the whole city with the edge of the sword. 38 Now the appointed signal between the men of Israel and the men in ambush was that they would make a great cloud of smoke rise up from the city, 39 whereupon the men of Israel would turn in battle. Now Benjamin had begun to strike *and* kill about thirty of the men of Israel. For they said, "Surely they are defeated before us, as *in* the first battle." 40 But when the cloud began to rise from the city in a column of smoke, the Benjamites looked behind them, and there was the whole city going up *in smoke* to heaven. 41 And when the men of Israel turned back, the men of Benjamin panicked, for they saw that disaster had come upon them. 42 Therefore they turned *their backs* before the men of Israel in the direction of the wilderness; but the battle overtook them, and whoever *came* out of the cities they destroyed in their midst. 43 They surrounded the Benjamites, chased them, *and* easily trampled them down as far as the front of Gibeah toward the east. 44 And eighteen thousand men of Benjamin fell; all these *were* men of valor. 45 Then they[a] turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon; and they cut down five thousand of them on the highways. Then they pursued them relentlessly up to Gidom, and killed two thousand of them. 46 So all who fell of Benjamin that day were twenty-five thousand men who drew the sword; all these *were* men of valor.

47 But six hundred men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and they stayed at the rock of Rimmon for four months. 48 And the men of Israel turned back against the children of Benjamin, and struck them down with the edge of the sword—from *every* city, men and beasts, all who were found. They also set fire to all the cities they came to.

Wives Provided for the Benjamites

21 Now the men of Israel had sworn an oath at Mizpah, saying, "None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin as a wife."

2 Then the people came to the house of God,[a] and remained there before God till evening. They lifted up their voices and wept bitterly, 3 and said, "O Lord God of Israel, why has this come to pass in Israel, that today there should be one tribe *missing* in Israel?"

4 So it was, on the next morning, that the people rose early and built an altar there, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. 5 The children of Israel said, "Who *is there* among all the tribes of Israel who did not come up with the assembly to the Lord?" For they had made a great oath concerning anyone who had not come up to the Lord at Mizpah, saying, "He shall surely be put to death." 6 And the children of Israel grieved for Benjamin their brother, and said, "One tribe is cut off from Israel today. 7 What shall we do for wives for those who remain, seeing we have

20:34 [a]Literally *they* **20:45** [a]Septuagint reads *the rest.* **21:2** [a]Or *Bethel*

sworn by the Lord that we will not give them our daughters as wives?"

8 And they said, "What one *is there* from the tribes of Israel who did not come up to Mizpah to the Lord?" And, in fact, no one had come to the camp from Jabesh Gilead to the assembly. 9 For when the people were counted, indeed, not one of the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead *was* there. 10 So the congregation sent out there twelve thousand of their most valiant men, and commanded them, saying, "Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead with the edge of the sword, including the women and children. 11 And this *is* the thing that you shall do: You shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman who has known a man intimately." 12 So they found among the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead four hundred young virgins who had not known a man intimately; and they brought them to the camp at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan.

13 Then the whole congregation sent *word* to the children of Benjamin who *were* at the rock of Rimmon, and announced peace to them. 14 So Benjamin came back at that time, and they gave them the women whom they had saved alive of the women of Jabesh Gilead; and yet they had not found enough for them.

15 And the people grieved for Benjamin, because the Lord had made a void in the tribes of Israel.

16 Then the elders of the congregation said, "What shall we do for wives for those who remain, since the women of Benjamin have been destroyed?" 17 And they said, "*There must be* an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, that a tribe may not be destroyed from Israel. 18 However, we cannot give them wives from our daughters, for the children of Israel have sworn an oath, saying, 'Cursed *be* the one who gives a wife to Benjamin.'" 19 Then they said, "In fact, *there is* a yearly feast of the Lord in Shiloh, which *is* north of Bethel, on the east side of the highway that goes up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah."

20 Therefore they instructed the children of Benjamin, saying, "Go, lie in wait in the vineyards, 21 and watch; and just when the daughters of Shiloh come out to perform their dances, then come out from the vineyards, and every man catch a wife for himself from the daughters of Shiloh; then go to the land of Benjamin. 22 Then it shall be, when their fathers or their brothers come to us to complain, that we will say to them, 'Be kind to them for our sakes, because we did not take a wife for any of them in the war; for *it is* not *as though* you have given the *women* to them at this time, making yourselves guilty of your oath.'"

23 And the children of Benjamin did so; they took enough wives for their number from those who danced, whom they caught. Then they went and returned to their inheritance, and they rebuilt the cities and dwelt in them. 24 So the children of Israel departed from there at that time, every man to his tribe and family; they went out from there, every man to his inheritance.

25 In those days *there was* no king in Israel; everyone did *what was* right in his own eyes.

THE BOOK OF

RUTH

INTRODUCTION

Here is a play with four characters.

Character number one is a prostitute.

Character number two is her son. By the time we meet him he is wealthy, powerful, and single. (We wonder if his bachelorhood has anything to do with being the son of a prostitute.)

Character number three is a foreign widow in a clannish culture. Everything about her is different. Speaks with an accent. Wears a different name. Eats different food. Has a different way. Her only friend is her mother-in-law who happens also to be a widow and happens to be:

Character number four. She is older than the first widow. Too old to have kids. When her two sons die and her husband dies, she is left alone. With only a foreigner as a friend.

Four people. Each rejected. Each alone. Four frazzled strings in the bottom of the knitting basket. Left untouched, awaiting the toss of the Master-weaver. But He doesn't discard them.

He picks them up and weaves them together.

The result? The unmarried son of the prostitute meets the foreign widow who left her homeland to accompany her mother-in-law. The mother-in-law recognizes the bachelor as a relative and urges her daughter-in-law to make herself available. She does, the two marry, and the single bachelor has a wife—the young widow has a husband and the older widow has a grandson and we have a story of providential romance.

Such is the story of Ruth.

You'll recognize her as the younger widow. The older is named Naomi. Boaz is the son of the prostitute. And the prostitute? Well, she isn't mentioned in this book. But she is mentioned in, of all places, the Gospel of Matthew.

Read the words in the parentheses of Matthew 1:5. Go ahead and flip over there, I'll wait for you.

Did you see it? Salmon was the father of Boaz. (Boaz's mother was Rahab.)

Who would've thought? A harlot on Jesus' family tree.

But these kind of things happen in the Bible. Aren't we glad they do? Aren't we glad the Master-weaver has a place in His plan for each of us?

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Jewish tradition says Samuel, others say Ezra, no one knows with certainty.

Date Written: After the era of Judges which was 1375–1050 B.C.

Key Themes:

- Ruth was intensely loyal to her mother-in-law Naomi.
- Because of Ruth's loyalty she traveled to a new place and married into a Hebrew family.
- Obed was born to Ruth and was an ancestor of King David and Jesus Christ.

Key Verse:

"But Ruth said: 'Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God'" (Ruth 1:16).

Contents:

I. Ruth and Naomi 1:1–22

II. Ruth Meets Boaz 2:1–23

III. Naomi's Plan 3:1–18

IV. The Marriage 4:1–22

Elimelech's Family Goes to Moab

Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.
2 The name of the man *was* Elimelech, the name of his wife *was* Naomi, and the names of his two sons *were* Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there. 3 Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons. 4 Now they took wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one *was* Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years. 5 Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; so the woman survived her two sons and her husband.

Naomi Returns with Ruth

6 Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had visited His people by giving them bread. 7 Therefore she went out from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. 8 And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each to her mother's house. The Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. 9 The Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband."

So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. 10 And they said to her, "Surely we will return with you to your people."

11 But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? *Are* there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? 12 Turn back, my daughters, go—for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, *if* I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, 13 would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me!"

14 Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

15 And she said, "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."

16 But Ruth said:

"Entreat me not to leave you,
Or to turn back from following after you;
For wherever you go, I will go;
And wherever you lodge, I will lodge;
Your people *shall be* my people,
And your God, my God.
17 Where you die, I will die,
And there will I be buried.
The Lord do so to me, and more also,
If *anything but* death parts you and me."

18 When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her.

Life Lessons

Ruth 1:1–22

SITUATION
The story of Ruth took place sometime during the rule of the Judges. Those were dark days for Israel, when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6). But during those dark days and evil times many remained faithful to God.

OBSERVATION
Naomi and Ruth portrayed beautiful examples of loyalty, friendship, and commitment to each other and to God.

INSPIRATION
One relationship of this caliber can buoy us through the fiercest storms. It was the Beatles who sang, "Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I'm sixty-four?" Oh, the agony of being sixty-four (or any age, for that matter) and having no one to care for you or need you. Happy are those who have one companion, one relationship that is not based on looks or performance. Every person is in dire need of at least one faithful friend, or a mate who will look him in the eye and say, "I will never leave you. You may grow old and gray, but I'll never leave you. Your face may wrinkle and your body may ruin, but I'll never leave you. The years may be cruel and the times may be hard, but I'll be here. I will never leave you." (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Think for a minute about the people in your world. What do they think of your commitment to them? How would they rate your

faithfulness? Does your loyalty ever waver? With whom are you a friend forever? Pray for that person(s) today.

EXPLORATION
Commitment—1 Samuel 20:16, 17; 2 Chronicles 15:14, 15; Esther 4:16; Psalm 37:5; Proverbs 17:17; Luke 9:23–27.

Life LESSONS

Ruth 2:1–23

SITUATION
God rewarded Ruth's loyalty to Naomi when she went to glean barley in the fields of Boaz. Boaz recognized her as a woman of worth and made sure his workers left extra barley stalks for her. Even though Ruth had to work hard, she was thankful for what she had; she was not bitter and despondent.

OBSERVATION
Boaz exhibited small acts of kindness. These small acts produced great rewards.

INSPIRATION
How does Jesus separate the people?

Jesus gives the answer. Those on the right, the sheep, will be those who fed Him when He was hungry, brought Him water when He was thirsty, gave Him lodging when He was lonely, clothing when He was naked, and comfort when He was sick or imprisoned.

The sheep will react with a sincere question: when? When did we feed, visit, clothe, or comfort You (Matthew 25:34–39)?

Jesus' answer will sound something like this. "Remember when you got off the subway? It was a wintry Washington morning. Commuters were

19 Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem. And it
happened, when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was
excited because of them; and the women said, "*Is* this Naomi?"
20 But she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi;[a] call me Mara,[b] for
the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. 21 I went out full, and the
Lord has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi,
since the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted
me?"
22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law
with her, who returned from the country of Moab. Now they came to
Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

Ruth Meets Boaz

2 There was a relative of Naomi's husband, a man of great wealth,
of the family of Elimelech. His name *was* Boaz. 2 So Ruth the
Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field, and glean
heads of grain after *him* in whose sight I may find favor."
And she said to her, "Go, my daughter."
3 Then she left, and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers.
And she happened to come to the part of the field *belonging* to Boaz,
who *was* of the family of Elimelech.
4 Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers,
"The Lord *be* with you!"
And they answered him, "The Lord bless you!"
5 Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers,
"Whose young woman *is* this?"
6 So the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered and said,
"It *is* the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the
country of Moab. 7 And she said, 'Please let me glean and gather after
the reapers among the sheaves.' So she came and has continued from
morning until now, though she rested a little in the house."
8 Then Boaz said to Ruth, "You will listen, my daughter, will you
not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay
close by my young women. 9 *Let* your eyes *be* on the field which they
reap, and go after them. Have I not commanded the young men not to
touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from
what the young men have drawn."
10 So she fell on her face, bowed down to the ground, and said to
him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice
of me, since I *am* a foreigner?"
11 And Boaz answered and said to her, "It has been fully reported
to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death
of your husband, and *how* you have left your father and your mother
and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you
did not know before. 12 The Lord repay your work, and a full reward
be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have
come for refuge."
13 Then she said, "Let me find favor in your sight, my lord; for you
have comforted me, and have spoken kindly to your maidservant,
though I am not like one of your maidservants."

1:20 [a] Literally *Pleasant* [b] Literally *Bitter*

14 Now Boaz said to her at mealtime, "Come here, and eat of the
bread, and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar." So she sat beside
the reapers, and he passed parched *grain* to her; and she ate and was
satisfied, and kept some back. 15 And when she rose up to glean, Boaz
commanded his young men, saying, "Let her glean even among the
sheaves, and do not reproach her. 16 Also let *grain* from the bundles fall
purposely for her; leave *it* that she may glean, and do not rebuke her."
17 So she gleaned in the field until evening, and beat out what she
had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. 18 Then she took *it*
up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had
gleaned. So she brought out and gave to her what she had kept back
after she had been satisfied.
19 And her mother-in-law said to her, "Where have you gleaned
today? And where did you work? Blessed be the one who took notice
of you."
So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and
said, "The man's name with whom I worked today *is* Boaz."
20 Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed *be* he of the
Lord, who has not forsaken His kindness to the living and the dead!"
And Naomi said to her, "This man *is* a relation of ours, one of our close
relatives."
21 Ruth the Moabitess said, "He also said to me, 'You shall stay close
by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.' "
22 And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "*It is* good, my
daughter, that you go out with his young women, and that people do
not meet you in any other field." 23 So she stayed close by the young
women of Boaz, to glean until the end of barley harvest and wheat
harvest; and she dwelt with her mother-in-law.

Ruth's Redemption Assured

3 Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, shall I
not seek security for you, that it may be well with you? 2 Now Boaz,
whose young women you were with, *is he* not our relative? In fact, he
is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. 3 Therefore wash
yourself and anoint yourself, put on your *best* garment and go down
to the threshing floor; *but* do not make yourself known to the man
until he has finished eating and drinking. 4 Then it shall be, when he
lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies; and you shall
go in, uncover his feet, and lie down; and he will tell you what you
should do."
5 And she said to her, "All that you say to me I will do."
6 So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all
that her mother-in-law instructed her. 7 And after Boaz had eaten and
drunk, and his heart was cheerful, he went to lie down at the end of the
heap of grain; and she came softly, uncovered his feet, and lay down.
8 Now it happened at midnight that the man was startled, and
turned himself; and there, a woman was lying at his feet. 9 And he said,
"Who *are* you?"
So she answered, "I *am* Ruth, your maidservant. Take your maidser-
vant under your wing,[a] for you are a close relative."

3:9 [a] Or *Spread the corner of your garment over your maidservant*

bundled and busy and focused on their work. You were too, mind you. But then you saw Me. Yes, that was Me! Standing between the coffee kiosk and the newsstand, that was Me. I was wearing a baseball cap and a scarf and playing a fiddle. The mob rushed past as if I were a plastic plant. But you stopped. I knew you were busy. You looked at your watch twice. But still you stopped and remembered Me. You stepped over to the coffee stand, bought Me a cup, and brought it over. I want you to know I never forgot that."

Jesus will recount, one by one, all the acts of kindness. Every deed done to improve the lot of another person. Even the small ones. In fact, they all seem small. Giving water. Offering food. Sharing clothing. . . . The works of mercy are simple deeds. And yet, in these simple deeds we serve Jesus. Astounding this truth: we serve Christ by serving needy people. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
When life throws a curveball to a friend, do you stand ready to help? Ask God to help you explore ways to lighten someone's load.

EXPLORATION
Character—Genesis 5:18–24; 1 Samuel 16:7; Romans 5:3, 4.

Life Lessons

Ruth 3:1–18

SITUATION
Naomi sought to find a husband for Ruth. She selected Boaz, a relative and a good-hearted man, to be someone

who would care for Ruth, possibly even marry her according to custom. Ruth diligently followed Naomi's instructions and lay at the feet of Boaz at night as a servant would. Her loyalty met with Boaz's approval.

OBSERVATION
Both Ruth and Boaz were persons of high moral integrity who selflessly honored the customs and traditions of their people.

INSPIRATION
Your work matters to society. We need you! Cities need plumbers. Nations need soldiers. Stoplights break. Bones break. We need people to repair the first and set the second. Someone has to raise kids, raise cane, and manage the kids who raise Cain.

Whether you log on or lace up for the day, you imitate God. Jehovah Himself worked for the first six days of creation. Jesus said, "My Father never stops working, and so I keep working, too" (John 5:17 NCV). Your career consumes half of your lifetime. Shouldn't it broadcast God? Don't those forty to sixty hours a week belong to Him as well? (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Can you be trusted to perform duties assigned? Today, try one over-and-above-the-call-of-duty task. Surprise someone: your boss, a fellow employee, a friend, or your spouse.

EXPLORATION
Integrity—Genesis 43:12; Psalm 25:21; Proverbs 12:3; 19:1.

10 Then he said, "Blessed *are* you of the Lord, my daughter! For you
have shown more kindness at the end than at the beginning, in that
you did not go after young men, whether poor or rich. 11 And now, my
daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the
people of my town know that you *are* a virtuous woman. 12 Now it is
true that I *am* a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I.
13 Stay this night, and in the morning it shall be *that* if he will perform
the duty of a close relative for you—good; let him do it. But if he does
not want to perform the duty for you, then I will perform the duty for
you, *as* the Lord lives! Lie down until morning."

14 So she lay at his feet until morning, and she arose before one
could recognize another. Then he said, "Do not let it be known
that the woman came to the threshing floor." 15 Also he said, "Bring
the shawl that *is* on you and hold it." And when she held it, he mea-
sured six *ephahs* of barley, and laid *it* on her. Then she[a] went into
the city.

16 When she came to her mother-in-law, she said, "*Is* that you, my
daughter?"

Then she told her all that the man had done for her. 17 And she said,
"These six *ephahs* of barley he gave me; for he said to me, 'Do not go
empty-handed to your mother-in-law.' "

18 Then she said, "Sit still, my daughter, until you know how the
matter will turn out; for the man will not rest until he has concluded
the matter this day."

Boaz Redeems Ruth

4 Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there; and behold, the
close relative of whom Boaz had spoken came by. So Boaz said,
"Come aside, friend,[a] sit down here." So he came aside and sat down.
2 And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, "Sit down
here." So they sat down. 3 Then he said to the close relative, "Naomi,
who has come back from the country of Moab, sold the piece of land
which *belonged* to our brother Elimelech. 4 And I thought to inform
you, saying, 'Buy *it* back in the presence of the inhabitants and the
elders of my people. If you will redeem *it,* redeem *it;* but if you[a] will
not redeem *it, then* tell me, that I may know; for *there is* no one but
you to redeem *it,* and I *am* next after you.' "

And he said, "I will redeem *it.*"

5 Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the field from the hand of
Naomi, you must also buy *it* from Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the
dead, to perpetuate[a] the name of the dead through his inheritance."

6 And the close relative said, "I cannot redeem *it* for myself, lest
I ruin my own inheritance. You redeem my right of redemption for
yourself, for I cannot redeem *it.*"

7 Now this *was the custom* in former times in Israel concerning
redeeming and exchanging, to confirm anything: one man took off
his sandal and gave *it* to the other, and this *was* a confirmation in
Israel.

3:15 [a]Many Hebrew manuscripts, Syriac, and Vulgate read *she;* Masoretic Text, Septuagint, and Targum read *he.* **4:1** [a]Hebrew *peloni almoni;* literally *so and so* **4:4** [a]Following many Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text reads *he.* **4:5** [a]Literally *raise up*

8 Therefore the close relative said to Boaz,
"Buy *it* for yourself." So he took off his sandal. 9 And Boaz said to the elders and all the
people, "You *are* witnesses this day that I have
bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that
was Chilion's and Mahlon's, from the hand of
Naomi. 10 Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the
widow of Mahlon, I have acquired as my wife,
to perpetuate the name of the dead through
his inheritance, that the name of the dead
may not be cut off from among his brethren
and from his position at the gate.[a] You *are* wit-
nesses this day."

11 And all the people who *were* at the gate,
and the elders, said, "*We are* witnesses. The
Lord make the woman who is coming to your
house like Rachel and Leah, the two who built
the house of Israel; and may you prosper
in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem.
12 May your house be like the house of Perez,
whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the
offspring which the Lord will give you from
this young woman."

Descendants of Boaz and Ruth

13 So Boaz took Ruth and she became his
wife; and when he went in to her, the Lord
gave her conception, and she bore a son.
14 Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed *be*
the Lord, who has not left you this day without
a close relative; and may his name be famous
in Israel! 15 And may he be to you a restorer of
life and a nourisher of your old age; for your
daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is bet-
ter to you than seven sons, has borne him."
16 Then Naomi took the child and laid him on
her bosom, and became a nurse to him. 17 Also
the neighbor women gave him a name, say-
ing, "There is a son born to Naomi." And they
called his name Obed. He *is* the father of Jesse,
the father of David.

18 Now this *is* the genealogy of Perez:
Perez begot Hezron; 19 Hezron begot Ram,
and Ram begot Amminadab; 20 Amminadab
begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon;[a]
21 Salmon begot Boaz, and Boaz begot Obed;
22 Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David.

4:10 [a]Probably his civic office **4:20** [a]Hebrew *Salmah*

Life Lessons

Ruth 4:1–22

SITUATION
Naomi and Ruth waited for the decision of their close relatives. God blessed Ruth with marriage and children. David and Jesus were her descendants.

OBSERVATION
When life takes a negative turn, God can turn heartache (1:21) into blessing (4:14, 15).

INSPIRATION
How far can we go with verses like this one: "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28)? Does "all things" include tumors and tests and tempers and terminations? John would answer yes. John would tell you that *God can turn any tragedy into a triumph, if only you will wait and watch. . . .*

Could there have been a greater tragedy for John than a dead Jesus? Three years earlier John had turned his back on his career and cast his lot with this Nazarene carpenter. Earlier in the week John had enjoyed a ticker-tape parade as Jesus and the disciples entered Jerusalem. Oh, how quickly things had turned! The people who had called Him king on Sunday called for His death the following Friday. These linens were a tangible reminder that his friend and his future were wrapped in cloth and sealed behind a rock.

John didn't know on that Friday what you and I now know. He didn't know that Friday's tragedy would be Sunday's triumph. John would later confess that he "did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead" (John 20:9).

That's why what he did on Saturday is so important.

We don't know anything about this day; we have no passage to read, no knowledge to share. All we know is this: When Sunday came, John was still present. When Mary Magdalene came looking for him, she found him.

Jesus was dead. The Master's body was lifeless. John's friend and future were buried. But John had not left. Why? Was he waiting for the resurrection? No. As far as he knew, the lips were forever silent and the hands forever still. He wasn't expecting a Sunday surprise. Then why was he here?

You'd think he would have left. Who was to say that the men who crucified Christ wouldn't come after him? The crowds were pleased with one crucifixion; the religious leaders might have called for more. Why didn't John get out of town?

Perhaps the answer was pragmatic; perhaps he was taking care of Jesus' mother. Or perhaps he didn't

have anywhere else to go. Could be he didn't have any money or energy or direction . . . or all of the above.

Or maybe he lingered because he loved Jesus.

To others, Jesus was a miracle worker. To others, Jesus was a master teacher. To others, Jesus was the hope of Israel. But to John, He was all of these and more. To John, Jesus was a friend.

You don't abandon a friend—not even when that friend is dead. John stayed close to Jesus.

He had a habit of doing this. He was close to Jesus in the upper room. He was close to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was at the foot of the Cross at the crucifixion, and he was a quick walk from the tomb at the burial.

Did he understand Jesus? No.

Was he glad Jesus did what He did? No.

But did he leave Jesus? No.

What about you? When you're in John's position, what do you do? When it's Saturday in your life, how do you react? When you are somewhere between yesterday's tragedy and tomorrow's triumph, what do you do? Do you leave God—or do you linger near Him?

John chose to linger. And because he lingered on Saturday, he was around on Sunday to see the miracle. . . .

Which takes us back to the question. Could God do something similar in your life? Could He take what today is a token of tragedy and turn it into a symbol of triumph? (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you feel like God's abandoned you? Don't give up! Pray that He will give you the patience to see the situation through, and thank Him in advance for what He is going to do.

EXPLORATION

God's Way—Genesis 50:20; Job 42:2, 3; Isaiah 38:17; 55:8; Micah 4:11, 12; Romans 8:28.

THE BOOK OF

1 SAMUEL

INTRODUCTION

It's the end of the race that matters.

Trophies aren't given for great starts. Medals aren't awarded for entering the race. A good start is crucial, but in the end, the end is all that matters.

First Samuel is a book of good starts but bad finishes.

It seems that every key character put his best foot forward and ended up in last place.

Take Eli for example.

A sterling religious leader. A man with a heart for God. Perceptive and strong, the last of the great priests. But look at the end of his life. The ark of the covenant has been captured. Two of his rebellious sons are killed. When he hears of their deaths, he falls over and breaks his neck.

Samuel is another case. Dedicated to God's service by Hannah, his mother, he anointed Israel's first kings. But he didn't learn from Eli's mistakes. Just like his mentor, he failed to train his family and his sons turned away from God.

But the most dramatic example is Saul, Israel's first king. He seemed to be the perfect man—handsome and meek, brave and victorious in battle. But success led to disobedience, and he slid from prominence to paranoia to suicide.

Why are these stories in the Bible? To remind us that we, too, are in a race. And that race isn't over. How we started isn't nearly as important as how we finish.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Unknown, though some say Samuel, Nathan, and Gad

Date Written: Possibly 1000–500 B.C.

Key Themes:

- Samuel's birth was a product of his mother's faith and prayer.
- Saul lost his power and even his sanity when he refused to trust God.
- David found victory against the odds because of his faith.

Key Verse:

"Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22).

Contents:

I. Samuel's Rise to Power as Judge 1:1—7:17

II. Saul's Rise to Power as King 8:1—16:23

III. David's Rise to Power as King 17:1—31:13

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 1:1—2:11

SITUATION
As the Book of 1 Samuel opens, judges had ruled Israel for more than two hundred years. Eli and Samuel were the last two judges, and Samuel was the first priest and prophet to serve when Israel had a king (Saul, David).

OBSERVATION
God rewards persevering faith. For example, Samuel's mother Hannah persevered in prayer, and God gave her a son. Faithful to her promise, she gave her son back to God.

INSPIRATION
Before going high, David went low; before ascending to fight, David descended to prepare. Don't face your giant without first doing the same. Dedicate time to prayer. Paul, the apostle, wrote, "Prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare. Pray hard and long" (Ephesians 6:18 MSG).

Prayer spawned David's successes. His Brook Besor wisdom grew out of the moment he "strengthened himself in the Lord his God" (1 Samuel 30:6). When Saul's soldiers tried to capture him, David turned toward God: "You have been my defense and refuge in the day of my trouble" (Psalm 59:16).

How do you survive a fugitive life in the caves? David did with prayers like this one: "Be good to me, God—and now! I've run to You for dear life. I'm hiding out under Your wings until the hurricane blows over. I call out to High God, the God who

The Family of Elkanah

Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim Zophim, of the mountains of Ephraim, and his name *was* Elkanah the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu,[a] the son of Tohu,[b] the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite.
2 And he had two wives: the name of one *was* Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. 3 This man went up from his city yearly to worship and sacrifice to the Lord of hosts in Shiloh. Also the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord, *were* there. 4 And whenever the time came for Elkanah to make an offering, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. 5 But to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, although the Lord had closed her womb. 6 And her rival also provoked her severely, to make her miserable, because the Lord had closed her womb. 7 So it was, year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord, that she provoked her; therefore she wept and did not eat.

Hannah's Vow

8 Then Elkanah her husband said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? And why is your heart grieved? *Am* I not better to you than ten sons?"

9 So Hannah arose after they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat by the doorpost of the tabernacle[a] of the Lord. 10 And she *was* in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish. 11 Then she made a vow and said, "O Lord of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head."

12 And it happened, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli watched her mouth. 13 Now Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli thought she was drunk. 14 So Eli said to her, "How long will you be drunk? Put your wine away from you!"

15 But Hannah answered and said, "No, my lord, I *am* a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. 16 Do not consider your maidservant a wicked woman,[a] for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief I have spoken until now."

17 Then Eli answered and said, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him."

18 And she said, "Let your maidservant find favor in your sight." So the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer *sad.*

Samuel Is Born and Dedicated

19 Then they rose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord, and returned and came to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the Lord remembered her. 20 So it came to pass in the process of time that Hannah conceived and bore a son,

1:1 [a]Spelled *Eliel* in 1 Chronicles 6:34 [b]Spelled *Toah* in 1 Chronicles 6:34
1:9 [a]Hebrew *heykal,* palace or temple **1:16** [a]Literally *daughter of Belial*

and called his name Samuel,[a] *saying,* "Because I have asked for him from the Lord."

21 Now the man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice and his vow. 22 But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "*Not* until the child is weaned; then I will take him, that he may appear before the Lord and remain there forever."

23 So Elkanah her husband said to her, "Do what seems best to you; wait until you have weaned him. Only let the Lord establish His[a] word." Then the woman stayed and nursed her son until she had weaned him.

24 Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bulls,[a] one ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the Lord in Shiloh. And the child *was* young. 25 Then they slaughtered a bull, and brought the child to Eli. 26 And she said, "O my lord! As your soul lives, my lord, I *am* the woman who stood by you here, praying to the Lord. 27 For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. 28 Therefore I also have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the Lord." So they worshiped the Lord there.

Hannah's Prayer

2 And Hannah prayed and said:

"My heart rejoices in the Lord;
My horn[a] is exalted in the Lord.
I smile at my enemies,
Because I rejoice in Your salvation.

2 "No one is holy like the Lord,
For *there is* none besides You,
Nor *is there* any rock like our God.

3 "Talk no more so very proudly;
Let no arrogance come from your mouth,
For the Lord *is* the God of knowledge;
And by Him actions are weighed.

4 "The bows of the mighty men *are* broken,
And those who stumbled are girded with strength.
5 *Those who were* full have hired themselves out for bread,
And the hungry have ceased *to hunger.*
Even the barren has borne seven,
And she who has many children has become feeble.

6 "The Lord kills and makes alive;
He brings down to the grave and brings up.
7 The Lord makes poor and makes rich;
He brings low and lifts up.
8 He raises the poor from the dust

1:20 [a]Literally *Heard by God* **1:23** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Dead Sea Scrolls, Septuagint, and Syriac read *your.* **1:24** [a]Dead Sea Scrolls, Septuagint, and Syriac read *a three-year-old bull.* **2:1** [a]That is, strength

holds me together" (Psalm 57:1, 2 MSG).

When David soaked his mind in God, he stood. When he didn't, he flopped. You think he spent much time in prayer the evening he seduced Bathsheba? Did he write a psalm the day he murdered Uriah? Doubtful.

Mark well this promise: "[God] will keep in perfect peace all who trust in [God], whose thoughts are fixed on [God]" (Isaiah 26:3 NLT). God promises not just peace but perfect peace.

Undiluted, unspotted, unhindered peace. To whom? To those whose minds are "fixed" on God. Forget occasional glances. Dismiss random ponderings. Peace is promised to the one who fixes thoughts and desires on the king. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How long do you hang on when it comes to praying for a specific need or desire? Do you give up or persevere? Try keeping a list: (1) what you pray for and when; (2) how God answers and when.

EXPLORATION

Patience in Prayer—Psalm 5:1–3; 40:1; 55:17; 116:2; Luke 11:5–10; 18:1–8; Ephesians 6:18.

And lifts the beggar from the ash heap,
To set *them* among princes
And make them inherit the throne of glory.

"For the pillars of the earth *are* the Lord's,
And He has set the world upon them.
9 He will guard the feet of His saints,
But the wicked shall be silent in darkness.

"For by strength no man shall prevail.
10 The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken in pieces;
From heaven He will thunder against them.
The Lord will judge the ends of the earth.

"He will give strength to His king,
And exalt the horn of His anointed."

11 Then Elkanah went to his house at Ramah. But the child ministered to the Lord before Eli the priest.

The Wicked Sons of Eli

12 Now the sons of Eli *were* corrupt;[a] they did not know the Lord. 13 And the priests' custom with the people *was that* when any man offered a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come with a three-pronged fleshhook in his hand while the meat was boiling. 14 Then he would thrust *it* into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; and the priest would take for himself all that the fleshhook brought up. So they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. 15 Also, before they burned the fat, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who sacrificed, "Give meat for roasting to the priest, for he will not take boiled meat from you, but raw."

16 And *if* the man said to him, "They should really burn the fat first; *then* you may take *as much* as your heart desires," he would then answer him, "*No,* but you must give *it* now; and if not, I will take *it* by force."

17 Therefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord.

Samuel's Childhood Ministry

18 But Samuel ministered before the Lord, *even as* a child, wearing a linen ephod. 19 Moreover his mother used to make him a little robe, and bring *it* to him year by year when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. 20 And Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, "The Lord give you descendants from this woman for the loan that was given to the Lord." Then they would go to their own home.

21 And the Lord visited Hannah, so that she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile the child Samuel grew before the Lord.

Prophecy Against Eli's Household

22 Now Eli was very old; and he heard everything his sons did to all Israel,[a] and how they lay with the women who assembled at the door

2:12 [a]Literally *sons of Belial* **2:22** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Dead Sea Scrolls and Septuagint omit the rest of this verse.

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 2:12—3:21

SITUATION
Contempt, arrogance, and disobedience marked Eli's sons. Eli dealt with them poorly himself. These major factors contributed to the bleak spiritual climate during Samuel's childhood. For three centuries no prophet had spoken God's Word until Samuel was chosen.

OBSERVATION
God honors and wants to use people, such as Samuel, who honor Him. But those who flagrantly disobey, such as Eli's sons, God will judge.

INSPIRATION
God lets you excel so you can make Him known. And you can be sure of one thing: God will make you good at something. This is His principle: "By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honor and life" (Proverbs 22:4).

Would we expect any less? A godly life often results in success. Consider a construction worker, for example. Imagine a trouble-making, hard-drinking fellow. Before he knows Christ, he's not much of an employee. Frequent hangovers, padded expense accounts. Sneaks out early on Friday afternoons… He does it all. And he pays the price—overdue bills, bail-bond debts, a résumé that reads like a rap sheet.

But then Christ finds him. Not only does God save his soul, He straightens out the man's work habits. The guy shows up on time. He does his job. He stops complaining and starts volunteering. Everything

of the tabernacle of meeting. 23 So he said to them, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. 24 No, my sons! For *it is* not a good report that I hear. You make the Lord's people transgress. 25 If one man sins against another, God will judge him. But if a man sins against the Lord, who will intercede for him?" Nevertheless they did not heed the voice of their father, because the Lord desired to kill them.

26 And the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favor both with the Lord and men.

27 Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "Thus says the Lord: 'Did I not clearly reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? 28 Did I not choose him out of all the tribes of Israel *to be* My priest, to offer upon My altar, to burn incense, and to wear an ephod before Me? And did I not give to the house of your father all the offerings of the children of Israel made by fire? 29 Why do you kick at My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded *in My* dwelling place, and honor your sons more than Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?' 30 Therefore the Lord God of Israel says: 'I said indeed *that* your house and the house of your father would walk before Me forever.' But now the Lord says: 'Far be it from Me; for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed. 31 Behold, the days are coming that I will cut off your arm and the arm of your father's house, so that there will not be an old man in your house. 32 And you will see an enemy *in My* dwelling place, *despite* all the good which God does for Israel. And there shall not be an old man in your house forever. 33 But any of your men *whom* I do not cut off from My altar shall consume your eyes and grieve your heart. And all the descendants of your house shall die in the flower of their age. 34 Now this *shall be* a sign to you that will come upon your two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas: in one day they shall die, both of them. 35 Then I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest *who* shall do according to what *is* in My heart and in My mind. I will build him a sure house, and he shall walk before My anointed forever. 36 And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left in your house will come *and* bow down to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and say, "Please, put me in one of the priestly positions, that I may eat a piece of bread."' "

Samuel's First Prophecy

3 Now the boy Samuel ministered to the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; *there was* no widespread revelation. 2 And it came to pass at that time, while Eli *was* lying down in his place, and when his eyes had begun to grow so dim that he could not see, 3 and before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle[a] of the Lord where the ark of God *was,* and while Samuel was lying down, 4 that the Lord called Samuel. And he answered, "Here I am!" 5 So he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me."

And he said, "I did not call; lie down again." And he went and lay down.

3:3 [a]Hebrew *heykal,* palace or temple

improves—attitude, productivity, cooperation.

And guess who notices? His boss. And guess what happens? Promotions. Pay increases. The company truck and credit card. Success. But with the success comes a problem. . . .

Success sabotages the memories of the successful. Kings of the mountain forget who carried them up the trail. . . .

Success begets amnesia. Doesn't have to, however. God offers spiritual ginseng to help your memory. His prescription is simply "Know the purpose of success." Why did God help you succeed? So you can make Him known. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What is your attitude when it comes to success? Is reaching the pinnacle your real god? Ask God to show you what has first place in your heart. Pray today, with first place given to God.

EXPLORATION

Arrogance—Judges 8:1–3; 2 Samuel 17:11–13; 2 Chronicles 26:16; Psalm 10:11; Acts 12:23; Ephesians 2:11–13.

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 4:1—5:12

SITUATION
When the Israelites improperly brought the ark of the covenant into battle with the Philistines, they were routed and the ark captured. Eli, who had grown lazy in his position, died when he heard that the battle had been lost and his sons killed. The Israelites thought God had abandoned them. At the same time, the Philistines endured plagues when they set the ark among their idols.

OBSERVATION
God's power and support for us is not based on a lucky charm or holy object like the ark, but on our constant faithfulness to Him.

INSPIRATION
Boxes bring wonderful order to our world. They keep cereal from spilling and books from tumbling. When it comes to containing stuff, boxes are masterful. But when it comes to explaining people, they fall short. And when it comes to defining Christ, no box works.

His Palestinian contemporaries tried, mind you. They designed an assortment of boxes. But He never fit one. They called Him a revolutionary; then He paid His taxes. They labeled Him as a country carpenter, but He confounded scholars. They came to see His miracles, but He refused to cater. He defied easy definitions. He was a Jew who attracted Gentiles. A rabbi who gave up on synagogues. A holy man who hung out with streetwalkers and turncoats.

6 Then the Lord called yet again, "Samuel!"

So Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." He answered, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." 7 (Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, nor was the word of the Lord yet revealed to him.)

8 And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. So he arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you did call me."

Then Eli perceived that the Lord had called the boy. 9 Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, 'Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.' " So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 Now the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!"

And Samuel answered, "Speak, for Your servant hears."

11 Then the Lord said to Samuel: "Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. 12 In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 13 For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them. 14 And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever."

15 So Samuel lay down until morning,[a] and opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the vision. 16 Then Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son!"

He answered, "Here I am."

17 And he said, "What *is* the word that *the Lord* spoke to you? Please do not hide *it* from me. God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the things that He said to you." 18 Then Samuel told him everything, and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It *is* the Lord. Let Him do what seems good to Him."

19 So Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. 20 And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel *had been* established as a prophet of the Lord. 21 Then the Lord appeared again in Shiloh. For the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord.

4 And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.[a]

The Ark of God Captured

Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines, and encamped beside Ebenezer; and the Philistines encamped in Aphek. 2 Then the Philistines put themselves in battle array against Israel. And when they joined battle, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men of the army in the field. 3 And when the people had come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among

3:15 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint adds *and he arose in the morning.* **4:1** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Septuagint and Vulgate add *And it came to pass in those days that the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight;* Septuagint adds further *against Israel.*

us it may save us from the hand of our enemies." 4So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from there the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, who dwells *between* the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, *were* there with the ark of the covenant of God.

5And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook. 6Now when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, "What *does* the sound of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews *mean*?" Then they understood that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp. 7So the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "God has come into the camp!" And they said, "Woe to us! For such a thing has never happened before. 8Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These *are* the gods who struck the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. 9Be strong and conduct yourselves like men, you Philistines, that you do not become servants of the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Conduct yourselves like men, and fight!"

10So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent. There was a very great slaughter, and there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. 11Also the ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

Death of Eli

12Then a man of Benjamin ran from the battle line the same day, and came to Shiloh with his clothes torn and dirt on his head. 13Now when he came, there was Eli, sitting on a seat by the wayside watching,[a] for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city and told *it,* all the city cried out. 14When Eli heard the noise of the outcry, he said, "What *does* the sound of this tumult *mean*?" And the man came quickly and told Eli. 15Eli was ninety-eight years old, and his eyes were so dim that he could not see.

16Then the man said to Eli, "I *am* he who came from the battle. And I fled today from the battle line."

And he said, "What happened, my son?"

17So the messenger answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has been a great slaughter among the people. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead; and the ark of God has been captured."

18Then it happened, when he made mention of the ark of God, that Eli fell off the seat backward by the side of the gate; and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.

Ichabod

19Now his daughter-in-law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, *due* to be delivered; and when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and gave birth, for her labor pains came upon her. 20And about the time of her death the women who stood by her said

4:13 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *beside the gate watching the road.*

In a male-dominated society, He recruited females. In an anti-Roman culture, He opted not to denounce Rome. He talked like a king yet lived like a pilgrim. People tried to designate Him. They couldn't.

We still try. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

The Israelites worshiped the ark, rather than God Himself. Is there an "ark" in your life? Does something get more attention than God? If so, turn your focus to the ever-present God, whose power transcends any object.

EXPLORATION

Worship—Deuteronomy 5:7; Judges 17:6; 2 Kings 18:4; 2 Chronicles 4:11–16.

It's one thing to miss a message from your wife about cleaning up a room. It's something else entirely to miss one from God about the destiny of your life.

—Max Lucado (He Chose the Nails)

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 6:1—7:17

SITUATION

Afflicted by plagues of rats and tumors, the Philistines returned the ark to Israel. The Israelites rejoiced and under Samuel's direction discarded their idols and former arrogance. Later, when the Philistines invaded, Samuel offered up prayer and sacrifice to God, and the Philistines were routed. Israel lived in peace for many years under Samuel's wise leadership.

OBSERVATION

Chapter 7 provides a good illustration of the results of repentance. Israel's confession of sin led to the subduing of the Philistines. The end result was peace (v. 14).

INSPIRATION

How could we who have been freed from sin return to it? Before Christ our lives were out of control, sloppy, and indulgent. We didn't even know we were slobs until we met Him.

Then He moved in. Things began to change. What we threw around we began putting away. What we neglected we cleaned up. What had been clutter became order. Oh, there were and still are occasional lapses of thought and deed, but by and large He got our house in order.

Suddenly we find ourselves wanting to do good. Go back to the old mess? Are you kidding? "But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from

to her, "Do not fear, for you have borne a son." But she did not answer, nor did she regard *it.* 21 Then she named the child Ichabod,[a] saying, "The glory has departed from Israel!" because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. 22 And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

The Philistines and the Ark

5 Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. 2 When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon[a] and set it by Dagon. 3 And when the people of Ashdod arose early in the morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the earth before the ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and set it in its place again. 4 And when they arose early the next morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the ground before the ark of the Lord. The head of Dagon and both the palms of its hands *were* broken off on the threshold; only Dagon's *torso*[a] was left of it. 5 Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor any who come into Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

6 But the hand of the Lord was heavy on the people of Ashdod, and He ravaged them and struck them with tumors,[a] *both* Ashdod and its territory. 7 And when the men of Ashdod saw how *it was,* they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is harsh toward us and Dagon our god." 8 Therefore they sent and gathered to themselves all the lords of the Philistines, and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?"

And they answered, "Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried away to Gath." So they carried the ark of the God of Israel away. 9 So it was, after they had carried it away, that the hand of the Lord was against the city with a very great destruction; and He struck the men of the city, both small and great, and tumors broke out on them.

10 Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. So it was, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, "They have brought the ark of the God of Israel to us, to kill us and our people!" 11 So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go back to its own place, so that it does not kill us and our people." For there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there. 12 And the men who did not die were stricken with the tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

The Ark Returned to Israel

6 Now the ark of the Lord was in the country of the Philistines seven months. 2 And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, "What shall we do with the ark of the Lord? Tell us how we should send it to its place."

3 So they said, "If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not

4:21 [a]Literally *Inglorious* **5:2** [a]A Philistine idol **5:4** [a]Following Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text reads *Dagon.* **5:6** [a]Probably bubonic plague. Septuagint and Vulgate add here *And in the midst of their land rats sprang up, and there was a great death panic in the city.*

send it empty; but by all means return *it* to Him *with* a trespass offering. Then you will be healed, and it will be known to you why His hand is not removed from you."

4 Then they said, "What *is* the trespass offering which we shall return to Him?"

They answered, "Five golden tumors and five golden rats, *according to* the number of the lords of the Philistines. For the same plague *was* on all of you and on your lords. 5 Therefore you shall make images of your tumors and images of your rats that ravage the land, and you shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will lighten His hand from you, from your gods, and from your land. 6 Why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When He did mighty things among them, did they not let the people go, that they might depart? 7 Now therefore, make a new cart, take two milk cows which have never been yoked, and hitch the cows to the cart; and take their calves home, away from them. 8 Then take the ark of the Lord and set it on the cart; and put the articles of gold which you are returning to Him *as* a trespass offering in a chest by its side. Then send it away, and let it go. 9 And watch: if it goes up the road to its own territory, to Beth Shemesh, *then* He has done us this great evil. But if not, then we shall know that *it is* not His hand *that* struck us—it happened to us by chance."

10 Then the men did so; they took two milk cows and hitched them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home. 11 And they set the ark of the Lord on the cart, and the chest with the gold rats and the images of their tumors. 12 Then the cows headed straight for the road to Beth Shemesh, *and* went along the highway, lowing as they went, and did not turn aside to the right hand or the left. And the lords of the Philistines went after them to the border of Beth Shemesh.

13 Now *the people of* Beth Shemesh *were* reaping their wheat harvest in the valley; and they lifted their eyes and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see *it.* 14 Then the cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh, and stood there; a large stone *was* there. So they split the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord. 15 The Levites took down the ark of the Lord and the chest that *was* with it, in which *were* the articles of gold, and put *them* on the large stone. Then the men of Beth Shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices the same day to the Lord. 16 So when the five lords of the Philistines had seen *it,* they returned to Ekron the same day.

17 These *are* the golden tumors which the Philistines returned *as* a trespass offering to the Lord: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, one for Ekron; 18 and the golden rats, *according to* the number of all the cities of the Philistines *belonging* to the five lords, *both* fortified cities and country villages, even as far as the large *stone of* Abel on which they set the ark of the Lord, *which stone remains* to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh.

19 Then He struck the men of Beth Shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the Lord. He struck fifty thousand and seventy men[a] of the people, and the people lamented because the Lord had struck the people with a great slaughter.

6:19 [a] Or *He struck seventy men of the people and fifty oxen of a man*

sin, you became slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:17, 18).

Can a discharged prisoner return to confinement? Yes. But let him remember the gray walls and the long nights. Can a newlywed forget his vows? Yes. But let him remember his holy vow and his beautiful bride. Can a converted slob once again be messy? Yes. But let him consider the difference between the filth of yesterday and the purity of today.

Can one who has been given a free gift not share that gift with others? I suppose. But . . . let him remember that all of life is a gift of grace. And let him remember that the call of grace is to live a gracious life.

For that is how grace works. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What is in your life right now that needs to be confessed? Repentance may be your first step toward true freedom in Christ. Examine your heart to see if there are any bad thoughts, feelings, or attitudes there. If necessary, confess them, and find the peace that comes from forgiveness. Let Christ come in and clean up your life.

EXPLORATION

Examining Yourself—Psalm 26:2; 139:23, 24; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Hebrews 10:22–31.

The Ark at Kirjath Jearim

20 And the men of Beth Shemesh said, "Who
is able to stand before this holy Lord God? And
to whom shall it go up from us?" 21 So they
sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjath
Jearim, saying, "The Philistines have brought
back the ark of the Lord; come down *and* take
it up with you."

7 Then the men of Kirjath Jearim came and
took the ark of the Lord, and brought it
into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and
consecrated Eleazar his son to keep the ark of
the Lord.

Samuel Judges Israel

2 So it was that the ark remained in Kirjath
Jearim a long time; it was there twenty years.
And all the house of Israel lamented after the
Lord.

3 Then Samuel spoke to all the house of
Israel, saying, "If you return to the Lord with
all your hearts, *then* put away the foreign gods
and the Ashtoreths[a] from among you, and pre-
pare your hearts for the Lord, and serve Him
only; and He will deliver you from the hand
of the Philistines." 4 So the children of Israel
put away the Baals and the Ashtoreths,[a] and
served the Lord only.

5 And Samuel said, "Gather all Israel to
Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you."
6 So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew
water, and poured *it* out before the Lord. And
they fasted that day, and said there, "We have
sinned against the Lord." And Samuel judged
the children of Israel at Mizpah.

7 Now when the Philistines heard that the
children of Israel had gathered together at
Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up
against Israel. And when the children of Israel
heard *of it,* they were afraid of the Philistines.
8 So the children of Israel said to Samuel, "Do
not cease to cry out to the Lord our God for
us, that He may save us from the hand of the
Philistines."

9 And Samuel took a suckling lamb and
offered *it as* a whole burnt offering to the
Lord. Then Samuel cried out to the Lord for
Israel, and the Lord answered him. 10 Now as
Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the
Philistines drew near to battle against Israel.
But the Lord thundered with a loud thunder
upon the Philistines that day, and so confused
them that they were overcome before Israel.
11 And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah
and pursued the Philistines, and drove them
back as far as below Beth Car. 12 Then Samuel
took a stone and set *it* up between Mizpah and
Shen, and called its name Ebenezer,[a] saying,
"Thus far the Lord has helped us."

13 So the Philistines were subdued, and they
did not come anymore into the territory of
Israel. And the hand of the Lord was against
the Philistines all the days of Samuel. 14 Then
the cities which the Philistines had taken from
Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to
Gath; and Israel recovered its territory from
the hands of the Philistines. Also there was
peace between Israel and the Amorites.

15 And Samuel judged Israel all the days of
his life. 16 He went from year to year on a cir-
cuit to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, and judged
Israel in all those places. 17 But he always
returned to Ramah, for his home *was* there.
There he judged Israel, and there he built an
altar to the Lord.

Israel Demands a King

8 Now it came to pass when Samuel was old
that he made his sons judges over Israel.
2 The name of his firstborn was Joel, and the
name of his second, Abijah; *they were* judges
in Beersheba. 3 But his sons did not walk in his
ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain,
took bribes, and perverted justice.

4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered
together and came to Samuel at Ramah, 5 and
said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons
do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king
to judge us like all the nations."

6 But the thing displeased Samuel when
they said, "Give us a king to judge us." So Sam-
uel prayed to the Lord. 7 And the Lord said to
Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all
that they say to you; for they have not rejected
you, but they have rejected Me, that I should
not reign over them. 8 According to all the
works which they have done since the day that
I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this
day—with which they have forsaken Me and
served other gods—so they are doing to you

7:3 [a]Canaanite goddesses **7:4** [a]Canaanite goddesses **7:12** [a]Literally *Stone of Help*

also. 9 Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly
forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will
reign over them."
10 So Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who asked
him for a king. 11 And he said, "This will be the behavior of the king
who will reign over you: He will take your sons and appoint *them* for
his own chariots and *to be* his horsemen, and *some* will run before his
chariots. 12 He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains
over his fifties, *will set some* to plow his ground and reap his harvest,
and *some* to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chari-
ots. 13 He will take your daughters *to be* perfumers, cooks, and bakers.
14 And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your
olive groves, and give *them* to his servants. 15 He will take a tenth of
your grain and your vintage, and give it to his officers and servants.
16 And he will take your male servants, your female servants, your fin-
est young men,[a] and your donkeys, and put *them* to his work. 17 He
will take a tenth of your sheep. And you will be his servants. 18 And you
will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen
for yourselves, and the Lord will not hear you in that day."
19 Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and
they said, "No, but we will have a king over us, 20 that we also may be
like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before
us and fight our battles."
21 And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he repeated
them in the hearing of the Lord. 22 So the Lord said to Samuel, "Heed
their voice, and make them a king."
And Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Every man go to his city."

Saul Chosen to Be King

9 There was a man of Benjamin whose name *was* Kish the son of
Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bechorath, the son of Aphiah, a
Benjamite, a mighty man of power. 2 And he had a choice and hand-
some son whose name *was* Saul. *There was* not a more handsome
person than he among the children of Israel. From his shoulders
upward *he was* taller than any of the people.
3 Now the donkeys of Kish, Saul's father, were lost. And Kish said
to his son Saul, "Please take one of the servants with you, and arise,
go and look for the donkeys." 4 So he passed through the mountains
of Ephraim and through the land of Shalisha, but they did not find
them. Then they passed through the land of Shaalim, and *they were*
not *there*. Then he passed through the land of the Benjamites, but
they did not find *them*.
5 When they had come to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant
who *was* with him, "Come, let us return, lest my father cease *caring*
about the donkeys and become worried about us."
6 And he said to him, "Look now, *there is* in this city a man of God,
and *he is* an honorable man; all that he says surely comes to pass. So
let us go there; perhaps he can show us the way that we should go."
7 Then Saul said to his servant, "But look, *if* we go, what shall we

8:16 [a]Septuagint reads *cattle*.

Life LESSONS

1 Samuel 8:1–22

SITUATION
When Samuel retired, Israel rejected his sons as judges and asked for a king, in spite of God's warning against this. Their request for a king was based on a desire to be like all the other nations.

OBSERVATION
Israel demonstrates that our desire to imitate the world may seem righteous at first, but the final result will be destruction.

INSPIRATION
We are weary of society's surface-level system, of being graded according to the inches of our waist, the square footage of our house, the color of our skin, the make of our car, the label of our clothes, the size of our office, the presence of diplomas, the absence of pimples. Don't we weary of such games?

Hard work ignored. Devotion unrewarded. The boss chooses cleavage over character. The teacher picks pet students instead of prepared ones. Parents show off their favorite sons and leave their runts out in the field. Oh, the Goliath of exclusion.

Are you sick of him? Then it's time to quit staring at him. Who cares what he, or they, think? What matters is what your Maker thinks. "The Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

Those words were written for the *haqqatons* of society, for misfits and outcasts. God uses them all.

Moses ran from justice, but God used him.

Jonah ran from God, but God used him.

Rahab ran a brothel, Samson ran to the wrong woman, Jacob ran in circles, Elijah ran into the mountains, Sarah ran out of hope, Lot ran with the wrong crowd, but God used them all.

And David? God saw a teenage boy serving Him in the backwoods of Bethlehem, at the intersection of boredom and anonymity, and through the voice of a brother, God called, "David! Come in. Someone wants to see you." Human eyes saw a gangly teenager enter the house, smelling like sheep and looking like he needed a bath. Yet, "the Lord said, 'Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!'" (16:12). (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How deeply do you care about fitting in and being like the world? What are the areas of your life where you blend in with those around you when you should not? Ask God to give you the courage and conviction to stand apart when you should.

EXPLORATION

Separation from the World—Isaiah 52:11; John 17:14; Romans 12:2; Galatians 1:10; Hebrews 11:24–26; James 1:27; 1 John 2:15–17.

bring the man? For the bread in our vessels is all gone, and *there is* no present to bring to the man of God. What do we have?"

8 And the servant answered Saul again and said, "Look, I have here at hand one-fourth of a shekel of silver. I will give *that* to the man of God, to tell us our way." 9 (Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he spoke thus: "Come, let us go to the seer"; for *he who is* now *called* a prophet was formerly called a seer.)

10 Then Saul said to his servant, "Well said; come, let us go." So they went to the city where the man of God *was.*

11 As they went up the hill to the city, they met some young women going out to draw water, and said to them, "Is the seer here?"

12 And they answered them and said, "Yes, there he is, just ahead of you. Hurry now; for today he came to this city, because there is a sacrifice of the people today on the high place. 13 As soon as you come into the city, you will surely find him before he goes up to the high place to eat. For the people will not eat until he comes, because he must bless the sacrifice; afterward those who are invited will eat. Now therefore, go up, for about this time you will find him." 14 So they went up to the city. As they were coming into the city, there was Samuel, coming out toward them on his way up to the high place.

15 Now the Lord had told Samuel in his ear the day before Saul came, saying, 16 "Tomorrow about this time I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him commander over My people Israel, that he may save My people from the hand of the Philistines; for I have looked upon My people, because their cry has come to Me."

17 So when Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said to him, "There he is, the man of whom I spoke to you. This one shall reign over My people." 18 Then Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, and said, "Please tell me, where *is* the seer's house?"

19 Samuel answered Saul and said, "I *am* the seer. Go up before me to the high place, for you shall eat with me today; and tomorrow I will let you go and will tell you all that *is* in your heart. 20 But as for your donkeys that were lost three days ago, do not be anxious about them, for they have been found. And on whom *is* all the desire of Israel? *Is it* not on you and on all your father's house?"

21 And Saul answered and said, "*Am* I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe[a] of Benjamin? Why then do you speak like this to me?"

22 Now Samuel took Saul and his servant and brought them into the hall, and had them sit in the place of honor among those who were invited; there *were* about thirty persons. 23 And Samuel said to the cook, "Bring the portion which I gave you, of which I said to you, 'Set it apart.'" 24 So the cook took up the thigh with its upper part and set *it* before Saul. And *Samuel* said, "Here it is, what was kept back. *It* was set apart for you. Eat; for until this time it has been kept for you, since I said I invited the people." So Saul ate with Samuel that day.

25 When they had come down from the high place into the city, *Samuel* spoke with Saul on the top of the house.[a] 26 They arose early;

9:21 [a]Literally *tribes* **9:25** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Septuagint omits *He spoke with Saul on the top of the house;* Septuagint and Vulgate add *And he prepared a bed for Saul on the top of the house, and he slept.*

and it was about the dawning of the day that Samuel called to Saul on the top of the house, saying, "Get up, that I may send you on your way." And Saul arose, and both of them went outside, he and Samuel.

Saul Anointed King

27 As they were going down to the outskirts of the city, Samuel said to Saul, "Tell the servant to go on ahead of us." And he went on. "But you stand here awhile, that I may announce to you the word of God."

10 Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured *it* on his head, and kissed him and said: "*Is it* not because the Lord has anointed you commander over His inheritance?[a] 2 When you have departed from me today, you will find two men by Rachel's tomb in the territory of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say to you, 'The donkeys which you went to look for have been found. And now your father has ceased caring about the donkeys and is worrying about you, saying, "What shall I do about my son?"' 3 Then you shall go on forward from there and come to the terebinth tree of Tabor. There three men going up to God at Bethel will meet you, one carrying three young goats, another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a skin of wine. 4 And they will greet you and give you two *loaves* of bread, which you shall receive from their hands. 5 After that you shall come to the hill of God where the Philistine garrison *is.* And it will happen, when you have come there to the city, that you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with a stringed instrument, a tambourine, a flute, and a harp before them; and they will be prophesying. 6 Then the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man. 7 And let it be, when these signs come to you, *that* you do as the occasion demands; for God *is* with you. 8 You shall go down before me to Gilgal; and surely I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings *and* make sacrifices of peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, till I come to you and show you what you should do."

9 So it was, when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, that God gave him another heart; and all those signs came to pass that day. 10 When they came there to the hill, there was a group of prophets to meet him; then the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them. 11 And it happened, when all who knew him formerly saw that he indeed prophesied among the prophets, that the people said to one another, "What *is* this *that* has come upon the son of Kish? *Is* Saul also among the prophets?" 12 Then a man from there answered and said, "But who *is* their father?" Therefore it became a proverb: "*Is* Saul also among the prophets?" 13 And when he had finished prophesying, he went to the high place.

14 Then Saul's uncle said to him and his servant, "Where did you go?"

So he said, "To look for the donkeys. When we saw that *they were* nowhere *to be found,* we went to Samuel."

15 And Saul's uncle said, "Tell me, please, what Samuel said to you."

10:1 [a] Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *His people Israel; and you shall rule the people of the Lord;* Septuagint and Vulgate add *And you shall deliver His people from the hands of their enemies all around them. And this shall be a sign to you, that God has anointed you to be a prince.*

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 9:1—10:27

SITUATION

Samuel had been an exceptional judge over Israel. But when it was time for him to retire, his sons were corrupt and inadequate for leading the nation. The people failed to recognize that God alone was their king and that their disobedience to Him was the reason for their problems. God knew that Israel's desire for a king was based on her reliance on human rather than divine strength.

OBSERVATION

In the life of Saul, we learn the important lesson that seeking God and being obedient to Him is far more important than all of the human strengths we may possess.

INSPIRATION

Your Goliath doesn't carry sword or shield; he brandishes blades of unemployment, abandonment, sexual abuse, or depression. Your giant doesn't parade up and down the hills of Elah; he prances through your office, your bedroom, your classroom. He brings bills you can't pay, grades you can't make, people you can't please, whiskey you can't resist, pornography you can't refuse, a career you can't escape, a past you can't shake, and a future you can't face.

You know well the roar of Goliath.

David faced one who foghorned his challenges morning and night. "The Philistine drew near and presented himself forty days, morning and evening"

(1 Samuel 17:16). Yours does the same. First thought of the morning, last worry of the night—your Goliath dominates your day and infiltrates your joy.

How long has he stalked you? . . .

You know Goliath. You recognize his walk and wince at his talk. You've seen your Godzilla. The question is, is he all you see? You know his voice—but is it all you hear? David saw and heard more. Read the first words he spoke, not just in the battle, but in the Bible: "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (17:26).

David shows up discussing God. The soldiers mentioned nothing about Him, the brothers never spoke His name, but David takes one step onto the stage and raises the subject of the living God. He does the same with King Saul: no chitchat about the battle or questions about the odds. Just a God-birthed announcement: "The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine" (17:37). . . .

No one else discusses God. David discusses no one else but God. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

If you want to be used by God, what do you see as the source of your potential success? Are you relying too heavily on your human strengths or doubting because of your human weaknesses? Remember, only God's power can make us useful for service in His kingdom, and with His

16 So Saul said to his uncle, "He told us plainly that the donkeys had
been found." But about the matter of the kingdom, he did not tell him
what Samuel had said.

Saul Proclaimed King

17 Then Samuel called the people together to the Lord at Mizpah,
18 and said to the children of Israel, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel:
'I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you from the hand
of the Egyptians *and* from the hand of all kingdoms and from those
who oppressed you.' 19 But you have today rejected your God, who
Himself saved you from all your adversities and your tribulations; and
you have said to Him, 'No, set a king over us!' Now therefore, present
yourselves before the Lord by your tribes and by your clans."[a]

20 And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come
near, the tribe of Benjamin was chosen. 21 When he had caused the
tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri
was chosen. And Saul the son of Kish was chosen. But when they
sought him, he could not be found. 22 Therefore they inquired of the
Lord further, "Has the man come here yet?"

And the Lord answered, "There he is, hidden among the equip-
ment."

23 So they ran and brought him from there; and when he stood
among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his
shoulders upward. 24 And Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see
him whom the Lord has chosen, that *there is* no one like him among
all the people?"

So all the people shouted and said, "Long live the king!"

25 Then Samuel explained to the people the behavior of royalty, and
wrote *it* in a book and laid *it* up before the Lord. And Samuel sent all
the people away, every man to his house. 26 And Saul also went home
to Gibeah; and valiant *men* went with him, whose hearts God had
touched. 27 But some rebels said, "How can this man save us?" So they
despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his peace.

Saul Saves Jabesh Gilead

11 Then Nahash the Ammonite came up and encamped against
Jabesh Gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, "Make
a covenant with us, and we will serve you."

2 And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, "On this *condition* I
will make *a covenant* with you, that I may put out all your right eyes,
and bring reproach on all Israel."

3 Then the elders of Jabesh said to him, "Hold off for seven days,
that we may send messengers to all the territory of Israel. And then, if
there is no one to save us, we will come out to you."

4 So the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and told the news in
the hearing of the people. And all the people lifted up their voices
and wept. 5 Now there was Saul, coming behind the herd from the
field; and Saul said, "What *troubles* the people, that they weep?" And
they told him the words of the men of Jabesh. 6 Then the Spirit of God
came upon Saul when he heard this news, and his anger was greatly
aroused. 7 So he took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces, and sent

10:19 [a] Literally *thousands*

them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, "Whoever does not go out with Saul and Samuel to battle, so it shall be done to his oxen."

And the fear of the Lord fell on the people, and they came out with one consent. 8When he numbered them in Bezek, the children of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand. 9And they said to the messengers who came, "Thus you shall say to the men of Jabesh Gilead: 'Tomorrow, by *the time* the sun is hot, you shall have help.' " Then the messengers came and reported *it* to the men of Jabesh, and they were glad. 10Therefore the men of Jabesh said, "Tomorrow we will come out to you, and you may do with us whatever seems good to you."

11So it was, on the next day, that Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the camp in the morning watch, and killed Ammonites until the heat of the day. And it happened that those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.

12Then the people said to Samuel, "Who *is* he who said, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Bring the men, that we may put them to death."

13But Saul said, "Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the Lord has accomplished salvation in Israel."

14Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom there." 15So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal. There they made sacrifices of peace offerings before the Lord, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

Samuel's Address at Saul's Coronation

12 Now Samuel said to all Israel: "Indeed I have heeded your voice in all that you said to me, and have made a king over you. 2And now here is the king, walking before you; and I am old and grayheaded, and look, my sons *are* with you. I have walked before you from my childhood to this day. 3Here I am. Witness against me before the Lord and before His anointed: Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I received *any* bribe with which to blind my eyes? I will restore *it* to you."

4And they said, "You have not cheated us or oppressed us, nor have you taken anything from any man's hand."

5Then he said to them, "The Lord *is* witness against you, and His anointed *is* witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand."

And they answered, "*He is* witness."

6Then Samuel said to the people, "*It is* the Lord who raised up Moses and Aaron, and who brought your fathers up from the land of Egypt. 7Now therefore, stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord concerning all the righteous acts of the Lord which He did to you and your fathers: 8When Jacob had gone into Egypt,[a] and your fathers cried out to the Lord, then the Lord sent Moses and Aaron,

12:8 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint adds *and the Egyptians afflicted them.*

power we are more than conquerors.

EXPLORATION
Necessity of Divine Power—Exodus 3:11, 12; Judges 6:12–14; 2 Chronicles 14:11; Ezra 1:2; Psalm 20:6, 7; 2 Corinthians 12:9.

Life LESSONS

1 Samuel 11:1—12:25

SITUATION
Saul's strength and resolve as a ruler were tested soon after he was anointed by Samuel. Though some doubted whether Saul should be king, he acted to rescue Jabesh Gilead and united his people against the Ammonites. These events confirmed for the people his place as king. Samuel then gave his farewell speech to the people, reminding them to stay close to the Lord.

OBSERVATION
Samuel knew the people had sinned, but he encouraged them to move forward in faith, for God would be with them. He reminded the people that the Lord alone was their God and that they should worship and follow Him alone.

INSPIRATION
"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6).

This must be one of the sweetest phrases ever penned. . . .

Goodness and mercy—the celestial escort of God's flock. If that duo doesn't reinforce your faith, try this phrase: "all the days of my life."

What a huge statement.

Look at the size of it! Goodness and mercy follow the child of God each and every day! Think of the days that lie ahead. What do you see? Days at home with only toddlers? God will be at your side. Days in a dead-end job? He will walk you through. Days of loneliness? He will take your hand. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me—not some, not most, not nearly all—but all the days of my life.

And what will He do during those days? (Here is my favorite word.) He will "follow" you.

What a surprising way to describe God! We're accustomed to a God who remains in one place. A God who sits enthroned in the heavens and rules and ordains. David, however, envisions a mobile and active God. Dare we do the same? Dare we envision a God who follows us? Who pursues us? Who chases us? Who tracks us down and wins us over? Who follows us with "goodness and mercy" all the days of our lives?

Isn't this the kind of God described in the Bible? A God who follows us? There are many in the Scriptures who would say so. You have to go no farther than the third chapter of the first book before you find God in the role of a seeker. Adam and Eve are hiding in the bushes, partly to cover their bodies, partly to cover their sin. But does God wait for them to come to Him? No, the words ring in the garden: "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9). With that question God began a quest for the heart of humanity that continues up to and through the moment you read these words. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

who brought your fathers out of Egypt and made them dwell in this place. 9 And when they forgot the Lord their God, He sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of the army of Hazor, into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab; and they fought against them. 10 Then they cried out to the Lord, and said, 'We have sinned, because we have forsaken the Lord and served the Baals and Ashtoreths;[a] but now deliver us from the hand of our enemies, and we will serve You.' 11 And the Lord sent Jerubbaal,[a] Bedan,[b] Jephthah, and Samuel,[c] and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side; and you dwelt in safety. 12 And when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us,' when the Lord your God *was* your king.

13 "Now therefore, here is the king whom you have chosen *and* whom you have desired. And take note, the Lord has set a king over you. 14 If you fear the Lord and serve Him and obey His voice, and do not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then both you and the king who reigns over you will continue following the Lord your God. 15 However, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you, as *it was* against your fathers.

16 "Now therefore, stand and see this great thing which the Lord will do before your eyes: 17 *Is* today not the wheat harvest? I will call to the Lord, and He will send thunder and rain, that you may perceive and see that your wickedness *is* great, which you have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking a king for yourselves."

18 So Samuel called to the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel.

19 And all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the Lord your God, that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins the evil of asking a king for ourselves."

20 Then Samuel said to the people, "Do not fear. You have done all this wickedness; yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. 21 And do not turn aside; for *then you would go* after empty things which cannot profit or deliver, for they *are* nothing. 22 For the Lord will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you His people. 23 Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way. 24 Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you. 25 But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king."

Saul's Unlawful Sacrifice

13 Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel,[a] 2 Saul chose for himself three thousand *men* of Israel. Two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and in the mountains of

12:10 [a]Canaanite goddesses **12:11** [a]Syriac reads *Deborah;* Targum reads *Gideon*. [b]Septuagint and Syriac read *Barak;* Targum reads *Simson*. [c]Syriac reads *Simson*. **13:1** [a]The Hebrew is difficult (compare 2 Samuel 5:4; 2 Kings 14:2; see also 2 Samuel 2:10; Acts 13:21).

Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. The rest of the people he sent away, every man to his tent.

3 And Jonathan attacked the garrison of the Philistines that *was* in Geba, and the Philistines heard *of it.* Then Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear!" 4 Now all Israel heard it said *that* Saul had attacked a garrison of the Philistines, and *that* Israel had also become an abomination to the Philistines. And the people were called together to Saul at Gilgal.

5 Then the Philistines gathered together to fight with Israel, thirty[a] thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which *is* on the seashore in multitude. And they came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth Aven. 6 When the men of Israel saw that they were in danger (for the people were distressed), then the people hid in caves, in thickets, in rocks, in holes, and in pits. 7 And *some of* the Hebrews crossed over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead.

As for Saul, he *was* still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. 8 Then he waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. 9 So Saul said, "Bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me." And he offered the burnt offering. 10 Now it happened, as soon as he had finished presenting the burnt offering, that Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might greet him.

11 And Samuel said, "What have you done?"

Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and *that* you did not come within the days appointed, and *that* the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, 12 then I said, 'The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the Lord.' Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering."

13 And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you. For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. 14 But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him *to be* commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you."

15 Then Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin.[a] And Saul numbered the people present with him, about six hundred men.

No Weapons for the Army

16 Saul, Jonathan his son, and the people present with them remained in Gibeah of Benjamin. But the Philistines encamped in Michmash. 17 Then raiders came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies. One company turned onto the road to Ophrah, to the land of Shual, 18 another company turned to the road *to* Beth

13:5 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate; Syriac and some manuscripts of the Septuagint read *three.* **13:15** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Septuagint and Vulgate add *And the rest of the people went up after Saul to meet the people who fought against them, going from Gilgal to Gibeah in the hill of Benjamin.*

APPLICATION
How has God shown you His goodness? His mercy? In what ways do you sense God's constant pursuit of you? Is He guiding you? Convicting you of sin? Granting you peace in a difficult time? Thank Him for His goodness and mercy to you.

EXPLORATION
Risk Taking—Judges 2:15; 3:9; 9:17; 13:5; 1 Samuel 9:16; Nehemiah 9:27.

Life LESSONS

1 Samuel 13:1—15:35

SITUATION
When the Philistines gathered to attack Israel at Geba, the Israelites were badly outnumbered. King Saul grew tired of waiting for Samuel to instruct him about the battle at hand. Samuel delayed, and Saul's men began to desert; but he erred in his panic.

OBSERVATION
Obey God's command in all circumstances. Saul lost his kingdom because he disobeyed God. Saul was pressured to act before all his men deserted. Lack of patience cost him everything.

INSPIRATION
Couldn't we use some stability? For twenty-seven years the citizens of South Padre trusted the stability of the Queen Isabella Causeway, the longest bridge in Texas. Every day 19,000 motorists used her to travel between Port Isabel and South Padre Island. Secured by tons of concrete, the two-and-a-quarter-mile bridge was the only connection between the mainland and the island. Buttressed

by deep pilings, approved by the best engineers. No one questioned the Queen Isabella.

Until September 15, 2001. At two o'clock in the morning four barges and a tugboat crashed into the support system and brought the bridge down, plunging cars and people into the Laguna Madre eighty-five feet below. Eight people died when 240 feet of the bridge collapsed.

You need never fear the same will happen to God's plan. His plan—born in eternity—will withstand any attack of humanity. Atheists, antagonists, skeptics, scholars—they've slammed into the bridge, but it has never budged. Texas engineers are regretting their work, but God will never regret His. "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For He is not a man, that He should relent" (1 Samuel 15:29).

God's plans will never change, because He makes His plans in complete knowledge. Forget hopeful forecasting. He declares "the end from the beginning" (Isaiah 46:10). Nothing takes Him by surprise. "The counsel of the Lord stands forever" (Psalm 33:11). (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

It's easy to compromise when people are waiting for you to act. Determine that no matter the pressure, no matter the cost, no matter the delay, you will act only when your response honors God. Never compromise your integrity to satisfy others.

EXPLORATION

Waiting—Psalm 27; 37:5–7.

Horon, and another company turned *to* the road of the border that overlooks the Valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness.

19 Now there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, "Lest the Hebrews make swords or spears." 20 But all the Israelites would go down to the Philistines to sharpen each man's plowshare, his mattock, his ax, and his sickle; 21 and the charge for a sharpening was a pim[a] for the plowshares, the mattocks, the forks, and the axes, and to set the points of the goads. 22 So it came about, on the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people who *were* with Saul and Jonathan. But they were found with Saul and Jonathan his son.

23 And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash.

Jonathan Defeats the Philistines

14 Now it happened one day that Jonathan the son of Saul said to the young man who bore his armor, "Come, let us go over to the Philistines' garrison that *is* on the other side." But he did not tell his father. 2 And Saul was sitting in the outskirts of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree which *is* in Migron. The people who *were* with him *were* about six hundred men. 3 Ahijah the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the Lord's priest in Shiloh, was wearing an ephod. But the people did not know that Jonathan had gone.

4 Between the passes, by which Jonathan sought to go over to the Philistines' garrison, *there was* a sharp rock on one side and a sharp rock on the other side. And the name of one *was* Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh. 5 The front of one faced northward opposite Michmash, and the other southward opposite Gibeah.

6 Then Jonathan said to the young man who bore his armor, "Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the Lord will work for us. For nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few."

7 So his armorbearer said to him, "Do all that is in your heart. Go then; here I am with you, according to your heart."

8 Then Jonathan said, "Very well, let us cross over to *these* men, and we will show ourselves to them. 9 If they say thus to us, 'Wait until we come to you,' then we will stand still in our place and not go up to them. 10 But if they say thus, 'Come up to us,' then we will go up. For the Lord has delivered them into our hand, and this *will be* a sign to us."

11 So both of them showed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines. And the Philistines said, "Look, the Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden." 12 Then the men of the garrison called to Jonathan and his armorbearer, and said, "Come up to us, and we will show you something."

Jonathan said to his armorbearer, "Come up after me, for the Lord has delivered them into the hand of Israel." 13 And Jonathan climbed up on his hands and knees with his armorbearer after him; and they fell before Jonathan. And as he came after him, his armorbearer killed

13:21 [a] About two-thirds shekel weight

them. 14 That first slaughter which Jonathan and his armorbearer made was about twenty men within about half an acre of land.[a]

15 And there was trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. The garrison and the raiders also trembled; and the earth quaked, so that it was a very great trembling. 16 Now the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked, and *there* was the multitude, melting away; and they went here and there. 17 Then Saul said to the people who *were* with him, "Now call the roll and see who has gone from us." And when they had called the roll, surprisingly, Jonathan and his armorbearer *were* not *there.* 18 And Saul said to Ahijah, "Bring the ark[a] of God here" (for at that time the ark[b] of God was with the children of Israel). 19 Now it happened, while Saul talked to the priest, that the noise which *was* in the camp of the Philistines continued to increase; so Saul said to the priest, "Withdraw your hand." 20 Then Saul and all the people who *were* with him assembled, and they went to the battle; and indeed every man's sword was against his neighbor, *and there was* very great confusion. 21 Moreover the Hebrews *who* were with the Philistines before that time, who went up with them into the camp *from the* surrounding *country,* they also joined the Israelites who *were* with Saul and Jonathan. 22 Likewise all the men of Israel who had hidden in the mountains of Ephraim, *when* they heard that the Philistines fled, they also followed hard after them in the battle. 23 So the Lord saved Israel that day, and the battle shifted to Beth Aven.

Saul's Rash Oath

24 And the men of Israel were distressed that day, for Saul had placed the people under oath, saying, "Cursed *is* the man who eats *any* food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies." So none of the people tasted food. 25 Now all *the people* of the land came to a forest; and there was honey on the ground. 26 And when the people had come into the woods, there was the honey, dripping; but no one put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. 27 But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath; therefore he stretched out the end of the rod that *was* in his hand and dipped it in a honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his countenance brightened. 28 Then one of the people said, "Your father strictly charged the people with an oath, saying, 'Cursed *is* the man who eats food this day.' " And the people were faint.

29 But Jonathan said, "My father has troubled the land. Look now, how my countenance has brightened because I tasted a little of this honey. 30 How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now would there not have been a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?"

31 Now they had driven back the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. So the people were very faint. 32 And the people rushed on the spoil, and took sheep, oxen, and calves, and slaughtered *them* on the ground; and the people ate *them* with the blood. 33 Then they told Saul, saying, "Look, the people are sinning against the Lord by eating with the blood!"

So he said, "You have dealt treacherously; roll a large stone to me this day." 34 Then Saul said, "Disperse yourselves among the people, and say to them, 'Bring me here every man's ox and every man's sheep, slaughter *them* here, and eat; and do not sin against the Lord by eating with the blood.' " So every one of the people brought his ox with him that night, and slaughtered *it* there. 35 Then Saul built an altar to the Lord. This was the first altar that he built to the Lord.

36 Now Saul said, "Let us go down after the Philistines by night, and plunder them until the morning light; and let us not leave a man of them."

And they said, "Do whatever seems good to you."

Then the priest said, "Let us draw near to God here."

37 So Saul asked counsel of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will You deliver them into the hand of Israel?" But He did not answer him that day. 38 And Saul said, "Come over here, all you chiefs of the people, and

14:14 [a]Literally *half the area plowed by a yoke* (of oxen in a day) **14:18** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *ephod.* [b]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *ephod.*

know and see what this sin was today. 39For *as* the Lord lives, who saves Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." But not a man among all the people answered him. 40Then he said to all Israel, "You be on one side, and my son Jonathan and I will be on the other side."

And the people said to Saul, "Do what seems good to you."

41Therefore Saul said to the Lord God of Israel, "Give a perfect *lot.*"[a] So Saul and Jonathan were taken, but the people escaped. 42And Saul said, "Cast *lots* between my son Jonathan and me." So Jonathan was taken. 43Then Saul said to Jonathan, "Tell me what you have done."

And Jonathan told him, and said, "I only tasted a little honey with the end of the rod that *was* in my hand. So now I must die!"

44Saul answered, "God do so and more also; for you shall surely die, Jonathan."

45But the people said to Saul, "Shall Jonathan die, who has accomplished this great deliverance in Israel? Certainly not! *As* the Lord lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day." So the people rescued Jonathan, and he did not die.

46Then Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place.

Saul's Continuing Wars

47So Saul established his sovereignty over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the people of Ammon, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he harassed *them.*[a] 48And he gathered an army and attacked the Amalekites, and delivered Israel from the hands of those who plundered them.

49The sons of Saul were Jonathan, Jishui,[a] and Malchishua. And the names of his two daughters *were these:* the name of the firstborn Merab, and the name of the younger Michal. 50The name of Saul's wife *was* Ahinoam the daughter of Ahimaaz. And the name of the commander of his army *was* Abner the son of Ner, Saul's uncle. 51Kish *was* the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner *was* the son of Abiel.

52Now there was fierce war with the Philistines all the days of Saul. And when Saul saw any strong man or any valiant man, he took him for himself.

Saul Spares King Agag

15 Samuel also said to Saul, "The Lord sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the Lord. 2Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'I will punish Amalek *for* what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. 3Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.' "

4So Saul gathered the people together and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men of Judah. 5And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and lay in wait in the valley.

6Then Saul said to the Kenites, "Go, depart, get down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the children of Israel when they came up out of Egypt." So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. 7And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. 8He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. 9But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all *that was* good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.

Saul Rejected as King

10Now the word of the Lord came to Samuel, saying, 11"I greatly regret that I have set up Saul *as* king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments." And it grieved Samuel, and

14:41 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Septuagint and Vulgate read *Why do You not answer Your servant today? If the injustice is with me or Jonathan my son, O Lord God of Israel, give proof; and if You say it is with Your people Israel, give holiness.* **14:47** [a]Septuagint and Vulgate read *prospered.* **14:49** [a]Called *Abinadab* in 1 Chronicles 8:33 and 9:39

Truth

The plain fact is we don't like the truth. Our credo is: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you squirm." Our dislike for the truth began at the age of three when mom asked, "Did you hit your little brother?" We knew then and there that honesty had its consequences.

Not only do we not like the truth, we don't trust the truth. If we are brutally honest (which is advisable in a discussion on honesty), we'd have to admit that the truth seems inadequate to do what we need done.

We want our bosses to like us, so we flatter. We call it polishing the apple. God calls it a lie.

We want people to admire us, so we exaggerate. We call it stretching the truth. God calls it a lie.

We want people to respect us, so we live in houses we can't afford and charge bills we can't pay. We call it the American way. God calls it living a lie.

Do you tell the truth . . . always? If not, start today. Don't wait until tomorrow. The ripple of today's lie is tomorrow's wave and next year's flood. Start today. Be just like Jesus. Tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Study Guide

Read 1 Samuel 15:1–29

- Think of the most reliable and honest person you know. How do you feel when you are with that person?
- How does it change a relationship when you suspect someone is being dishonest with you?
- How can honesty keep us from getting ahead in our professional lives?
- How would you explain to a child the importance of truthfulness?
- List some dynamics that keep us from being brutally honest with ourselves and others.
- How do people usually respond when they get caught in a lie?
- What tactics do we use to avoid the truth about ourselves?
- Describe how important it is to you that the significant people in your life are truthful with you, even when it hurts.
- What truths do you need the courage to tell?

he cried out to the Lord all night. 12So when Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul, it was told Samuel, saying, "Saul went to Carmel, and indeed, he set up a monument for himself; and he has gone on around, passed by, and gone down to Gilgal." 13Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed *are* you of the Lord! I have performed the commandment of the Lord."

14But Samuel said, "What then *is* this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"

15And Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed."

16Then Samuel said to Saul, "Be quiet! And I will tell you what the Lord said to me last night."

And he said to him, "Speak on."

17So Samuel said, "When you *were* little in your own eyes, *were* you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the Lord anoint you king over Israel? 18Now the Lord sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' 19Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the Lord?"

20And Saul said to Samuel, "But I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. 21But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal."

22So Samuel said:

"Has the Lord *as great* delight in burnt
offerings and sacrifices,
As in obeying the voice of the Lord?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
And to heed than the fat of rams.
23 For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft,
And stubbornness *is as* iniquity and
idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of
the Lord,
He also has rejected you from *being* king."

24Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. 25Now therefore, please pardon my sin, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord."

26But Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel."

27And as Samuel turned around to go away, *Saul* seized the edge of his robe, and it tore. 28So Samuel said to him, "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, *who is* better than you. 29And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For He *is* not a man, that He should relent."

30Then he said, "I have sinned; *yet* honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord your God." 31So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul worshiped the Lord.

32Then Samuel said, "Bring Agag king of the Amalekites here to me." So Agag came to him cautiously.

And Agag said, "Surely the bitterness of death is past."

33But Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women." And Samuel hacked Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal.

34Then Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house at Gibeah of Saul. 35And Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul, and the Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.

David Anointed King

16 Now the Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons."

2And Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears *it,* he will kill me."

But the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' 3Then invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will

show you what you shall do; you shall anoint for Me the one I name to you."

4 So Samuel did what the Lord said, and went to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, "Do you come peaceably?"

5 And he said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice." Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons, and invited them to the sacrifice.

6 So it was, when they came, that he looked at Eliab and said, "Surely the Lord's anointed *is* before Him!"

7 But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For *the Lord does* not *see* as man sees;[a] for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

8 So Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." 9 Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." 10 Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen these." 11 And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all the young men here?" Then he said, "There remains yet the youngest, and there he is, keeping the sheep."

And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him. For we will not sit down[a] till he comes here." 12 So he sent and brought him in. Now he *was* ruddy, with bright eyes, and good-looking. And the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him; for this *is* the one!" 13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel arose and went to Ramah.

A Distressing Spirit Troubles Saul

14 But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him. 15 And Saul's servants said to him, "Surely, a distressing spirit from God is troubling you. 16 Let our master now command your servants, *who are* before you, to seek out a man *who is* a skillful player on the harp. And it shall be that he will play it with his hand when the distressing spirit from God is upon you, and you shall be well."

17 So Saul said to his servants, "Provide me now a man who can play well, and bring *him* to me."

18 Then one of the servants answered and said, "Look, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, *who is* skillful in playing, a mighty man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a handsome person; and the Lord *is* with him."

19 Therefore Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, "Send me your son David, who *is* with the sheep." 20 And Jesse took a donkey *loaded with* bread, a skin of wine, and a young goat, and sent *them* by his son David to Saul. 21 So David came to Saul and stood before him. And he loved him greatly, and he became his armorbearer. 22 Then Saul sent

16:7 [a]Septuagint reads *For God does not see as man sees;* Targum reads *It is not by the appearance of a man;* Vulgate reads *Nor do I judge according to the looks of a man*. **16:11** [a]Following Septuagint and Vulgate; Masoretic Text reads *turn around;* Targum and Syriac read *turn away*.

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 16:1–23

SITUATION

God sent Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint one of Jesse's sons as king. This new king would replace King Saul, who had failed to obey God.

OBSERVATION

God does not see or judge in the same way that humans do. People look at the outside appearance or qualifications, but God looks at the heart. He evaluates our inner disposition and character.

INSPIRATION

None were more shunned by their culture than the blind, the lame, the lepers, and the deaf. They had no place. No name. No value. Canker sores on the culture. Excess baggage on the side of the road. But those whom the people called trash, Jesus called treasures.

In my closet hangs a sweater that I seldom wear. It is too small. The sleeves are too short, the shoulders too tight. Some of the buttons are missing, and the thread is frazzled. I should throw that sweater away. I have no use for it. I'll never wear it again. Logic says I should clear out the space and get rid of the sweater.

That's what logic says.

But love won't let me.

Something unique about the sweater makes me keep it. What is unusual about it? For one thing, it has no label. Nowhere on the garment will you find a tag that reads, "Made In Taiwan," or "Wash in Cold Water." It has no tag because it wasn't made in a factory. It has no label because it wasn't produced

on an assembly line. It isn't the product of a nameless employee earning a living. It's the creation of a devoted mother expressing her love.

That sweater is unique. One of a kind. It can't be replaced. Each strand was chosen with care. Each thread was selected with affection.

And though the sweater has lost all of its use, it has lost none of its value. It is valuable not because of its function, but because of its maker.

That must have been what the psalmist had in mind when he wrote, "You knit me together in my mother's womb."

Think on those words. You were knitted together. You aren't an accident. You weren't mass produced. You aren't an assembly-line product. You were deliberately planned, specifically gifted, and lovingly positioned on this earth by the Master Craftsman.

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

In a society that has little room for second fiddles, that's good news. In a culture where the door of opportunity opens only once and then slams shut, that is a revelation. In a system that ranks the value of a human by the figures of his salary or the shape of her legs . . . let me tell you something: Jesus' plan is a reason for joy! Jesus told John that a new kingdom was coming—a kingdom where people have value not because of what they do, but because of whose they are.

(From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

to Jesse, saying, "Please let David stand before me, for he has found favor in my sight." 23 And so it was, whenever the spirit from God was upon Saul, that David would take a harp and play *it* with his hand. Then Saul would become refreshed and well, and the distressing spirit would depart from him.

David and Goliath

17 Now the Philistines gathered their armies together to battle, and were gathered at Sochoh, which *belongs* to Judah; they encamped between Sochoh and Azekah, in Ephes Dammim. 2 And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and they encamped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up in battle array against the Philistines. 3 The Philistines stood on a mountain on one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side, with a valley between them.

4 And a champion went out from the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, from Gath, whose height *was* six cubits and a span. 5 *He had* a bronze helmet on his head, and he *was* armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat *was* five thousand shekels of bronze. 6 And *he had* bronze armor on his legs and a bronze javelin between his shoulders. 7 Now the staff of his spear *was* like a weaver's beam, and his iron spearhead *weighed* six hundred shekels; and a shield-bearer went before him. 8 Then he stood and cried out to the armies of Israel, and said to them, "Why have you come out to line up for battle? *Am* I not a Philistine, and you the servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. 9 If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us." 10 And the Philistine said, "I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together." 11 When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

12 Now David *was* the son of that Ephrathite of Bethlehem Judah, whose name *was* Jesse, and who had eight sons. And the man was old, advanced *in years,* in the days of Saul. 13 The three oldest sons of Jesse had gone to follow Saul to the battle. The names of his three sons who went to the battle *were* Eliab the firstborn, next to him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. 14 David *was* the youngest. And the three oldest followed Saul. 15 But David occasionally went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem.

16 And the Philistine drew near and presented himself forty days, morning and evening.

17 Then Jesse said to his son David, "Take now for your brothers an ephah of this dried *grain* and these ten loaves, and run to your brothers at the camp. 18 And carry these ten cheeses to the captain of *their* thousand, and see how your brothers fare, and bring back news of them." 19 Now Saul and they and all the men of Israel *were* in the Valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines.

20 So David rose early in the morning, left the sheep with a keeper, and took *the things* and went as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the camp as the army was going out to the fight and shouting for the battle. 21 For Israel and the Philistines had drawn up in battle array, army against army. 22 And David left his supplies in the hand of the supply keeper, ran to the army, and came and greeted

his brothers. 23 Then as he talked with them, there was the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, coming up from the armies of the Philistines; and he spoke according to the same words. So David heard *them.* 24 And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were dreadfully afraid. 25 So the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel; and it shall be *that* the man who kills him the king will enrich with great riches, will give him his daughter, and give his father's house exemption *from taxes* in Israel."

26 Then David spoke to the men who stood by him, saying, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who *is* this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

27 And the people answered him in this manner, saying, "So shall it be done for the man who kills him."

28 Now Eliab his oldest brother heard when he spoke to the men; and Eliab's anger was aroused against David, and he said, "Why did you come down here? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your pride and the insolence of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle."

29 And David said, "What have I done now? *Is* there not a cause?" 30 Then he turned from him toward another and said the same thing; and these people answered him as the first ones *did.*

31 Now when the words which David spoke were heard, they reported *them* to Saul; and he sent for him. 32 Then David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine."

33 And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you *are* a youth, and he a man of war from his youth."

34 But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, 35 I went out after it and struck it, and delivered *the lamb* from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught *it* by its beard, and struck and killed it. 36 Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God." 37 Moreover David said, "The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

And Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you!"

38 So Saul clothed David with his armor, and he put a bronze helmet on his head; he also clothed him with a coat of mail. 39 David fastened his sword to his armor and tried to walk, for he had not tested *them.* And David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these, for I have not tested *them.*" So David took them off.

40 Then he took his staff in his hand; and he chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag, in a pouch which he had, and his sling was in his hand. And he drew near to the Philistine. 41 So the Philistine came, and began drawing near to David, and the man who bore the shield *went* before him. 42 And when the Philistine looked about and saw David, he disdained him; for he was *only* a youth, ruddy and good-looking. 43 So the Philistine

APPLICATION
We often pick leaders by credentials rather than character. Next time you must select a leader, ask questions about character—not about résumé. Spend more time cultivating your character than your references.

EXPLORATION
God's Insight—Exodus 4:10–16; 1 Chronicles 28:9; Jeremiah 1:6–8; 17:9, 10.

Life LESSONS

1 Samuel 17:1–58

SITUATION
Earlier passages confirmed that Goliath came from an area that had many tall people. Even though it wasn't unusual for two armies to send out their best soldiers to fight in place of an all-out war, the Israelites had no one to compare to nine-foot-tall Goliath.

OBSERVATION
Though the Israelites feared losing to Goliath, they forgot who had called them to enter the Promised Land. Though they had seen God fight for them in many previous battles, they neglected to trust Him in this one. David's focus was not on the size of the enemy, but on God.

INSPIRATION
There are certain things anyone knows not to do. . . . You don't fight a lion with a toothpick. You don't sneeze into the wind. You don't go bear hunting with a cork gun. And you don't send a shepherd boy to battle a giant.

You don't, that is, unless you are out of options. Saul was. And it is when we are out of options that we

are most ready for God's surprises.

Was Saul ever surprised!

The king tried to give David some equipment. "What do you want, boy? Shield? Sword? Grenades? Rifles? A helicopter? We'll make a Rambo out of you."

David had something else in mind. Five smooth stones and an ordinary leather sling.

The soldiers gasped. Saul sighed. Goliath jeered. David swung. And God made His point. "Anyone who underestimates what God can do with the ordinary has rocks in his head." (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What battle are you facing this week? Even if it's bigger than you can handle, it's not bigger than God can handle. Proceed with His backing.

EXPLORATION

Don't Be Afraid—Deuteronomy 31:6; Isaiah 46:4; Daniel 6:27; Matthew 10:28–31; John 14:27; 2 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 4:6; Hebrews 13:6.

We, like David, have two choices: flee or face the giant.

—Max Lucado (Facing Your Giants)

said to David, "*Am* I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. 44 And the Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!"

45 Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. 46 This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. 47 Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle *is* the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands."

48 So it was, when the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, that David hurried and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. 49 Then David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone; and he slung *it* and struck the Philistine in his forehead, so that the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the earth. 50 So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. But *there was* no sword in the hand of David. 51 Therefore David ran and stood over the Philistine, took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and cut off his head with it.

And when the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. 52 Now the men of Israel and Judah arose and shouted, and pursued the Philistines as far as the entrance of the valley[a] and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell along the road to Shaaraim, even as far as Gath and Ekron. 53 Then the children of Israel returned from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their tents. 54 And David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem, but he put his armor in his tent.

55 When Saul saw David going out against the Philistine, he said to Abner, the commander of the army, "Abner, whose son *is* this youth?"

And Abner said, "As your soul lives, O king, I do not know."

56 So the king said, "Inquire whose son this young man *is*."

57 Then, as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand. 58 And Saul said to him, "Whose son *are* you, young man?"

So David answered, "*I am* the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite."

Saul Resents David

18 Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. 2 Saul took him that day, and would not let him go home to his father's house anymore. 3 Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. 4 And Jonathan took

17:52 [a] Following Masoretic Text, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *Gath*.

off the robe that *was* on him and gave it to David, with his armor, even to his sword and his bow and his belt.

5 So David went out wherever Saul sent him, *and* behaved wisely. And Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants. 6 Now it had happened as they were coming *home,* when David was returning from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women had come out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy, and with musical instruments. 7 So the women sang as they danced, and said:

"Saul has slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands."

8 Then Saul was very angry, and the saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed *only* thousands. Now *what* more can he have but the kingdom?" 9 So Saul eyed David from that day forward.

10 And it happened on the next day that the distressing spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied inside the house. So David played *music* with his hand, as at other times; but *there was* a spear in Saul's hand. 11 And Saul cast the spear, for he said, "I will pin David to the wall!" But David escaped his presence twice.

12 Now Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, but had departed from Saul. 13 Therefore Saul removed him from his presence, and made him his captain over a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people. 14 And David behaved wisely in all his ways, and the Lord *was* with him. 15 Therefore, when Saul saw that he behaved very wisely, he was afraid of him. 16 But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them.

David Marries Michal

17 Then Saul said to David, "Here is my older daughter Merab; I will give her to you as a wife. Only be valiant for me, and fight the Lord's battles." For Saul thought, "Let my hand not be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him."

18 So David said to Saul, "Who *am* I, and what *is* my life *or* my father's family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?" 19 But it happened at the time when Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David, that she was given to Adriel the Meholathite as a wife.

20 Now Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. 21 So Saul said, "I will give her to him, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." Therefore Saul said to David a second time, "You shall be my son-in-law today."

22 And Saul commanded his servants, "Communicate with David secretly, and say, 'Look, the king has delight in you, and all his servants love you. Now therefore, become the king's son-in-law.'"

23 So Saul's servants spoke those words in the hearing of David. And David said, "Does it seem to you *a* light *thing* to be a king's son-in-law, seeing I *am* a poor and lightly esteemed man?" 24 And the servants of Saul told him, saying, "In this manner David spoke."

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 18:1—20:42

SITUATION

Though Saul was king and his son Jonathan first in line for succession, God had appointed David as the next king of Israel. David waited for God's timing and did not try to dethrone Saul or eliminate the heir to the throne. Saul's goal was to protect his family line at any cost.

OBSERVATION

In this tender story, Jonathan protects David. In hugging David, Jonathan was saying that his own bond of loyalty with David would never be broken.

INSPIRATION

The touch did not heal the disease, you know. Matthew is careful to mention that it was the pronouncement and not the touch of Christ that cured the condition. "Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' Immediately his leprosy was cleansed" (Matthew 8:3).

The infection was banished by a word from Jesus.

The loneliness, however, was treated by a touch from Jesus.

Oh, the power of a godly touch. Haven't you known it? The doctor who treated you, or the teacher who dried your tears? Was there a hand holding yours at a funeral? Another on your shoulder during a trial? A handshake of welcome at a new job? A pastoral prayer for healing? Haven't we known the power of a godly touch?

Can't we offer the same? Many of you already

do. Some of you have the master touch of the Physician Himself. You use your hands to pray over the sick and minister to the weak. If you aren't touching them personally, your hands are writing letters, dialing phones, baking pies. You have learned the power of a touch.

But others of us tend to forget. Our hearts are good; it's just that our memories are bad. We forget how significant one touch can be. We fear saying the wrong thing or using the wrong tone or acting the wrong way. So rather than do it incorrectly, we do nothing at all.

Aren't we glad Jesus didn't make the same mistake? If your fear of doing the wrong thing prevents you from doing anything, keep in mind the perspective of the lepers of the world. They aren't picky. They aren't finicky. They're just lonely. They are yearning for a godly touch.

Jesus touched the untouchables of the world. Will you do the same? (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

It's hard to imagine the affirmation and power that a simple hug or touch can do for another person. Are there lonely or depressed individuals you can reach out to this week? Encourage him or her in the Lord. Don't be afraid to show appropriate physical affection.

EXPLORATION

Encouragement—Acts 11:23; 13:15; 15:31, 32; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Timothy 4:2; Hebrews 3:13; 10:24, 25.

25 Then Saul said, "Thus you shall say to David: 'The king does not
desire any dowry but one hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to take
vengeance on the king's enemies.' " But Saul thought to make David
fall by the hand of the Philistines. 26 So when his servants told David
these words, it pleased David well to become the king's son-in-law.
Now the days had not expired; 27 therefore David arose and went,
he and his men, and killed two hundred men of the Philistines. And
David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full count to the
king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. Then Saul gave him
Michal his daughter as a wife.

28 Thus Saul saw and knew that the Lord *was* with David, and *that*
Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him; 29 and Saul was still more afraid of
David. So Saul became David's enemy continually. 30 Then the princes
of the Philistines went out *to war.* And so it was, whenever they went
out, *that* David behaved more wisely than all the servants of Saul, so
that his name became highly esteemed.

Saul Persecutes David

19 Now Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants,
that they should kill David; but Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted
greatly in David. 2 So Jonathan told David, saying, "My father Saul
seeks to kill you. Therefore please be on your guard until morning,
and stay in a secret *place* and hide. 3 And I will go out and stand beside
my father in the field where you *are,* and I will speak with my father
about you. Then what I observe, I will tell you."

4 Thus Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father, and said to
him, "Let not the king sin against his servant, against David, because
he has not sinned against you, and because his works *have been*
very good toward you. 5 For he took his life in his hands and killed
the Philistine, and the Lord brought about a great deliverance for all
Israel. You saw *it* and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent
blood, to kill David without a cause?"

6 So Saul heeded the voice of Jonathan, and Saul swore, "*As* the
Lord lives, he shall not be killed." 7 Then Jonathan called David, and
Jonathan told him all these things. So Jonathan brought David to Saul,
and he was in his presence as in times past.

8 And there was war again; and David went out and fought with the
Philistines, and struck them with a mighty blow, and they fled from
him.

9 Now the distressing spirit from the Lord came upon Saul as he sat
in his house with his spear in his hand. And David was playing *music*
with *his* hand. 10 Then Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the
spear, but he slipped away from Saul's presence; and he drove the
spear into the wall. So David fled and escaped that night.

11 Saul also sent messengers to David's house to watch him and to
kill him in the morning. And Michal, David's wife, told him, saying,
"If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed."
12 So Michal let David down through a window. And he went and fled
and escaped. 13 And Michal took an image and laid *it* in the bed, put
a cover of goats' *hair* for his head, and covered *it* with clothes. 14 So
when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, "He *is* sick."

15 Then Saul sent the messengers *back* to see David, saying, "Bring

him up to me in the bed, that I may kill him."
16 And when the messengers had come in,
there was the image in the bed, with a cover
of goats' *hair* for his head. 17 Then Saul said
to Michal, "Why have you deceived me like
this, and sent my enemy away, so that he has
escaped?"

And Michal answered Saul, "He said to me,
'Let me go! Why should I kill you?' "

18 So David fled and escaped, and went
to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that
Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel
went and stayed in Naioth. 19 Now it was told
Saul, saying, "Take note, David *is* at Naioth
in Ramah!" 20 Then Saul sent messengers to
take David. And when they saw the group of
prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing
as leader over them, the Spirit of God came
upon the messengers of Saul, and they also
prophesied. 21 And when Saul was told, he
sent other messengers, and they prophesied
likewise. Then Saul sent messengers again the
third time, and they prophesied also. 22 Then
he also went to Ramah, and came to the great
well that *is* at Sechu. So he asked, and said,
"Where *are* Samuel and David?"

And *someone* said, "Indeed *they are* at
Naioth in Ramah." 23 So he went there to
Naioth in Ramah. Then the Spirit of God was
upon him also, and he went on and proph-
esied until he came to Naioth in Ramah.
24 And he also stripped off his clothes and
prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and
lay down naked all that day and all that night.
Therefore they say, "*Is* Saul also among the
prophets?"[a]

Jonathan's Loyalty to David

20 Then David fled from Naioth in Ramah,
and went and said to Jonathan, "What
have I done? What *is* my iniquity, and what *is*
my sin before your father, that he seeks my
life?"

2 So Jonathan said to him, "By no means!
You shall not die! Indeed, my father will do
nothing either great or small without first tell-
ing me. And why should my father hide this
thing from me? It *is* not *so!*"

3 Then David took an oath again, and said,
"Your father certainly knows that I have found
favor in your eyes, and he has said, 'Do not let
Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved.' But
truly, *as* the Lord lives and *as* your soul lives,
there is but a step between me and death."

4 So Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you
yourself desire, I will do *it* for you."

5 And David said to Jonathan, "Indeed
tomorrow *is* the New Moon, and I should not
fail to sit with the king to eat. But let me go,
that I may hide in the field until the third *day*
at evening. 6 If your father misses me at all,
then say, 'David earnestly asked *permission*
of me that he might run over to Bethlehem,
his city, for *there is* a yearly sacrifice there for
all the family.' 7 If he says thus: '*It is* well,' your
servant will be safe. But if he is very angry, be
sure that evil is determined by him. 8 There-
fore you shall deal kindly with your servant,
for you have brought your servant into a
covenant of the Lord with you. Nevertheless,
if there is iniquity in me, kill me yourself, for
why should you bring me to your father?"

9 But Jonathan said, "Far be it from you! For
if I knew certainly that evil was determined by
my father to come upon you, then would I not
tell you?"

10 Then David said to Jonathan, "Who will
tell me, or what *if* your father answers you
roughly?"

11 And Jonathan said to David, "Come, let
us go out into the field." So both of them
went out into the field. 12 Then Jonathan said
to David: "The Lord God of Israel *is witness!*
When I have sounded out my father sometime
tomorrow, *or* the third *day,* and indeed *there is*
good toward David, and I do not send to you
and tell you, 13 may the Lord do so and much
more to Jonathan. But if it pleases my father
to do you evil, then I will report it to you and
send you away, that you may go in safety. And
the Lord be with you as He has been with my
father. 14 And you shall not only show me the
kindness of the Lord while I still live, that I
may not die; 15 but you shall not cut off your
kindness from my house forever, no, not when
the Lord has cut off every one of the enemies
of David from the face of the earth." 16 So
Jonathan made *a covenant* with the house of
David, *saying,* "Let the Lord require *it* at the
hand of David's enemies."

19:24 [a] Compare 1 Samuel 10:12

17 Now Jonathan again caused David to
vow, because he loved him; for he loved him
as he loved his own soul. 18 Then Jonathan
said to David, "Tomorrow *is* the New Moon;
and you will be missed, because your seat will
be empty. 19 And *when* you have stayed three
days, go down quickly and come to the place
where you hid on the day of the deed; and
remain by the stone Ezel. 20 Then I will shoot
three arrows to the side, as though I shot at
a target; 21 and there I will send a lad, *saying,*
'Go, find the arrows.' If I expressly say to the
lad, 'Look, the arrows *are* on this side of you;
get them and come'—then, as the Lord lives,
there is safety for you and no harm. 22 But if I
say thus to the young man, 'Look, the arrows
are beyond you'—go your way, for the Lord
has sent you away. 23 And as for the matter
which you and I have spoken of, indeed the
Lord *be* between you and me forever."

24 Then David hid in the field. And when the
New Moon had come, the king sat down to eat
the feast. 25 Now the king sat on his seat, as at
other times, on a seat by the wall. And Jona-
than arose,[a] and Abner sat by Saul's side, but
David's place was empty. 26 Nevertheless Saul
did not say anything that day, for he thought,
"Something has happened to him; he *is* unclean,
surely he *is* unclean." 27 And it happened the
next day, the second *day* of the month, that
David's place was empty. And Saul said to Jon-
athan his son, "Why has the son of Jesse not
come to eat, either yesterday or today?"

28 So Jonathan answered Saul, "David ear-
nestly asked *permission* of me *to go* to Beth-
lehem. 29 And he said, 'Please let me go, for
our family has a sacrifice in the city, and
my brother has commanded me *to be there.*
And now, if I have found favor in your eyes,
please let me get away and see my brothers.'
Therefore he has not come to the king's table."

30 Then Saul's anger was aroused against
Jonathan, and he said to him, "You son of a
perverse, rebellious *woman!* Do I not know
that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your
own shame and to the shame of your mother's
nakedness? 31 For as long as the son of Jesse
lives on the earth, you shall not be established,
nor your kingdom. Now therefore, send and
bring him to me, for he shall surely die."

32 And Jonathan answered Saul his father,
and said to him, "Why should he be killed?
What has he done?" 33 Then Saul cast a spear
at him to kill him, by which Jonathan knew
that it was determined by his father to kill
David.

34 So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce
anger, and ate no food the second day of the
month, for he was grieved for David, because
his father had treated him shamefully.

35 And so it was, in the morning, that Jon-
athan went out into the field at the time
appointed with David, and a little lad *was* with
him. 36 Then he said to his lad, "Now run, find
the arrows which I shoot." As the lad ran, he
shot an arrow beyond him. 37 When the lad
had come to the place where the arrow was
which Jonathan had shot, Jonathan cried out
after the lad and said, "*Is* not the arrow beyond
you?" 38 And Jonathan cried out after the lad,
"Make haste, hurry, do not delay!" So Jona-
than's lad gathered up the arrows and came
back to his master. 39 But the lad did not know
anything. Only Jonathan and David knew of
the matter. 40 Then Jonathan gave his weapons
to his lad, and said to him, "Go, carry *them* to
the city."

41 As soon as the lad had gone, David arose
from *a place* toward the south, fell on his face
to the ground, and bowed down three times.
And they kissed one another; and they wept
together, but David more so. 42 Then Jonathan
said to David, "Go in peace, since we have
both sworn in the name of the Lord, saying,
'May the Lord be between you and me, and
between your descendants and my descen-
dants, forever.'" So he arose and departed,
and Jonathan went into the city.

David and the Holy Bread

21 Now David came to Nob, to Ahimelech
the priest. And Ahimelech was afraid
when he met David, and said to him, "Why *are*
you alone, and no one is with you?"

2 So David said to Ahimelech the priest,
"The king has ordered me on some business,
and said to me, 'Do not let anyone know any-
thing about the business on which I send you,
or what I have commanded you.' And I have
directed *my* young men to such and such a

20:25 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *he sat across from Jonathan.*

place. 3 Now therefore, what have you on hand? Give *me* five *loaves of* bread in my hand, or whatever can be found."

4 And the priest answered David and said, "*There is* no common bread on hand; but there is holy bread, if the young men have at least kept themselves from women."

5 Then David answered the priest, and said to him, "Truly, women *have been* kept from us about three days since I came out. And the vessels of the young men are holy, and *the bread is* in effect common, even though it was consecrated in the vessel this day."

6 So the priest gave him holy *bread;* for there was no bread there but the showbread which had been taken from before the Lord, in order to put hot bread *in its place* on the day when it was taken away.

7 Now a certain man of the servants of Saul *was* there that day, detained before the Lord. And his name *was* Doeg, an Edomite, the chief of the herdsmen who *belonged* to Saul.

8 And David said to Ahimelech, "Is there not here on hand a spear or a sword? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste."

9 So the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, there it is, wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take *it.* For *there is* no other except that one here."

And David said, "*There is* none like it; give it to me."

David Flees to Gath

10 Then David arose and fled that day from before Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath. 11 And the servants of Achish said to him, "*Is* this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of him to one another in dances, saying:

'Saul has slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands'?"[a]

12 Now David took these words to heart, and was very much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. 13 So he changed his behavior before them, pretended madness in their hands, scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard. 14 Then Achish said to his servants, "Look, you see the man is insane. Why have you brought him to me? 15 Have I need of madmen, that you have brought this *fellow* to play the madman in my presence? Shall this *fellow* come into my house?"

David's Four Hundred Men

22 David therefore departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. So when his brothers and all his father's house heard *it,* they went down there to him. 2 And everyone *who was* in distress, everyone who *was* in debt, and everyone *who was* discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him.

3 Then David went from there to Mizpah of Moab; and he said to

21:11 [a] Compare 1 Samuel 18:7

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 21:1—22:23

SITUATION

David, pursued by Saul, sought rest at the town of Nob. Ahimelech the priest cared for David and his men. When Saul discovered David had been at Nob, he condemned the priests who aided David. Fearful of a conspiracy against himself, Saul ordered eighty-five priests killed and the town of Nob destroyed. Only one son of Ahimelech escaped to join David.

OBSERVATION

David's faith has slipped as he runs from Saul. His desperation becomes evident when he meets the priest Ahimelech and lies to him.

INSPIRATION

[David's] arrival stirs understandable fear in Ahimelech. He "was afraid when he met David" (1 Samuel 21:1). What brings a warrior to Nob? What does the son-in-law of the king want?

David buys assurance by lying to the priest (see 21:2, 3). Desperate, David resorts to mistruth. This surprises us. So far David has been stellar, spotless, stainless—Snow White in a cast of warty-nosed witches. He stayed calm when his brothers snapped; he remained strong when Goliath roared; he kept his cool when Saul lost his.

But now he lies like a mob don at confession. Blatantly. Convincingly. Saul hasn't sent him on a mission. He's not on secret royal business. He's a fugitive. Unfairly, yes. But a fugitive nonetheless. And he lies about it.

the king of Moab, "Please let my father and mother come here with you, till I know what God will do for me." 4 So he brought them before the king of Moab, and they dwelt with him all the time that David was in the stronghold.

5 Now the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not stay in the stronghold; depart, and go to the land of Judah." So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth.

Saul Murders the Priests

6 When Saul heard that David and the men who *were* with him had been discovered—now Saul was staying in Gibeah under a tamarisk tree in Ramah, with his spear in his hand, and all his servants standing about him— 7 then Saul said to his servants who stood about him, "Hear now, you Benjamites! Will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, *and* make you all captains of thousands and captains of hundreds? 8 All of you have conspired against me, and *there is* no one who reveals to me that my son has made a covenant with the son of Jesse; and *there is* not one of you who is sorry for me or reveals to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as *it is* this day."

9 Then answered Doeg the Edomite, who was set over the servants of Saul, and said, "I saw the son of Jesse going to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. 10 And he inquired of the Lord for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

11 So the king sent to call Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's house, the priests who *were* in Nob. And they all came to the king. 12 And Saul said, "Hear now, son of Ahitub!"

He answered, "Here I am, my lord."

13 Then Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, in that you have given him bread and a sword, and have inquired of God for him, that he should rise against me, to lie in wait, as it is this day?"

14 So Ahimelech answered the king and said, "And who among all your servants *is as* faithful as David, who is the king's son-in-law, who goes at your bidding, and is honorable in your house? 15 Did I then begin to inquire of God for him? Far be it from me! Let not the king impute anything to his servant, *or* to any in the house of my father. For your servant knew nothing of all this, little or much."

16 And the king said, "You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house!" 17 Then the king said to the guards who stood about him, "Turn and kill the priests of the Lord, because their hand also *is* with David, and because they knew when he fled and did not tell it to me." But the servants of the king would not lift their hands to strike the priests of the Lord. 18 And the king said to Doeg, "You turn and kill the priests!" So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck the priests, and killed on that day eighty-five men who wore a linen ephod. 19 Also Nob, the city of the priests, he struck with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and nursing infants, oxen and donkeys and sheep—with the edge of the sword.

20 Now one of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David. 21 And Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the Lord's priests. 22 So David said to Abiathar, "I knew

The priest does not question David. He has no reason to doubt the skedaddler. He just has no resources with which to help him. The priest has bread, not common bread, but holy bread. The bread of the Presence. Each Sabbath the priest placed twelve loaves of wheat bread on the table as an offering to God. After a week, and only after a week, the priests, and only the priests, could eat the bread. (As if anyone wants week-old bread.) Nonetheless, Ahimelech's options and clerical collar shrink.

David is no priest. And the bread has just been placed on the altar. What's Ahimelech to do? Distribute the bread and violate the law? Keep the bread and ignore David's hunger? The priest looks for a loophole: "There is no common bread on hand; but there is holy bread, if the young men have at least kept themselves from women" (21:4).

Ahimelech wants to know if David and his men have been behaving. Blame it on the smell of fresh bread, but David responds with lie number two and a theological two-step. His men haven't laid eyes, much less hands, on a girl. And the holy bread? He puts an arm around the priest, walks him toward the altar, and suggests, *You know, Ahim, old boy,* "the bread is in effect common, even though it was sanctified in the vessel this day" (21:5). Even holy loaves, David reasons, are still oven baked and wheat based. Bread is bread, right?

David, what are you doing? Is lying not enough? Now you're playing loose with Scripture and putting the soft sell on the preacher? . . .

that day, when Doeg the Edomite *was* there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have caused *the death* of all the persons of your father's house. 23 Stay with me; do not fear. For he who seeks my life seeks your life, but with me you *shall be* safe."

David Saves the City of Keilah

23 Then they told David, saying, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah, and they are robbing the threshing floors."

2 Therefore David inquired of the Lord, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?"

And the Lord said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines, and save Keilah."

3 But David's men said to him, "Look, we are afraid here in Judah. How much more then if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?" 4 Then David inquired of the Lord once again.

And the Lord answered him and said, "Arise, go down to Keilah. For I will deliver the Philistines into your hand." 5 And David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines, struck them with a mighty blow, and took away their livestock. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah.

6 Now it happened, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, *that* he went down *with* an ephod in his hand.

7 And Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah. So Saul said, "God has delivered him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars." 8 Then Saul called all the people together for war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men.

9 When David knew that Saul plotted evil against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." 10 Then David said, "O Lord God of Israel, Your servant has certainly heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah to destroy the city for my sake. 11 Will the men of Keilah deliver me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as Your servant has heard? O Lord God of Israel, I pray, tell Your servant."

And the Lord said, "He will come down."

12 Then David said, "Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul?"

And the Lord said, "They will deliver *you*."

13 So David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah and went wherever they could go. Then it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah; so he halted the expedition.

David in Wilderness Strongholds

14 And David stayed in strongholds in the wilderness, and remained in the mountains in the Wilderness of Ziph. Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand. 15 So David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. And David *was* in the Wilderness of Ziph in a forest.[a] 16 Then Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David in the woods and strengthened his hand in God. 17 And he said to him, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Even my father Saul knows that." 18 So the two of them made a covenant before the Lord. And David stayed in the woods, and Jonathan went to his own house.

23:15 [a] Or *in Horesh*

David's faith is wavering. Not too long ago the shepherd's sling was all he needed. Now the one who refused the armor and sword of Saul requests a weapon from the priest. What has happened to our hero?

Simple. He's lost his God-focus. Goliath is on the big screen of David's imagination. As a result, desperation has set in. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Sometimes our desperation or fear causes us to act rashly and to displease God. Such acts separate us from our eternal Father and strain our relationship with Him. What did you fear or get angry about yesterday? Repent and ask for God's forgiveness so that you do not act in a manner unworthy of Him or set in motion consequences that you cannot control.

EXPLORATION
Separation—Isaiah 1:4–9; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–9; Revelation 14:11.

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 23:1—24:22

SITUATION
David, hotly pursued by King Saul, proved his honorable motivations by *not* killing Saul in the cave. Although his own men pressured him, he would not kill God's king.

OBSERVATION
By maintaining right priorities in life, we can withstand the fiery trials and temptations.

INSPIRATION
David models how to give

grace to the person who gives nothing but grief.

Saul signals for his men to stop. They do. Three thousand soldiers cease their marching as their king dismounts and walks up the mountainside.

The region of En Gedi simmers in the brick-oven heat. Sunrays strike daggerlike on the soldiers' necks. Lizards lie behind rocks. Scorpions linger in the dirt. And snakes, like Saul, seek rest in the cave.

Saul enters the cave "to relieve himself. Now David and his men were hiding far back in the cave" (1 Samuel 24:3 NCV). With eyes dulled from the desert sun, the king fails to notice the silent figures who line the walls.

But don't you know they see him. As Saul heeds nature's call, dozens of eyes widen. Their minds race, and hands reach for daggers. One thrust of the blade will bring Saul's tyranny and their running to an end. But David signals for his men to hold back. He edges along the wall, unsheathes his knife, and cuts not the flesh but the robe of Saul. David then creeps back into the recesses of the cave.

David's men can't believe what their leader has done. Neither can David. Yet his feelings don't reflect theirs. They think he has done too little; he thinks he has done too much. Rather than gloat, he regrets.

Later David felt guilty because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. He said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord" (24:6)

Saul exits the cave, and David soon follows. He lifts the garment corner and, in

19 Then the Ziphites came up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is David
not hiding with us in strongholds in the woods, in the hill of Hachilah,
which *is* on the south of Jeshimon? 20 Now therefore, O king, come
down according to all the desire of your soul to come down; and our
part *shall be* to deliver him into the king's hand."
21 And Saul said, "Blessed *are* you of the Lord, for you have compas-
sion on me. 22 Please go and find out for sure, and see the place where
his hideout is, *and* who has seen him there. For I am told he is very
crafty. 23 See therefore, and take knowledge of all the lurking places
where he hides; and come back to me with certainty, and I will go
with you. And it shall be, if he is in the land, that I will search for him
throughout all the clans[a] of Judah."
24 So they arose and went to Ziph before Saul. But David and
his men *were* in the Wilderness of Maon, in the plain on the south
of Jeshimon. 25 When Saul and his men went to seek *him,* they
told David. Therefore he went down to the rock, and stayed in the
Wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard *that,* he pursued David in
the Wilderness of Maon. 26 Then Saul went on one side of the moun-
tain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. So
David made haste to get away from Saul, for Saul and his men were
encircling David and his men to take them.
27 But a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the
Philistines have invaded the land!" 28 Therefore Saul returned from
pursuing David, and went against the Philistines; so they called that
place the Rock of Escape.[a] 29 Then David went up from there and
dwelt in strongholds at En Gedi.

David Spares Saul

24 Now it happened, when Saul had returned from following the
Philistines, that it was told him, saying, "Take note! David *is* in
the Wilderness of En Gedi." 2 Then Saul took three thousand chosen
men from all Israel, and went to seek David and his men on the Rocks
of the Wild Goats. 3 So he came to the sheepfolds by the road, where
there *was* a cave; and Saul went in to attend to his needs. (David and
his men were staying in the recesses of the cave.) 4 Then the men of
David said to him, "This is the day of which the Lord said to you,
'Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do
to him as it seems good to you.'" And David arose and secretly cut
off a corner of Saul's robe. 5 Now it happened afterward that David's
heart troubled him because he had cut Saul's robe. 6 And he said to
his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master,
the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he *is*
the anointed of the Lord." 7 So David restrained his servants with *these*
words, and did not allow them to rise against Saul. And Saul got up
from the cave and went on *his* way.
8 David also arose afterward, went out of the cave, and called out
to Saul, saying, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind
him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed down. 9 And
David said to Saul: "Why do you listen to the words of men who say,
'Indeed David seeks your harm'? 10 Look, this day your eyes have seen

23:23 [a]Literally *thousands* **23:28** [a]Hebrew *Sela Hammahlekoth*

that the Lord delivered you today into my hand in the cave, and *someone* urged *me* to kill you. But *my eye* spared you, and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he *is* the Lord's anointed.' 11 Moreover, my father, see! Yes, see the corner of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the corner of your robe, and did not kill you, know and see that *there is* neither evil nor rebellion in my hand, and I have not sinned against you. Yet you hunt my life to take it. 12 Let the Lord judge between you and me, and let the Lord avenge me on you. But my hand shall not be against you. 13 As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Wickedness proceeds from the wicked.' But my hand shall not be against you. 14 After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom do you pursue? A dead dog? A flea? 15 Therefore let the Lord be judge, and judge between you and me, and see and plead my case, and deliver me out of your hand."

16 So it was, when David had finished speaking these words to Saul, that Saul said, "*Is* this your voice, my son David?" And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. 17 Then he said to David: "You *are* more righteous than I; for you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil. 18 And you have shown this day how you have dealt well with me; for when the Lord delivered me into your hand, you did not kill me. 19 For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him get away safely? Therefore may the Lord reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. 20 And now I know indeed that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. 21 Therefore swear now to me by the Lord that you will not cut off my descendants after me, and that you will not destroy my name from my father's house."

22 So David swore to Saul. And Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

Death of Samuel

25 Then Samuel died; and the Israelites gathered together and lamented for him, and buried him at his home in Ramah. And David arose and went down to the Wilderness of Paran.[a]

David and the Wife of Nabal

2 Now *there was* a man in Maon whose business *was* in Carmel, and the man *was* very rich. He had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. And he was shearing his sheep in Carmel. 3 The name of the man *was* Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. And *she was* a woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance; but the man *was* harsh and evil in *his* doings. He *was of the house of* Caleb.

4 When David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep, 5 David sent ten young men; and David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel, go to Nabal, and greet him in my name. 6 And thus you shall say to him who lives *in prosperity:* 'Peace *be* to you, peace to your house, and peace to all that you have! 7 Now I have heard that you have shearers. Your shepherds were with us, and we did not hurt them, nor was there anything missing from them all the while they were in Carmel. 8 Ask your young men, and they will tell you.

25:1 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *Maon*.

so many words, shouts, "I could have killed you, but I didn't."

Saul looks up, stunned, and wonders aloud, "If a man finds his enemy, will he let him get away safely?" (24:19).

David will. More than once. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Temptation need not get the better of us. Sometimes the world tells us to do certain actions, to focus on ourselves, to justify whatever we choose to do. God says to keep priorities right and follow Him always. Who are you listening to?

EXPLORATION
Peace—John 14:27; Galatians 5:22. Pressure—Philippians 3:12–14.

Life LESSONS

1 Samuel 25:1—26:25

SITUATION
As an outcast David lived by his wits in order to evade death at the hands of King Saul. During this time, David went to Nabal (a rich man he had aided in the past) for help. Nabal insulted David and his men, but God constrained David from killing Nabal. David then had an opportunity for the second time to kill Saul but respected his position instead.

OBSERVATION
Saul finally recognized that David was destined to be the leader of Israel. Apparently Saul never again tried to interfere with God's will for the kingdom (see 27:4).

INSPIRATION
What do you do when people mistreat you or those

you love? Does the fire of anger boil within you, with leaping flames consuming your emotions? Or do you reach somewhere, to some source of cool water and pull out a bucket of mercy—to free yourself? Is there any emotion that imprisons the soul more than the unwillingness to forgive?

Don't get on the roller coaster of resentment and anger. You be the one who says, "Yes, he mistreated me, but I am going to be like Christ. I'll be the one who says, 'Forgive them, Father, they don't know what they're doing.'"

The first step toward forgiveness is to see the other person as a human being, not as a source of hurt. That's how God treated us with mercy—He became one of us, He felt as we feel, He understood our frustrations. And as a result, when He hung on the Cross, He could look at those crucifying Him and ask God to forgive them.

When you forgive someone, you are as close to God as you will ever be, because in that forgiveness you are demonstrating the very heart of God, the merciful King. If you want to understand God, if you want to draw closer to Him, then forgive someone today. (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "Forgiveness")

APPLICATION

Because of our inherent self-centeredness, it is never easy to forgive some people, especially those who have hurt us deeply. To keep yourself from allowing a root of bitterness to take hold, forgive those who have hurt you. Ask the Lord to impress on you the grace He bestowed on you at Calvary.

Therefore let *my* young men find favor in your eyes, for we come on a feast day. Please give whatever comes to your hand to your servants and to your son David.'"

9 So when David's young men came, they spoke to Nabal according to all these words in the name of David, and waited.

10 Then Nabal answered David's servants, and said, "Who *is* David, and who *is* the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who break away each one from his master. 11 Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers, and give *it* to men when I do not know where they *are* from?"

12 So David's young men turned on their heels and went back; and they came and told him all these words. 13 Then David said to his men, "Every man gird on his sword." So every man girded on his sword, and David also girded on his sword. And about four hundred men went with David, and two hundred stayed with the supplies.

14 Now one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, "Look, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master; and he reviled them. 15 But the men *were* very good to us, and we were not hurt, nor did we miss anything as long as we accompanied them, when we were in the fields. 16 They were a wall to us both by night and day, all the time we were with them keeping the sheep. 17 Now therefore, know and consider what you will do, for harm is determined against our master and against all his household. For he *is such* a scoundrel[a] that *one* cannot speak to him."

18 Then Abigail made haste and took two hundred *loaves* of bread, two skins of wine, five sheep already dressed, five seahs of roasted *grain,* one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and loaded *them* on donkeys. 19 And she said to her servants, "Go on before me; see, I am coming after you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal.

20 So it was, *as* she rode on the donkey, that she went down under cover of the hill; and there were David and his men, coming down toward her, and she met them. 21 Now David had said, "Surely in vain I have protected all that this *fellow* has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that *belongs* to him. And he has repaid me evil for good. 22 May God do so, and more also, to the enemies of David, if I leave one male of all who *belong* to him by morning light."

23 Now when Abigail saw David, she dismounted quickly from the donkey, fell on her face before David, and bowed down to the ground. 24 So she fell at his feet and said: "On me, my lord, *on* me *let* this iniquity *be!* And please let your maidservant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your maidservant. 25 Please, let not my lord regard this scoundrel Nabal. For as his name *is,* so *is* he: Nabal[a] *is* his name, and folly *is* with him! But I, your maidservant, did not see the young men of my lord whom you sent. 26 Now therefore, my lord, *as* the Lord lives and *as* your soul lives, since the Lord has held you back from coming to bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hand, now then, let your enemies and those who seek harm for my lord be as Nabal. 27 And now this present which your maidservant has brought to my lord, let it be given to the young men who follow my lord.

25:17 [a]Literally *son of Belial* **25:25** [a]Literally *Fool*

28 Please forgive the trespass of your maidservant. For the Lord will
certainly make for my lord an enduring house, because my lord fights
the battles of the Lord, and evil is not found in you throughout your
days. 29 Yet a man has risen to pursue you and seek your life, but the
life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the Lord
your God; and the lives of your enemies He shall sling out, *as from* the
pocket of a sling. 30 And it shall come to pass, when the Lord has done
for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning
you, and has appointed you ruler over Israel, 31 that this will be no grief
to you, nor offense of heart to my lord, either that you have shed blood
without cause, or that my lord has avenged himself. But when the Lord
has dealt well with my lord, then remember your maidservant."

32 Then David said to Abigail: "Blessed *is* the Lord God of Israel,
who sent you this day to meet me! 33 And blessed *is* your advice and
blessed *are* you, because you have kept me this day from coming
to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand. 34 For
indeed, *as* the Lord God of Israel lives, who has kept me back from
hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, surely by
morning light no males would have been left to Nabal!" 35 So David
received from her hand what she had brought him, and said to her,
"Go up in peace to your house. See, I have heeded your voice and
respected your person."

36 Now Abigail went to Nabal, and there he was, holding a feast in
his house, like the feast of a king. And Nabal's heart *was* merry within
him, for he *was* very drunk; therefore she told him nothing, little or
much, until morning light. 37 So it was, in the morning, when the wine
had gone from Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his
heart died within him, and he became *like* a stone. 38 Then it hap-
pened, *after* about ten days, that the Lord struck Nabal, and he died.

39 So when David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Blessed *be*
the Lord, who has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of
Nabal, and has kept His servant from evil! For the Lord has returned
the wickedness of Nabal on his own head."

And David sent and proposed to Abigail, to take her as his wife.
40 When the servants of David had come to Abigail at Carmel, they
spoke to her saying, "David sent us to you, to ask you to become his
wife."

41 Then she arose, bowed her face to the earth, and said, "Here is
your maidservant, a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my
lord." 42 So Abigail rose in haste and rode on a donkey, attended by
five of her maidens; and she followed the messengers of David, and
became his wife. 43 David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel, and so both of
them were his wives.

44 But Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Palti[a] the
son of Laish, who *was* from Gallim.

David Spares Saul a Second Time

26 Now the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is David
not hiding in the hill of Hachilah, opposite Jeshimon?" 2 Then
Saul arose and went down to the Wilderness of Ziph, having three

25:44 [a] Spelled *Paltiel* in 2 Samuel 3:15

EXPLORATION
Forgiveness—Matthew 6:9–15; 2 Corinthians 2:10, 11; Ephesians 4:31, 32; Colossians 3:12–14.

Forgiveness is choosing to see your offender with different eyes.

—Max Lucado (Facing Your Giants)

thousand chosen men of Israel with him, to seek David in the Wilderness of Ziph. 3And Saul encamped in the hill of Hachilah, which *is* opposite Jeshimon, by the road. But David stayed in the wilderness, and he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness. 4David therefore sent out spies, and understood that Saul had indeed come.

5So David arose and came to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army. Now Saul lay within the camp, with the people encamped all around him. 6Then David answered, and said to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, brother of Joab, saying, "Who will go down with me to Saul in the camp?"

And Abishai said, "I will go down with you."

7So David and Abishai came to the people by night; and there Saul lay sleeping within the camp, with his spear stuck in the ground by his head. And Abner and the people lay all around him. 8Then Abishai said to David, "God has delivered your enemy into your

New Life In Christ

"Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?"—1 Samuel 26:9

Extending Grace to Others

When the church in Rome was debating whether to eat meat offered to idols, did Paul tell them to start two churches? One for the meat-eaters and one for the non-meat-eaters? No, on the contrary, he urged, "Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God" (Romans 15:7).

Is God asking us to do anything more than what He has already done? Hasn't He gone a long way in accepting us? If God can tolerate my mistakes, can't I tolerate the mistakes of others? If God allows me, with my foibles and failures, to call Him Father, shouldn't I extend the same grace to others? In fact, who can offer grace except those secure in the grip of grace? If God doesn't demand perfection, should I? . . .

God's ship is a grand vessel. Just as a ship has many rooms, so God's kingdom has room for many opinions. But just as a ship has one deck, God's kingdom has a common ground: the all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Will you pray with me for the day when Jesus' prayer is answered?

Will you pray with me for the day when the world is won because the church is one?

Will you pray with me for the day when we come out of our rooms and stand together to salute our captain? When clusters cease and the chorus commences?

Jesus' final prayer before the Cross was for the unity of His followers. Would He offer a prayer that couldn't be answered? I don't think so either. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

Question: Is there anyone in your church, family, or circle of friends to whom you need to show grace?

For more on "New Life in Christ," see page 500.

hand this day. Now therefore, please, let me strike him at once with the spear, right to the earth; and I will not *have to strike* him a second time!"

9 But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?" 10 David said furthermore, "*As* the Lord lives, the Lord shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish. 11 The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed. But please, take now the spear and the jug of water that *are* by his head, and let us go." 12 So David took the spear and the jug of water *by* Saul's head, and they got away; and no man saw or knew *it* or awoke. For they *were* all asleep, because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen on them.

13 Now David went over to the other side, and stood on the top of a hill afar off, a great distance *being* between them. 14 And David called out to the people and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, "Do you not answer, Abner?"

Then Abner answered and said, "Who *are* you, calling out to the king?"

15 So David said to Abner, "*Are* you not a man? And who *is* like you in Israel? Why then have you not guarded your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy your lord the king. 16 This thing that you have done *is* not good. *As* the Lord lives, you deserve to die, because you have not guarded your master, the Lord's anointed. And now see where the king's spear *is,* and the jug of water that *was* by his head."

17 Then Saul knew David's voice, and said, "*Is* that your voice, my son David?"

David said, "*It is* my voice, my lord, O king." 18 And he said, "Why does my lord thus pursue his servant? For what have I done, or what evil *is* in my hand? 19 Now therefore, please, let my lord the king hear the words of his servant: If the Lord has stirred you up against me, let Him accept an offering. But if *it is* the children of men, *may* they *be* cursed before the Lord, for they have driven me out this day from sharing in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.' 20 So now, do not let my blood fall to the earth before the face of the Lord. For the king of Israel has come out to seek a flea, as when one hunts a partridge in the mountains."

21 Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Return, my son David. For I will harm you no more, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Indeed I have played the fool and erred exceedingly."

22 And David answered and said, "Here is the king's spear. Let one of the young men come over and get it. 23 May the Lord repay every man *for* his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the Lord delivered you into *my* hand today, but I would not stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed. 24 And indeed, as your life was valued much this day in my eyes, so let my life be valued much in the eyes of the Lord, and let Him deliver me out of all tribulation."

25 Then Saul said to David, "*May* you *be* blessed, my son David! You shall both do great things and also still prevail."

So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place.

David Allied with the Philistines

27 And David said in his heart, "Now I shall perish someday by the hand of Saul. *There is* nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape to the land of the Philistines; and Saul will despair of me, to seek me anymore in any part of Israel. So I shall escape out of his hand." 2 Then David arose and went over with the six hundred men who *were* with him to Achish the son of Maoch, king of Gath. 3 So David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, each man with his household, *and* David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal's widow. 4 And it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath; so he sought him no more.

5 Then David said to Achish, "If I have now found favor in your eyes, let them give me a place in some town in the country, that I may dwell there. For why should your servant dwell in the royal city with you?" 6 So Achish gave him Ziklag that day. Therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. 7 Now the time that David dwelt in the country of the Philistines was one full year and four months.

8 And David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Girzites,[a] and the

27:8 [a] Or *Gezrites*

Amalekites. For those *nations* were the inhabitants of the land from of old, as you go to Shur, even as far as the land of Egypt. 9 Whenever David attacked the land, he left neither man nor woman alive, but took away the sheep, the oxen, the donkeys, the camels, and the apparel, and returned and came to Achish. 10 Then Achish would say, "Where have you made a raid today?" And David would say, "Against the southern *area* of Judah, or against the southern *area* of the Jerahmeelites, or against the southern *area* of the Kenites." 11 David would save neither man nor woman alive, to bring *news* to Gath, saying, "Lest they should inform on us, saying, 'Thus David did.'" And thus *was* his behavior all the time he dwelt in the country of the Philistines. 12 So Achish believed David, saying, "He has made his people Israel utterly abhor him; therefore he will be my servant forever."

28 Now it happened in those days that the Philistines gathered their armies together for war, to fight with Israel. And Achish said to David, "You assuredly know that you will go out with me to battle, you and your men."

2 So David said to Achish, "Surely you know what your servant can do."

And Achish said to David, "Therefore I will make you one of my chief guardians forever."

Saul Consults a Medium

3 Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had lamented for him and buried him in Ramah, in his own city. And Saul had put the mediums and the spiritists out of the land.

4 Then the Philistines gathered together, and came and encamped at Shunem. So Saul gathered all Israel together, and they encamped at Gilboa. 5 When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. 6 And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets.

7 Then Saul said to his servants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her."

And his servants said to him, "In fact, *there is* a woman who is a medium at En Dor."

8 So Saul disguised himself and put on other clothes, and he went, and two men with him; and they came to the woman by night. And he said, "Please conduct a seance for me, and bring up for me the one I shall name to you."

9 Then the woman said to him, "Look, you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the spiritists from the land. Why then do you lay a snare for my life, to cause me to die?"

10 And Saul swore to her by the Lord, saying, "*As* the Lord lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing."

11 Then the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?"

And he said, "Bring up Samuel for me."

12 When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman spoke to Saul, saying, "Why have you deceived me? For you *are* Saul!"

13 And the king said to her, "Do not be afraid. What did you see?"

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 27:1–12

SITUATION

David knew that his life was in jeopardy as long as Saul was alive. David's problems drove him so far from his homeland and heritage that he resorted to an alliance with the Philistine king who allowed him to survive as an outlaw.

OBSERVATION

Troubles and conflicts sometimes cause us to make accommodations we normally would find unacceptable.

INSPIRATION

Jesus said that out of the nature of the heart a man speaks. There's nothing like a good thump to reveal the nature of a heart. The true character of a person is seen not in momentary heroics, but in the thump-packed humdrum of day-to-day living. . . .

Begin by thanking God for thumps. I don't mean a half-hearted thank you. I mean a "rejoicing, jumping for joy" thank you from the bottom of your heart. Chances are that God is doing the thumping. And He's doing it for your own good. So every thump is a reminder that God is molding you. . . .

Beware of "thump-slump" times. Know your pressure periods. For me, Mondays are infamous for causing thump-slumps. Fridays can be just as bad. For all of us there are times during the week that we can anticipate an unusual amount of thumping. The best way to handle thump-slump times? Bolster yourself with extra prayer and don't give up.

And the woman said to Saul, "I saw a spirit[a] ascending out of the earth."

14 So he said to her, "What *is* his form?"

And she said, "An old man is coming up, and he *is* covered with a mantle." And Saul perceived that it *was* Samuel, and he stooped with *his* face to the ground and bowed down.

15 Now Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?"

And Saul answered, "I am deeply distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore, neither by prophets nor by dreams. Therefore I have called you, that you may reveal to me what I should do."

16 Then Samuel said: "So why do you ask me, seeing the Lord has departed from you and has become your enemy? 17 And the Lord has done for Himself[a] as He spoke by me. For the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David. 18 Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord nor execute His fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you this day. 19 Moreover the Lord will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons *will be* with me. The Lord will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines."

20 Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, and was dreadfully afraid because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all day or all night.

21 And the woman came to Saul and saw that he was severely troubled, and said to him, "Look, your maidservant has obeyed your voice, and I have put my life in my hands and heeded the words which you spoke to me. 22 Now therefore, please, heed also the voice of your maidservant, and let me set a piece of bread before you; and eat, that you may have strength when you go on *your* way."

23 But he refused and said, "I will not eat."

So his servants, together with the woman, urged him; and he heeded their voice. Then he arose from the ground and sat on the bed. 24 Now the woman had a fatted calf in the house, and she hastened to kill it. And she took flour and kneaded *it,* and baked unleavened bread from it. 25 So she brought *it* before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they rose and went away that night.

The Philistines Reject David

29 Then the Philistines gathered together all their armies at Aphek, and the Israelites encamped by a fountain which *is* in Jezreel. 2 And the lords of the Philistines passed in review by hundreds and by thousands, but David and his men passed in review at the rear with Achish. 3 Then the princes of the Philistines said, "What *are* these Hebrews *doing here?*"

And Achish said to the princes of the Philistines, "*Is* this not David, the servant of Saul king of Israel, who has been with me these days, or these years? And to this day I have found no fault in him since he defected *to me.*"

28:13 [a]Hebrew *elohim* **28:17** [a]Or *him,* that is, David

Remember, no thump is disastrous. All thumps work for good if we are living for and obeying God. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
The problems and obstacles we encounter in life are meant to cultivate faith, wisdom, patience, and confidence. We can profit from facing such obstacles as we allow God to shape our character through them. What events today could bring obstacles into your path? Ask God to increase your faith through those difficulties.

EXPLORATION
Trials—Job 23:10; Psalm 94:12; Proverbs 3:11; Romans 5:3; 1 Peter 1:7.

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 28:1–25

SITUATION
Saul discovered the Philistines massing for an attack. Unsure of his ability to lead the nation to victory, Saul turned to the witch of Endor for help.

OBSERVATION
Sometimes, in a struggle to solve our problems, we are tempted to turn away from God's help. Saul's life demonstrated the disastrous results of seeking help by means of spiritual forces other than God. The Holy Spirit had long abandoned him.

INSPIRATION
And, for some, the loss of mystery has led to the loss of majesty. The more we know, the less we believe. Strange, don't you think? Knowledge of the workings shouldn't negate wonder. Knowledge should stir wonder. Who has more

reason to worship than the astronomer who has seen the stars? Than the surgeon who has held a heart? Than the oceanographer who has pondered the depths? The more we know, the more we should be amazed.

Ironically, the more we know, the less we worship. We are more impressed with our discovery of the light switch than with the one who invented electricity. Call it cricket-brained logic. Rather than worship the Creator, we worship the creation (see Romans 1:25).

No wonder there is no wonder. We've figured it all out.

One of the most popular attractions at Disney World is the Jungle Cruise. People will spend forty-five minutes waiting in the Florida heat for the chance to board the boat and wind through snake-infested forests. They come for the thrills. You never know when a native will jump out of the trees or a crocodile will peek out of the water. The waterfalls drench you, the rainbow inspires you, and the baby elephants playing in the water amuse you.

It's quite a trip—the first few times. But after four or five runs down the river, it begins to lose its zest. I should know. During the three years I lived in Miami, Florida, I made nearly twenty trips to Orlando. I was single and owned a van and was a sucker for anybody who wanted to spend a day at the Magic Kingdom. By the eighth or ninth trip I could tell you the names of the guides and the jokes they told.

A couple of times I actually dozed off on the journey. The trail had lost its secrets. Ever wonder why people sleep in on Sunday mornings (whether in the bed or in the sanctuary)?

4 But the princes of the Philistines were angry with him; so the
princes of the Philistines said to him, "Make this fellow return, that
he may go back to the place which you have appointed for him, and
do not let him go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become
our adversary. For with what could he reconcile himself to his master,
if not with the heads of these men? 5 *Is* this not David, of whom they
sang to one another in dances, saying:

'Saul has slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands'?"[a]

6 Then Achish called David and said to him, "Surely, *as* the Lord
lives, you have been upright, and your going out and your coming
in with me in the army *is* good in my sight. For to this day I have not
found evil in you since the day of your coming to me. Nevertheless the
lords do not favor you. 7 Therefore return now, and go in peace, that
you may not displease the lords of the Philistines."

8 So David said to Achish, "But what have I done? And to this day
what have you found in your servant as long as I have been with you,
that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?"

9 Then Achish answered and said to David, "I know that you *are* as
good in my sight as an angel of God; nevertheless the princes of the
Philistines have said, 'He shall not go up with us to the battle.' 10 Now
therefore, rise early in the morning with your master's servants who
have come with you.[a] And as soon as you are up early in the morning
and have light, depart."

11 So David and his men rose early to depart in the morning, to
return to the land of the Philistines. And the Philistines went up to
Jezreel.

David's Conflict with the Amalekites

30 Now it happened, when David and his men came to Ziklag,
on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the South
and Ziklag, attacked Ziklag and burned it with fire, 2 and had taken
captive the women and those who *were* there, from small to great;
they did not kill anyone, but carried *them* away and went their way.
3 So David and his men came to the city, and there it was, burned with
fire; and their wives, their sons, and their daughters had been taken
captive. 4 Then David and the people who *were* with him lifted up
their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep. 5 And
David's two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the widow of
Nabal the Carmelite, had been taken captive. 6 Now David was greatly
distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of
all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters.
But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.

7 Then David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech's son, "Please
bring the ephod here to me." And Abiathar brought the ephod to

29:5 [a]Compare 1 Samuel 18:7 **29:10** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint adds *and go to the place which I have selected for you there; and set no bothersome word in your heart, for you are good before me. And rise on your way.*

David. 8 So David inquired of the Lord, saying, "Shall I pursue this troop? Shall I overtake them?"

And He answered him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake *them* and without fail recover *all*."

9 So David went, he and the six hundred men who *were* with him, and came to the Brook Besor, where those stayed who were left behind. 10 But David pursued, he and four hundred men; for two hundred stayed *behind,* who were so weary that they could not cross the Brook Besor.

11 Then they found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David; and they gave him bread and he ate, and they let him drink water. 12 And they gave him a piece of a cake of figs and two clusters of raisins. So when he had eaten, his strength came back to him; for he had eaten no bread nor drunk water for three days and three nights. 13 Then David said to him, "To whom do you *belong,* and where *are* you from?"

And he said, "I *am* a young man from Egypt, servant of an Amalekite; and my master left me behind, because three days ago I fell sick. 14 We made an invasion of the southern *area* of the Cherethites, in the *territory* which *belongs* to Judah, and of the southern *area* of Caleb; and we burned Ziklag with fire."

15 And David said to him, "Can you take me down to this troop?"

So he said, "Swear to me by God that you will neither kill me nor deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will take you down to this troop."

16 And when he had brought him down, there they were, spread out over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing, because of all the great spoil which they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. 17 Then David attacked them from twilight until the evening of the next day. Not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men who rode on camels and fled. 18 So David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away, and David rescued his two wives. 19 And nothing of theirs was lacking, either small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything which they had taken from them; David recovered all. 20 Then David took all the flocks and herds they had driven before those *other* livestock, and said, "This *is* David's spoil."

21 Now David came to the two hundred men who had been so weary that they could not follow David, whom they also had made to stay at the Brook Besor. So they went out to meet David and to meet the people who *were* with him. And when David came near the people, he greeted them. 22 Then all the wicked and worthless men[a] of those who went with David answered and said, "Because they did not go with us, we will not give them *any* of the spoil that we have recovered, except for every man's wife and children, that they may lead *them* away and depart."

23 But David said, "My brethren, you shall not do so with what the Lord has given us, who has preserved us and delivered into our hand the troop that came against us. 24 For who will heed you in this matter? But as his part *is* who goes down to the battle, so *shall* his part *be* who

30:22 [a] Literally *men of Belial*

Now you know. They've seen it all. Why get excited? They know it all. There is nothing sacred. The holy becomes humdrum. Rather than dashing into life like kids to the park, we doze through our days like commuters on a train.

Can you see why people become "full of sexual sin, using their bodies wrongly with each other"? (Romans 1:24 NCV). You've got to get excitement somewhere.

According to Romans 1, godlessness is a bad swap. In living for today, the hut-building hedonist destroys his hope of living in a castle tomorrow.

What was true in Paul's day is still true in ours, and we would do well to heed his warning. Otherwise, what is to keep us from destroying ourselves? If there is no standard in this life, no purpose to this life, and nothing sacred about this life, what is to keep us from doing whatever we want? (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Ask yourself if you've allowed anything in your life to take the place of God. Do you find that God is not "exciting enough"? Do you prefer to go elsewhere to try to find answers to your problems? Admit the reality of spiritual warfare. Recognize that only in the true God can you find inner joy and peace.

EXPLORATION

Spiritual Warfare—Matthew 6:13; 2 Corinthians 4:3, 4; Ephesians 6:10–20; Colossians 2:13–15; 1 Timothy 4:1, 2; Hebrews 2:14, 15; James 4:7, 8.

stays by the supplies; they shall share alike." [25] So it was, from that day forward; he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel to this day.

[26] Now when David came to Ziklag, he sent *some* of the spoil to the elders of Judah, to his friends, saying, "Here is a present for you from the spoil of the enemies of the Lord"— [27] to *those* who *were* in Bethel, *those* who *were* in Ramoth of the South, *those* who *were* in Jattir, [28] *those* who *were* in Aroer, *those* who *were* in Siphmoth, *those* who *were* in Eshtemoa, [29] *those* who *were* in Rachal, *those* who *were* in the cities of the Jerahmeelites, *those* who *were* in the cities of the Kenites, [30] *those* who *were* in Hormah, *those* who *were* in Chorashan,[a] *those* who *were* in Athach, [31] *those* who *were* in Hebron, and to all the places where David himself and his men were accustomed to rove.

The Tragic End of Saul and His Sons

31 Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. [2] Then the Philistines followed hard after Saul and his sons. And the Philistines killed Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul's sons. [3] The battle became fierce against Saul. The archers hit him, and he was severely wounded by the archers.

[4] Then Saul said to his armorbearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and thrust me through and abuse me."

But his armorbearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it. [5] And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword, and died with him. [6] So Saul, his three sons, his armorbearer, and all his men died together that same day.

[7] And when the men of Israel who *were* on the other side of the valley, and *those* who *were* on the other side of the Jordan, saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them. [8] So it happened the next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. [9] And they cut off his head and stripped off his armor, and sent *word* throughout the land of the Philistines, to proclaim *it in* the temple of their idols and among the people. [10] Then they put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths, and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan.[a]

[11] Now when the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, [12] all the valiant men arose and traveled all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth Shan; and they came to Jabesh and burned them there. [13] Then they took their bones and buried *them* under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

30:30 [a] Or *Borashan* **31:10** [a] Spelled *Beth Shean* in Joshua 17:11 and elsewhere

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 29:1–11

SITUATION
David and his refugee warriors prepared to fight with the Philistines against Saul's army. But the Philistines feared David would turn traitor against them, and they refused his assistance.

OBSERVATION
God helps us avoid situations that would divide our loyalties and break our hearts.

INSPIRATION
"Give me a word picture to describe a relative in your life who really bugs you." . . .

"Tar baby in Brer Rabbit," someone responded. Everyone understood the reference except me. I didn't remember the story of Brer Rabbit. I asked for the short version. Wily Fox played a trick on Brer Rabbit. The fox made a doll out of tar and stuck it on the side of the road. When Rabbit saw the tar baby, he thought it was a person and stopped to visit.

It was a one-sided conversation. The tar baby's silence bothered the rabbit. . . . So in his frustration he hit the tar baby and stuck to it. He hit the tar baby again with the other hand and, you guessed it, the other hand got stuck.

"That's how we are with difficult relatives," my fable-using friend explained. "We're stuck to someone we can't communicate with." . . .

You've probably got a tar baby in your life, someone you can't talk to and can't walk away from. A mother

who whines, an uncle who slurps his soup, or a sister who flaunts her figure. . . .

Tar-baby relationships—stuck together but falling apart. . . .

I can't assure you that your family will ever give you the blessing you seek, but I know God will. Let God give you what your family doesn't. If your earthly father doesn't affirm you, then let your heavenly Father take his place. . . . (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God knows the pain of conflict with people close to us.

EXPLORATION

God and Conflict—Genesis 13:5–9; Luke 12:51–53; John 14:27–29; Acts 15:37–39; Ephesians 4:25–32.

Life Lessons

1 Samuel 30:1—31:13

SITUATION

When his own village was raided by the Amalekites, David pursued the raiders. But first he averted a mutiny by his warriors and sought God's wisdom. After destroying the Amalekite band, David brought back the captured women, children, and plunder. He divided the plunder equally among those who had fought and those who had stayed behind. Elsewhere, Saul killed himself in a losing battle with the Philistines, who hung his headless body on a city wall as an insult to the defeated Israelites.

OBSERVATION

In times of trouble, David turned to God for wisdom and help, while Saul consistently turned away from God, even at his death.

INSPIRATION

When David called, you risked your life. Now, victory in hand, you gallop back to Brook Besor. You crest the ridge overlooking the camp and see the two hundred men below.

"You leeches."

While you fought, they slept. You went to battle; they went to matinees and massage therapists. They shot eighteen holes and stayed up late playing poker.

You might feel the way some of David's men felt: "Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except for every man's wife and children" (1 Samuel 30:22).

Rescued wives: angry.

Rescuers: resentful.

And what about the two hundred men who had rested? Worms have higher self-esteem. They feel as manly as a lace doily.

A Molotov cocktail of emotions is stirred, lit, and handed to David. Here's how he defuses it: "My brethren, you shall not do so with what the Lord has given us, who has preserved us and delivered into our hand the troop that came against us. For who will heed you in this matter? But as his part is who goes down to the battle, so shall his part be who stays by the supplies; they shall share alike" (30:23, 24).

Note David's words: they "stays by the supplies," as if this had been their job. They hadn't asked to guard supplies; they wanted to rest. But David dignifies their decision to stay.

David did many mighty deeds in his life. He did many foolish deeds in his life. But perhaps the noblest was this rarely discussed deed: he honored the tired soldiers at Brook Besor.

It's okay to rest. Jesus fights when you cannot.

Someday somebody will read what David did and name their church the Congregation at Brook Besor. Isn't that what the church is intended to be? A place for soldiers to recover their strength? . . .

I wonder how many could do the same. Too tired to fight. Too ashamed to complain. While others claim victories, the weary sit in silence. How many sit at the Brook Besor?

If you are listed among them, here is what you need to know: it's okay to rest. Jesus is your David. He fights when you cannot. He goes where you cannot. He's not angry if you sit. Did He not invite, "Come off by yourselves; let's take a break and get a little rest" (Mark 6:31 MSG)?

Brook Besor blesses rest.

Brook Besor also cautions against arrogance. David knew the victory was a gift. Let's remember the same. Salvation comes like the Egyptian in the desert, a delightful surprise on the path. Unearned. Undeserved. Who are the strong to criticize the tired?

Are you weary? Catch your breath. We need your strength.

Are you strong? Reserve passing judgment on the tired. Odds are, you'll need to plop down yourself. And when you do, Brook Besor is a good story to know.

(From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How do you react to problems and pressures? Ask God to help you lighten up with laughter, forgiveness, and trust—that God will give you all the energy you need.

EXPLORATION

Listening to God—Exodus 9:12; 1 Kings 19:11–13; Proverbs 1:20–28; Mark 4:9; Hebrews 2:1–3.

THE BOOK OF

2 SAMUEL

INTRODUCTION

King David.

In the first ten chapters of 2 Samuel he can do no wrong. He is never defeated in battle. Never wrong in judgment. He begins his reign in prayer (2:1) and continues in faith. Enemies are subdued, the nation is unified, the capitol secured, and the boundary extends from six thousand to sixty thousand square miles.

But that is the first ten chapters.

Chapter 11 is a hinge on which hangs the cellar door. David opens it, and down he falls. By the time he lands on the cellar floor, he is bruised, confused, and staring into the darkness.

You know what happened. On a lazy afternoon his wandering eyes found a forbidden maiden. Testosterone surged and evil urged so he summoned her, slept with her, and then sent her home.

A rendezvous. So fast. So impulsive. So passionate. So pregnant.

Rather than repent, he connives and lies and leaves a soldier dead and a widow weeping and all of us wondering: Is this the same David? Is this the shepherd? Is this the boy of faith? The man of prayer? Is this the man after God's own heart?

With time, confession comes and forgiveness is given, but the scars remain. Nathan's prophecy proves true: the sword never departed from David's house (12:10). Bloodshed stained his home from then on.

Some of the final words written about David are some of the saddest, "King David was old, advanced in years; and they put covers on him, but he could not get warm" (1 Kings 1:1).

Mark it down. Compromise chills the soul.

If only David hadn't opened that cellar door.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Unknown, though some say Samuel, Nathan, and Gad

Date Written: Possibly 1000–500 B.C.

Key Themes:

- Though David had been mistreated by Saul, he mourned Saul's passing.
- David was a man after God's own heart, a man of faith, even though he made mistakes.
- Among the good things David did, he returned the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem.
- Among the mistakes David made was his affair with Bathsheba and the resulting family discord.

Key Verse:

"Your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16).

Contents:

I. David's Kingdom 1:1—10:19

II. David and Bathsheba 11:1—18:33

III. David's Spiritual Restoration and Later Reign 19:1—24:25

The Report of Saul's Death

Now it came to pass after the death of Saul, when David had returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites, and David had stayed two days in Ziklag, 2 on the third day, behold, it happened that a man came from Saul's camp with his clothes torn and dust on his head. So it was, when he came to David, that he fell to the ground and prostrated himself.

3 And David said to him, "Where have you come from?"

So he said to him, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel."

4 Then David said to him, "How did the matter go? Please tell me."

And he answered, "The people have fled from the battle, many of the people are fallen and dead, and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also."

5 So David said to the young man who told him, "How do you know that Saul and Jonathan his son are dead?"

6 Then the young man who told him said, "As I happened by chance *to be* on Mount Gilboa, there was Saul, leaning on his spear; and indeed the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him. 7 Now when he looked behind him, he saw me and called to me. And I answered, 'Here I am.' 8 And he said to me, 'Who *are* you?' So I answered him, 'I *am* an Amalekite.' 9 He said to me again, 'Please stand over me and kill me, for anguish has come upon me, but my life still *remains* in me.' 10 So I stood over him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown that *was* on his head and the bracelet that *was* on his arm, and have brought them here to my lord."

11 Therefore David took hold of his own clothes and tore them, and *so did* all the men who *were* with him. 12 And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, for the people of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

13 Then David said to the young man who told him, "Where *are* you from?"

And he answered, "I *am* the son of an alien, an Amalekite."

14 So David said to him, "How was it you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?" 15 Then David called one of the young men and said, "Go near, *and* execute him!" And he struck him so that he died. 16 So David said to him, "Your blood *is* on your own head, for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the Lord's anointed.' "

The Song of the Bow

17 Then David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son, 18 and he told *them* to teach the children of Judah *the Song of* the Bow; indeed *it is* written in the Book of Jasher:

19 "The beauty of Israel is slain on your high places!
How the mighty have fallen!
20 Tell *it* not in Gath,
Proclaim *it* not in the streets of Ashkelon—
Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,
Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 1:1–27

SITUATION

After hearing of the report of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, David and his men wept and mourned.

OBSERVATION

David's lament showed his deep feelings for both men. He still showed respect for Saul, and he displayed his love for Jonathan.

INSPIRATION

In God's plan every life is long enough and every death is timely. And though you and I might wish for a longer life, God knows better.

And—this is important—though you and I may wish a longer life for our loved ones, they don't. Ironically, the first to accept God's decision of death is the one who dies.

While we are shaking heads in disbelief, they are lifting hands in worship. While we are mourning at a grave, they are marveling at heaven. While we are questioning God, they are praising God.

But, Max, what of those who die with no faith? My husband never prayed. My grandpa never worshiped. My mother never opened a Bible, much less her heart. What about the one who never believed?

How do we know he didn't?

Who among us is privy to a person's final thoughts? Who among us knows what transpires in those final moments? Are you sure no prayer was offered? Eternity can bend the proudest knees. Could a person stare into the yawning canyon of death without whispering a

plea for mercy? And could our God, who is partial to the humble, resist it?

He couldn't on Calvary. The confession of the thief on the cross was both a first and final one. But Christ heard it. Christ received it. Maybe you never heard your loved one confess Christ, but who's to say Christ didn't?

We don't know the final thoughts of a dying soul, but we know this. We know our God is a good God. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). He wants your loved one in heaven more than you do. And He usually gets what He wants.

You know what else God wants? He wants you to face your sorrow. Denial and dismissal are not a part of God's grief therapy.

David faced his. When he learned of the death of Saul and Jonathan, David and the entire army tore their clothing, wept aloud, and fasted until sunset. His lament was intense and public. "O mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew nor rain upon you," he mourned, "nor fields of offerings. . . . Saul and Jonathan were beloved and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions" (2 Samuel 1:21–23).

David not only sang this dirge, he "told them to teach the children of Judah the song of the Bow" (v. 18). Death was not soft-pedaled or passed over. Face it, fight it, question it, or condemn it, but don't deny it. . . . Don't heed, but do

21 "O mountains of Gilboa,
Let there be no dew nor rain upon you,
Nor fields of offerings.
For the shield of the mighty is cast away there!
The shield of Saul, not anointed with oil.
22 From the blood of the slain,
From the fat of the mighty,
The bow of Jonathan did not turn back,
And the sword of Saul did not return empty.

23 "Saul and Jonathan *were* beloved and pleasant in their lives,
And in their death they were not divided;
They were swifter than eagles,
They were stronger than lions.

24 "O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,
Who clothed you in scarlet, with luxury;
Who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.

25 "How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle!
Jonathan *was* slain in your high places.
26 I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;
You have been very pleasant to me;
Your love to me was wonderful,
Surpassing the love of women.

27 "How the mighty have fallen,
And the weapons of war perished!"

David Anointed King of Judah

2 It happened after this that David inquired of the Lord, saying, "Shall I go up to any of the cities of Judah?"
And the Lord said to him, "Go up."
David said, "Where shall I go up?"
And He said, "To Hebron."

2 So David went up there, and his two wives also, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite. 3 And David brought up the men who *were* with him, every man with his household. So they dwelt in the cities of Hebron.

4 Then the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah. And they told David, saying, "The men of Jabesh Gilead *were the ones* who buried Saul." 5 So David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh Gilead, and said to them, "You *are* blessed of the Lord, for you have shown this kindness to your lord, to Saul, and have buried him. 6 And now may the Lord show kindness and truth to you. I also will repay you this kindness, because you have done this thing. 7 Now therefore, let your hands be strengthened, and be valiant; for your master Saul is dead, and also the house of Judah has anointed me king over them."

Ishbosheth Made King of Israel

8 But Abner the son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, took Ishbosheth[a] the son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim; 9 and he made him king over Gilead, over the Ashurites, over Jezreel, over Ephraim, over Benjamin, and over all Israel. 10 Ishbosheth, Saul's son, *was* forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and he reigned two years. Only the house of Judah followed David. 11 And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.

Israel and Judah at War

12 Now Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ishbosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. 13 And Joab the son of Zeruiah, and the servants of David, went out and met them by the pool of Gibeon. So they sat down, one on one side of the pool and the other on the other side of the pool. 14 Then Abner said to Joab, "Let the young men now arise and compete before us."

And Joab said, "Let them arise."

15 So they arose and went over by number, twelve from Benjamin, *followers* of Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and twelve from the servants of David. 16 And each one grasped his opponent by the head and *thrust* his sword in his opponent's side; so they fell down together. Therefore that place was called the Field of Sharp Swords,[a] which *is* in Gibeon. 17 So there was a very fierce battle that day, and Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David.

18 Now the three sons of Zeruiah were there: Joab and Abishai and Asahel. And Asahel *was* as fleet of foot as a wild gazelle. 19 So Asahel pursued Abner, and in going he did not turn to the right hand or to the left from following Abner.

20 Then Abner looked behind him and said, "*Are* you Asahel?"

He answered, "I *am*."

21 And Abner said to him, "Turn aside to your right hand or to your left, and lay hold on one of the young men and take his armor for yourself." But Asahel would not turn aside from following him. 22 So Abner said again to Asahel, "Turn aside from following me. Why should I strike you to the ground? How then could I face your brother Joab?" 23 However, he refused to turn aside. Therefore Abner struck him in the stomach with the blunt end of the spear, so that the spear came out of his back; and he fell down there and died on the spot. So it was *that* as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died, stood still.

24 Joab and Abishai also pursued Abner. And the sun was going down when they came to the hill of Ammah, which *is* before Giah by the road to the Wilderness of Gibeon. 25 Now the children of Benjamin gathered together behind Abner and became a unit, and took their stand on top of a hill. 26 Then Abner called to Joab and said, "Shall the sword devour forever? Do you not know that it will be bitter in the latter end? How long will it be then until you tell the people to return from pursuing their brethren?"

27 And Joab said, "*As* God lives, unless you had spoken, surely then

2:8 [a]Called *Esh-Baal* in 1 Chronicles 8:33 and 9:39 **2:16** [a]Hebrew *Helkath Hazzurim*

forgive, those who urge you not to.

God will lead you through, not around, the valley of the shadow of death. And, by the way, aren't you glad it's just a shadow? (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you unable to face the death of someone? Face your sorrow head-on, and ask the Lord to provide you with inner peace.

EXPLORATION

Sorrow—Isaiah 35:10; John 16:19, 20; 2 Corinthians 7:8–10; Revelation 21:3, 4.

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 2:1—3:5

SITUATION

David mourned when he received the news of Saul's death. For years David had run from Saul; then he became king in Saul's place.

OBSERVATION

David openly grieved for the nation's loss of a king and prince, and for his loss of a best friend.

INSPIRATION

Jonathan. Closer than a brother. He had saved David's life and sworn to protect his children.

Saul. God's chosen. God's anointed. Yes, he had hounded David. He had badgered David. But he was still God's anointed.

God's chosen king—dead.

David's best friend—dead.

Leaving David to face yet another giant—the giant of grief.

We've felt his heavy hand on our shoulders.

Not in Ziklag, but in emergency rooms, in children's hospitals, at car wrecks, and on battlefields. And we, like David, have two choices: flee or face the giant.

Many opt to flee grief. . . .

What else can you do? The grave stirs such unspeakable hurt and unanswerable questions, we're tempted to turn and walk. Change the subject, avoid the issue. Work hard. Drink harder. Stay busy. Stay distant. Head north to Montana and don't look back.

Yet we pay a high price when we do. Bereavement comes from the word *reave.* Look up *reave* in the dictionary, and you'll read "to take away by force, plunder, rob." Death robs you. The grave plunders moments and memories not yet shared: birthdays, vacations, lazy walks, talks over tea. You are bereaved because you've been robbed.

Normal is no more and never will be again. . . .

Just when you think the beast of grief is gone, you hear a song she loved or smell the cologne he wore or pass a restaurant where the two of you used to eat. The giant keeps showing up.

And the giant of grief keeps stirring up. Stirring up . . .

Anxiety. "Am I next?"

Guilt. "Why did I tell him . . ?" "Why didn't I say to her . . ?"

Wistfulness. You see intact couples and long for your mate. You see parents with kids and yearn for your child.

The giant stirs up insomnia, loss of appetite, forgetfulness, thoughts of suicide. Grief is not a mental

by morning all the people would have given up pursuing their brethren." 28 So Joab blew a trumpet; and all the people stood still and did not pursue Israel anymore, nor did they fight anymore. 29 Then Abner and his men went on all that night through the plain, crossed over the Jordan, and went through all Bithron; and they came to Mahanaim.

30 So Joab returned from pursuing Abner. And when he had gathered all the people together, there were missing of David's servants nineteen men and Asahel. 31 But the servants of David had struck down, of Benjamin and Abner's men, three hundred and sixty men who died. 32 Then they took up Asahel and buried him in his father's tomb, which *was in* Bethlehem. And Joab and his men went all night, and they came to Hebron at daybreak.

3 Now there was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. But David grew stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker.

Sons of David

2 Sons were born to David in Hebron: His firstborn was Amnon by Ahinoam the Jezreelitess; 3 his second, Chileab, by Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite; the third, Absalom the son of Maacah, the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur; 4 the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; 5 and the sixth, Ithream, by David's wife Eglah. These were born to David in Hebron.

Abner Joins Forces with David

6 Now it was so, while there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, that Abner was strengthening *his hold* on the house of Saul.

7 And Saul had a concubine, whose name *was* Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah. So *Ishbosheth* said to Abner, "Why have you gone in to my father's concubine?"

8 Then Abner became very angry at the words of Ishbosheth, and said, "*Am* I a dog's head that belongs to Judah? Today I show loyalty to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers, and to his friends, and have not delivered you into the hand of David; and you charge me today with a fault concerning this woman? 9 May God do so to Abner, and more also, if I do not do for David as the Lord has sworn to him— 10 to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul, and set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beersheba." 11 And he could not answer Abner another word, because he feared him.

12 Then Abner sent messengers on his behalf to David, saying, "Whose *is* the land?" saying *also,* "Make your covenant with me, and indeed my hand *shall be* with you to bring all Israel to you."

13 And *David* said, "Good, I will make a covenant with you. But one thing I require of you: you shall not see my face unless you first bring Michal, Saul's daughter, when you come to see my face." 14 So David sent messengers to Ishbosheth, Saul's son, saying, "Give *me* my wife Michal, whom I betrothed to myself for a hundred foreskins of the Philistines." 15 And Ishbosheth sent and took her from *her* husband, from Paltiel[a] the son of Laish. 16 Then her husband went along with

3:15 [a] Spelled *Palti* in 1 Samuel 25:44

her to Bahurim, weeping behind her. So Abner said to him, "Go, return!" And he returned.

17 Now Abner had communicated with the elders of Israel, saying, "In time past you were seeking for David *to be* king over you. 18 Now then, do *it!* For the Lord has spoken of David, saying, 'By the hand of My servant David, I[a] will save My people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and the hand of all their enemies.'" 19 And Abner also spoke in the hearing of Benjamin. Then Abner also went to speak in the hearing of David in Hebron all that seemed good to Israel and the whole house of Benjamin.

20 So Abner and twenty men with him came to David at Hebron. And David made a feast for Abner and the men who *were* with him. 21 Then Abner said to David, "I will arise and go, and gather all Israel to my lord the king, that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may reign over all that your heart desires." So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace.

Joab Murders Abner

22 At that moment the servants of David and Joab came from a raid and brought much spoil with them. But Abner *was* not with David in Hebron, for he had sent him away, and he had gone in peace. 23 When Joab and all the troops that *were* with him had come, they told Joab, saying, "Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he sent him away, and he has gone in peace." 24 Then Joab came to the king and said, "What have you done? Look, Abner came to you; why *is* it *that* you sent him away, and he has already gone? 25 Surely you realize that Abner the son of Ner came to deceive you, to know your going out and your coming in, and to know all that you are doing."

26 And when Joab had gone from David's presence, he sent messengers after Abner, who brought him back from the well of Sirah. But David did not know *it.* 27 Now when Abner had returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him privately, and there stabbed him in the stomach, so that he died for the blood of Asahel his brother.

28 Afterward, when David heard *it,* he said, "My kingdom and I *are* guiltless before the Lord forever of the blood of Abner the son of Ner. 29 Let it rest on the head of Joab and on all his father's house; and let there never fail to be in the house of Joab one who has a discharge or is a leper, who leans on a staff or falls by the sword, or who lacks bread." 30 So Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner, because he had killed their brother Asahel at Gibeon in the battle.

David's Mourning for Abner

31 Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, "Tear your clothes, gird yourselves with sackcloth, and mourn for Abner." And King David followed the coffin. 32 So they buried Abner in Hebron; and the king lifted up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner, and all the people wept. 33 And the king sang *a lament* over Abner and said:

3:18 [a]Following many Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Syriac, and Targum; Masoretic Text reads *he.*

illness, but it sure feels like one sometimes. . . .

Your friends may not understand this.

You may not understand this. But please try. Understand the gravity of your loss. You didn't lose at Monopoly or misplace your keys. You can't walk away from this. At some point, within minutes or months, you need to do what David did. Face your grief. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you dealing with grief or loss? The pain is real. You need to give yourself time to work through the pain. Ask God, who understands what you're feeling, to draw close and give you the strength you need. If someone you know is grieving, be an attentive and understanding friend.

EXPLORATION

Faith—Isaiah 29:22–24; Psalm 24:4–6; Proverbs 3:5; Jeremiah 33:14–17; Matthew 1:1–17; Luke 20:41–44.

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 3:6—4:12

SITUATION

David welcomed Abner to join him in battle. All of his men did not share his enthusiasm, and Joab killed Abner. David sought justice for his murder.

OBSERVATION

David not only battled the house of Saul, but battled sin. Leaders can suffer from sinful decisions others make.

INSPIRATION

Real change is an inside job. You might alter things a day or two with money and systems, but the heart of

the matter is and always will be, the matter of the heart.

Allow me to get specific. Our problem is sin. Not finances. Not budgets. Not overcrowded prisons or drug dealers. Our problem is sin. We are in rebellion against our Creator. We are separated from our Father. We are cut off from the source of life. A new president or policy won't fix that. It can only be solved by God.

That's why the Bible uses drastic terms like *conversion, repentance,* and *lost* and *found.* Society may renovate, but only God re-creates.

Here is a practical exercise to put this truth into practice. The next time alarms go off in your world, ask yourself three questions.

1. Is there any unconfessed sin in my life? . . .

2. Are there any unresolved conflicts in my world? . . .

3. Are there any unsurrendered worries in my heart? . . .

Alarms serve a purpose. They signal a problem. Sometimes the problem is out there. More often it's in here. So before you peek outside, take a good look inside. (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Ask yourself the three questions in this lesson's "Inspiration." What alarms are sounding? Take a peek inside and turn those alarms off!

EXPLORATION

Submission to God—Deuteronomy 4:27–29; 1 Chronicles 16:11; 22:19; Psalm 25:4; 27:4–14; Romans 6:13–23; 12:1, 2; James 4:8.

"Should Abner die as a fool dies?
34 Your hands were not bound
Nor your feet put into fetters;
As a man falls before wicked men, *so* you fell."

Then all the people wept over him again.

35 And when all the people came to persuade David to eat food while it was still day, David took an oath, saying, "God do so to me, and more also, if I taste bread or anything else till the sun goes down!" 36 Now all the people took note *of it,* and it pleased them, since whatever the king did pleased all the people. 37 For all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the king's *intent* to kill Abner the son of Ner. 38 Then the king said to his servants, "Do you not know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel? 39 And I *am* weak today, though anointed king; and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, *are* too harsh for me. The Lord shall repay the evildoer according to his wickedness."

Ishbosheth Is Murdered

4 When Saul's son[a] heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he lost heart, and all Israel was troubled. 2 Now Saul's son *had* two men *who were* captains of troops. The name of one *was* Baanah and the name of the other Rechab, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, of the children of Benjamin. (For Beeroth also was *part* of Benjamin, 3 because the Beerothites fled to Gittaim and have been sojourners there until this day.)

4 Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son *who was* lame in *his* feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel; and his nurse took him up and fled. And it happened, as she made haste to flee, that he fell and became lame. His name *was* Mephibosheth.[a]

5 Then the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, set out and came at about the heat of the day to the house of Ishbosheth, who was lying on his bed at noon. 6 And they came there, all the way into the house, *as though* to get wheat, and they stabbed him in the stomach. Then Rechab and Baanah his brother escaped. 7 For when they came into the house, he was lying on his bed in his bedroom; then they struck him and killed him, beheaded him and took his head, and were all night escaping through the plain. 8 And they brought the head of Ishbosheth to David at Hebron, and said to the king, "Here is the head of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul your enemy, who sought your life; and the Lord has avenged my lord the king this day of Saul and his descendants."

9 But David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, and said to them, "*As* the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life from all adversity, 10 when someone told me, saying, 'Look, Saul is dead,' thinking to have brought good news, I arrested him and had him executed in Ziklag—the one who *thought* I would give him a reward for *his* news. 11 How much more, when wicked men have killed a righteous person in his own house on his bed?

4:1 [a]That is, Ishbosheth **4:4** [a]Called *Merib-Baal* in 1 Chronicles 8:34 and 9:40

Therefore, shall I not now require his blood at your hand and remove you from the earth?" 12 So David commanded his young men, and they executed them, cut off their hands and feet, and hanged *them* by the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ishbosheth and buried *it* in the tomb of Abner in Hebron.

David Reigns over All Israel

5 Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and spoke, saying, "Indeed we *are* your bone and your flesh. 2 Also, in time past, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and brought them in; and the Lord said to you, 'You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over Israel.'" 3 Therefore all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord. And they anointed David king over Israel. 4 David *was* thirty years old when he began to reign, *and* he reigned forty years. 5 In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years over all Israel and Judah.

The Conquest of Jerusalem

6 And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who spoke to David, saying, "You shall not come in here; but the blind and the lame will repel you," thinking, "David cannot come in here." 7 Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion (that *is,* the City of David).

8 Now David said on that day, "Whoever climbs up by way of the water shaft and defeats the Jebusites (the lame and the blind, *who are* hated by David's soul), *he shall be chief and captain.*" [a] Therefore they say, "The blind and the lame shall not come into the house."

9 Then David dwelt in the stronghold, and called it the City of David. And David built all around from the Millo [a] and inward. 10 So David went on and became great, and the Lord God of hosts *was* with him.

11 Then Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters and masons. And they built David a house. 12 So David knew that the Lord had established him as king over Israel, and that He had exalted His kingdom for the sake of His people Israel.

13 And David took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem, after he had come from Hebron. Also more sons and daughters were born to David. 14 Now these *are* the names of those who were born to him in Jerusalem: Shammua, [a] Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, 15 Ibhar, Elishua, [a] Nepheg, Japhia, 16 Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet.

The Philistines Defeated

17 Now when the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines went up to search for David. And David heard *of it* and went down to the stronghold. 18 The Philistines also went and deployed themselves in the Valley of Rephaim. 19 So David inquired of the Lord, saying, "Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will You deliver them into my hand?"

5:8 [a] Compare 1 Chronicles 11:6 **5:9** [a] Literally *The Landfill* **5:14** [a] Spelled *Shimea* in 1 Chronicles 3:5 **5:15** [a] Spelled *Elishama* in 1 Chronicles 3:6

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 5:1—6:23

SITUATION

At the beginning of David's reign, God enabled him to conquer Jerusalem and bring the ark of the covenant to this holy city. Unfortunately the event is marred by a death caused because the people mishandled the ark of God and did not carry it according to the instructions God had given Moses centuries earlier.

OBSERVATION

Through the high and low points of our lives, God graciously provides for our needs. David had to learn a lesson about God's laws and His holiness the hard way.

INSPIRATION

We wonder why the Israelites didn't cherish the ark of the covenant. Stunningly, they let it gather dust for thirty years in the house of a priest who lived seven miles west of Jerusalem. Neglected. Ignored. But just-crowned David determines to change that. After he settles the city of Jerusalem, he makes the return of the chest his top priority. He plans a Macy's-caliber parade and invites thirty thousand Hebrews to attend.

They gather near the home of Abinadab, the priest. His two sons, Uzzah and Ahio, are put in charge of the transport. They load the ark on an ox-drawn wagon and begin the march. Trumpets blast, songs erupt, and all goes well for the first two miles, until they hit a patch of rough road. The oxen stumble, the wagon shakes, and the ark shifts. Uzzah,

thinking the holy chest is about to fall off the wagon, extends his hand to steady it. And heaven Uzied Uzzah, "and he died" (2 Samuel 6:7).

This will dampen a parade real quick. Everyone goes home. Deeply distressed, David returns to Jerusalem. The ark is kept at the home of Obed-Edom while David sorts things out. Apparently, he succeeds, because at the end of three months David returns, reclaims the ark, and resumes the parade. This time there is no death. There is dancing. David enters Jerusalem with rejoicing. And "David danced before the Lord with all his might" (6:14).

Two men. One dead. The other dancing. What do they teach us? Specifically, what do they teach us about invoking the presence of God? . . .

Uzzah's tragedy teaches this: God comes on His own terms. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Keep a prayer journal. Be completely honest with God. Write down disappointments, then devote pages to successes.

EXPLORATION

Joy—1 Thessalonians 5:16–22. Unity—Romans 15:5, 6. Love—Romans 12:9–21.

And the Lord said to David, "Go up, for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into your hand."

20 So David went to Baal Perazim, and David defeated them there; and he said, "The Lord has broken through my enemies before me, like a breakthrough of water." Therefore he called the name of that place Baal Perazim.[a] 21 And they left their images there, and David and his men carried them away.

22 Then the Philistines went up once again and deployed themselves in the Valley of Rephaim. 23 Therefore David inquired of the Lord, and He said, "You shall not go up; circle around behind them, and come upon them in front of the mulberry trees. 24 And it shall be, when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry trees, then you shall advance quickly. For then the Lord will go out before you to strike the camp of the Philistines." 25 And David did so, as the Lord commanded him; and he drove back the Philistines from Geba[a] as far as Gezer.

The Ark Brought to Jerusalem

6 Again David gathered all *the* choice *men* of Israel, thirty thousand. 2 And David arose and went with all the people who *were* with him from Baale Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, whose name is called by the Name,[a] the Lord of Hosts, who dwells *between* the cherubim. 3 So they set the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which *was* on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drove the new cart.[a] 4 And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which *was* on the hill, accompanying the ark of God; and Ahio went before the ark. 5 Then David and all the house of Israel played *music* before the Lord on all kinds of *instruments of* fir wood, on harps, on stringed instruments, on tambourines, on sistrums, and on cymbals.

6 And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out *his hand* to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. 7 Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for *his* error; and he died there by the ark of God. 8 And David became angry because of the Lord's outbreak against Uzzah; and he called the name of the place Perez Uzzah[a] to this day.

9 David was afraid of the Lord that day; and he said, "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?" 10 So David would not move the ark of the Lord with him into the City of David; but David took it aside into the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. 11 The ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite three months. And the Lord blessed Obed-Edom and all his household.

12 Now it was told King David, saying, "The Lord has blessed the house of Obed-Edom and all that *belongs* to him, because of the ark of God." So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with gladness. 13 And so it was, when those bearing the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, that he sacrificed oxen and fatted sheep. 14 Then David danced before the Lord with all

5:20 [a]Literally *Master of Breakthroughs* **5:25** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *Gibeon*. **6:2** [a]Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate omit *by the Name;* many Hebrew manuscripts and Syriac read *there*. **6:3** [a]Septuagint adds *with the ark*. **6:8** [a]Literally *Outburst Against Uzzah*

his might; and David *was* wearing a linen ephod. 15 So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet.

16 Now as the ark of the Lord came into the City of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window and saw King David leaping and whirling before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart. 17 So they brought the ark of the Lord, and set it in its place in the midst of the tabernacle that David had erected for it. Then David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. 18 And when David had finished offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts. 19 Then he distributed among all the people, among the whole multitude of Israel, both the women and the men, to everyone a loaf of bread, a piece *of meat,* and a cake of raisins. So all the people departed, everyone to his house.

20 Then David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, "How glorious was the king of Israel today, uncovering himself today in the eyes of the maids of his servants, as one of the base fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!"

21 So David said to Michal, "*It was* before the Lord, who chose me instead of your father and all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel. Therefore I will play *music* before the Lord. 22 And I will be even more undignified than this, and will be humble in my own sight. But as for the maidservants of whom you have spoken, by them I will be held in honor."

23 Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death.

God's Covenant with David

7 Now it came to pass when the king was dwelling in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies all around, 2 that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells inside tent curtains."

3 Then Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that *is* in your heart, for the Lord *is* with you."

4 But it happened that night that the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying, 5 "Go and tell My servant David, 'Thus says the Lord: "Would you build a house for Me to dwell in? 6 For I have not dwelt in a house since the time that I brought the children of Israel up from Egypt, even to this day, but have moved about in a tent and in a tabernacle. 7 Wherever I have moved about with all the children of Israel, have I ever spoken a word to anyone from the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'" ' 8 Now therefore, thus shall you say to My servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: "I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel. 9 And I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and have made you a great name, like the name of the great men who *are* on the earth. 10 Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore, as previously,

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 7:1–29

SITUATION
David sought to honor God, and God rewarded him with promises for his future. David's response was humble, worshipful prayer.

OBSERVATION
David not only knew about God, he fellowshipped with God. David shows us the value of knowing God better.

INSPIRATION
People and their proverbial hang-ups. Pete always speaks before he thinks. Joe always fails where he should succeed.

And you. Does one prevailing problem leech your life?

Some are prone to cheat. Others quick to doubt. Maybe you worry. Yes, everyone worries some, but you own the national distributorship of anxiety. Perhaps you are judgmental. Sure, everybody can be critical, but you pass more judgments than a federal judge.

What is that one weakness, bad habit, rotten attitude? Where does Satan have a stronghold within you? Ahh, there is the fitting word— *stronghold:* a fortress, citadel, thick walls, tall gates. It's as if the devil staked a claim on one weakness and constructed a rampart around it. "You ain't touching this flaw," he defies heaven, placing himself squarely between God's help and your

- explosive temper,
- fragile self-image,
- freezer-size appetite,
- distrust for authority.

Seasons come and go, and this Loch Ness monster

still lurks in the water-bottom of your soul. He won't go away. He lives up to both sides of his compound name: *strong* enough to grip like a vise and stubborn enough to *hold* on. He clamps like a bear trap—the harder you shake, the more it hurts.

Strongholds: old, difficult, discouraging challenges. . . .

Do what David did. Turn a deaf ear to old voices. And, as you do, open your eyes to new choices. When everyone else saw walls, David saw tunnels. Others focused on the obvious. David searched for the unusual. Since he did what no one expected, he achieved what no one imagined. Get creative with your problem solving. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you feel like you communicate with God when you pray? Or do your prayers merely fulfill an obligation? Next time you pray, talk to God as you would a friend. Ask God if you need a change in your attitude. Learn to pray continually.

EXPLORATION

Hindrances to Prayer—Micah 3:4; Philippians 4:6; 1 Peter 3:7.

11 since the time that I commanded judges *to be* over My people Israel,
and have caused you to rest from all your enemies. Also the Lord tells
you that He will make you a house.[a]
12 "When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will
set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will
establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for My name, and I
will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be his Father,
and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with
the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. 15 But My mercy
shall not depart from him, as I took *it* from Saul, whom I removed
from before you. 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be estab-
lished forever before you.[a] Your throne shall be established forever." ' "
17 According to all these words and according to all this vision, so
Nathan spoke to David.

David's Thanksgiving to God

18 Then King David went in and sat before the Lord; and he said:
"Who *am* I, O Lord God? And what is my house, that You have brought
me this far? 19 And yet this was a small thing in Your sight, O Lord God;
and You have also spoken of Your servant's house for a great while
to come. *Is* this the manner of man, O Lord God? 20 Now what more
can David say to You? For You, Lord God, know Your servant. 21 For
Your word's sake, and according to Your own heart, You have done all
these great things, to make Your servant know *them.* 22 Therefore You
are great, O Lord God.[a] For *there is* none like You, nor *is there any* God
besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears. 23 And
who *is* like Your people, like Israel, the one nation on the earth whom
God went to redeem for Himself as a people, to make for Himself a
name—and to do for Yourself great and awesome deeds for Your land—
before Your people whom You redeemed for Yourself from Egypt, the
nations, and their gods? 24 For You have made Your people Israel Your
very own people forever; and You, Lord, have become their God.
25 "Now, O Lord God, the word which You have spoken concerning
Your servant and concerning his house, establish *it* forever and do as You
have said. 26 So let Your name be magnified forever, saying, 'The Lord of
hosts *is* the God over Israel.' And let the house of Your servant David be
established before You. 27 For You, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, have
revealed *this* to Your servant, saying, 'I will build you a house.' Therefore
Your servant has found it in his heart to pray this prayer to You.
28 "And now, O Lord God, You are God, and Your words are true, and
You have promised this goodness to Your servant. 29 Now therefore, let
it please You to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue
before You forever; for You, O Lord God, have spoken *it,* and with Your
blessing let the house of Your servant be blessed forever."

David's Further Conquests

8 After this it came to pass that David attacked the Philistines and
subdued them. And David took Metheg Ammah from the hand of
the Philistines.

7:11 [a]That is, a royal dynasty **7:16** [a]Septuagint reads *Me.* **7:22** [a]Targum and Syriac read *O Lord God.*

2 Then he defeated Moab. Forcing them down to the ground, he
measured them off with a line. With two lines he measured off those
to be put to death, and with one full line those to be kept alive. So the
Moabites became David's servants, *and* brought tribute.

3 David also defeated Hadadezer the son of Rehob, king of Zobah,
as he went to recover his territory at the River Euphrates. 4 David took
from him one thousand *chariots,* seven hundred[a] horsemen, and
twenty thousand foot soldiers. Also David hamstrung all the chariot
horses, except that he spared *enough* of them for one hundred chariots.

5 When the Syrians of Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of
Zobah, David killed twenty-two thousand of the Syrians. 6 Then David
put garrisons in Syria of Damascus; and the Syrians became David's
servants, *and* brought tribute. So the Lord preserved David wherever
he went. 7 And David took the shields of gold that had belonged to the
servants of Hadadezer, and brought them to Jerusalem. 8 Also from
Betah[a] and from Berothai, cities of Hadadezer, King David took a large
amount of bronze.

9 When Toi[a] king of Hamath heard that David had defeated all the
army of Hadadezer, 10 then Toi sent Joram[a] his son to King David, to
greet him and bless him, because he had fought against Hadadezer
and defeated him (for Hadadezer had been at war with Toi); and
Joram brought with him articles of silver, articles of gold, and articles
of bronze. 11 King David also dedicated these to the Lord, along with
the silver and gold that he had dedicated from all the nations which
he had subdued— 12 from Syria,[a] from Moab, from the people of
Ammon, from the Philistines, from Amalek, and from the spoil of
Hadadezer the son of Rehob, king of Zobah.

13 And David made *himself* a name when he returned from killing
eighteen thousand Syrians[a] in the Valley of Salt. 14 He also put gar-
risons in Edom; throughout all Edom he put garrisons, and all the
Edomites became David's servants. And the Lord preserved David
wherever he went.

David's Administration

15 So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered judg-
ment and justice to all his people. 16 Joab the son of Zeruiah *was* over
the army; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud *was* recorder; 17 Zadok the son
of Ahitub and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar *were* the priests; Seraiah[a]
was the scribe; 18 Benaiah the son of Jehoiada *was over* both the
Cherethites and the Pelethites; and David's sons were chief ministers.

David's Kindness to Mephibosheth

9 Now David said, "Is there still anyone who is left of the house of
Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

2 And *there was* a servant of the house of Saul whose name *was*
Ziba. So when they had called him to David, the king said to him, "*Are*
you Ziba?"

8:4 [a]Or *seven thousand* (compare 1 Chronicles 18:4) **8:8** [a]Spelled *Tibhath* in 1 Chronicles 18:8 **8:9** [a]Spelled *Tou* in 1 Chronicles 18:9 **8:10** [a]Spelled *Hadoram* in 1 Chronicles 18:10 **8:12** [a]Septuagint, Syriac, and some Hebrew manuscripts read *Edom.* **8:13** [a]Septuagint, Syriac, and some Hebrew manuscripts read *Edomites* (compare 1 Chronicles 18:12). **8:17** [a]Spelled *Shavsha* in 1 Chronicles 18:16

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 8:1—10:19

SITUATION
David had defeated the Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, and Philistines. These nations had been a constant military and religious threat to Israel.

OBSERVATION
The story of David and Mephibosheth is a striking picture of salvation by grace. It also beautifully shows how David remembered and followed through on his covenant with Jonathan.

INSPIRATION
Mephibosheth is bracketed into the Bible. [Second Samuel 4:4] doesn't tell us much, just his name (Mephibosheth), his calamity (dropped by his nurse), his deformity (crippled), and then it moves on.

But that's enough to raise a few questions. Who was this boy? Why is this story in Scripture? Why is Lucado mentioning him in a book about grace? A bit of background would be helpful.

Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan, the grandson of Saul, who was the first king of Israel. Saul and Jonathan were killed in battle, leaving the throne to be occupied by David. In those days the new king often staked out his territory by exterminating the family of the previous king.

David had no intention of following this tradition, but the family of Saul didn't know that. So they hurried to escape. Of special concern to them was five-year-old Mephibosheth, for upon the deaths of his father and uncle, he was the presumptive heir to

the throne. If David was intent on murdering Saul's heirs, this boy would be first on his list. So the family got out of Dodge. But in the haste of the moment, Mephibosheth slipped from the arms of his nurse, permanently damaging both feet. For the rest of his life he would be a cripple.

If his story is beginning to sound familiar, it should. You and he have a lot in common. Weren't you also born of royalty? And don't you carry the wounds of a fall? And hasn't each of us lived in fear of a king we have never seen?

Mephibosheth would understand Paul's portrait of us paupers, "when we were unable to help ourselves . . ." (Romans 5:6 NCV). For nearly two decades the young prince lived in a distant land, unable to walk to the king, too fearful to talk to the king. He was unable to help himself.

Meanwhile, David's kingdom flourished. Under his leadership, Israel grew to ten times its original size. He knew no defeat on the battlefield nor insurrection in his court. Israel was at peace. The people were thankful. And David, the shepherd made king, did not forget his promise to Jonathan. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

During the course of our lives, we will come across many people who have needs that we are able to meet. What will be our response? Don't assume someone else will meet that need. And ask the Holy Spirit to prompt you to see if you've promised to help someone in the past but never followed through.

He said, "At your service!"

3 Then the king said, "*Is* there not still someone of the house of Saul, to whom I may show the kindness of God?"

And Ziba said to the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan *who is* lame in *his* feet."

4 So the king said to him, "Where *is* he?"

And Ziba said to the king, "Indeed he *is* in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, in Lo Debar."

5 Then King David sent and brought him out of the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, from Lo Debar.

6 Now when Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, had come to David, he fell on his face and prostrated himself. Then David said, "Mephibosheth?"

And he answered, "Here is your servant!"

7 So David said to him, "Do not fear, for I will surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father's sake, and will restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather; and you shall eat bread at my table continually."

8 Then he bowed himself, and said, "What *is* your servant, that you should look upon such a dead dog as I?"

9 And the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said to him, "I have given to your master's son all that belonged to Saul and to all his house. 10 You therefore, and your sons and your servants, shall work the land for him, and you shall bring in *the harvest,* that your master's son may have food to eat. But Mephibosheth your master's son shall eat bread at my table always." Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.

11 Then Ziba said to the king, "According to all that my lord the king has commanded his servant, so will your servant do."

"As for Mephibosheth," *said the king,* "he shall eat at my table[a] like one of the king's sons." 12 Mephibosheth had a young son whose name *was* Micha. And all who dwelt in the house of Ziba *were* servants of Mephibosheth. 13 So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem, for he ate continually at the king's table. And he was lame in both his feet.

The Ammonites and Syrians Defeated

10 It happened after this that the king of the people of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his place. 2 Then David said, "I will show kindness to Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father showed kindness to me."

So David sent by the hand of his servants to comfort him concerning his father. And David's servants came into the land of the people of Ammon. 3 And the princes of the people of Ammon said to Hanun their lord, "Do you think that David really honors your father because he has sent comforters to you? Has David not *rather* sent his servants to you to search the city, to spy it out, and to overthrow it?"

4 Therefore Hanun took David's servants, shaved off half of their beards, cut off their garments in the middle, at their buttocks, and sent them away. 5 When they told David, he sent to meet them,

9:11 [a] Septuagint reads *David's table.*

because the men were greatly ashamed. And the king said, "Wait at Jericho until your beards have grown, and *then* return."

6 When the people of Ammon saw that they had made themselves repulsive to David, the people of Ammon sent and hired the Syrians of Beth Rehob and the Syrians of Zoba, twenty thousand foot soldiers; and from the king of Maacah one thousand men, and from Ish-Tob twelve thousand men. 7 Now when David heard *of it,* he sent Joab and all the army of the mighty men. 8 Then the people of Ammon came out and put themselves in battle array at the entrance of the gate. And the Syrians of Zoba, Beth Rehob, Ish-Tob, and Maacah *were* by themselves in the field.

9 When Joab saw that the battle line was against him before and behind, he chose some of Israel's best and put *them* in battle array against the Syrians. 10 And the rest of the people he put under the command of Abishai his brother, that he might set *them* in battle array against the people of Ammon. 11 Then he said, "If the Syrians are too strong for me, then you shall help me; but if the people of Ammon are too strong for you, then I will come and help you. 12 Be of good courage, and let us be strong for our people and for the cities of our God. And may the Lord do *what is* good in His sight."

13 So Joab and the people who *were* with him drew near for the battle against the Syrians, and they fled before him. 14 When the people of Ammon saw that the Syrians were fleeing, they also fled before Abishai, and entered the city. So Joab returned from the people of Ammon and went to Jerusalem.

15 When the Syrians saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they gathered together. 16 Then Hadadezer[a] sent and brought out the Syrians who *were* beyond the River,[b] and they came to Helam. And Shobach the commander of Hadadezer's army *went* before them. 17 When it was told David, he gathered all Israel, crossed over the Jordan, and came to Helam. And the Syrians set themselves in battle array against David and fought with him. 18 Then the Syrians fled before Israel; and David killed seven hundred charioteers and forty thousand horsemen of the Syrians, and struck Shobach the commander of their army, who died there. 19 And when all the kings *who were* servants to Hadadezer[a] saw that they were defeated by Israel, they made peace with Israel and served them. So the Syrians were afraid to help the people of Ammon anymore.

David, Bathsheba, and Uriah

11 It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out *to battle,* that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

2 Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman *was* very beautiful to behold. 3 So David sent and inquired about the woman. And *someone* said, "*Is* this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" 4 Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him,

10:16 [a]Hebrew *Hadarezer* [b]That is, the Euphrates **10:19** [a]Hebrew *Hadarezer*

EXPLORATION
God's Grace—Nehemiah 9:31; Psalm 111:4; 112:4; Proverbs 19:17.

If the Bible is called the Good Book, it's not because its people are. Blood runs as freely through the stories as the ink through the quills that penned them.

—Max Lucado (He Chose the Nails)

Life LESSONS

2 Samuel 11:1—12:31

SITUATION
David became king of Israel after Saul's death. Although a successful commander of Israel's army, he let himself be conquered by lust. He committed adultery with Bathsheba, then arranged to have her husband murdered.

OBSERVATION
David was not immune to temptation. When he sinned, God held him accountable for his actions.

INSPIRATION
He should be with his men, at battle, astride his steed and against his foe. But he isn't. He is at home.

It's springtime in Israel. The nights are warm, and the air is sweet. David has time on his hands, love on his mind, and people at his disposal.

His eyes fall upon a woman as she bathes. We'll always wonder if Bathsheba was bathing in a place where she shouldn't bathe, hoping David would look where he shouldn't look. We'll never know. But we know that he looks and likes what he sees. So he inquires about her. A servant returns with this information: "That woman is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam. She is the wife of Uriah the Hittite" (2 Samuel 11:3 NCV).

The servant laces his information with a warning. He gives not only the woman's name but her marital status and the name of her husband. Why tell David she is married if not to caution him? And why give the husband's name

and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house. 5And the woman conceived; so she sent and told David, and said, "I *am* with child."

6Then David sent to Joab, *saying,* "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. 7When Uriah had come to him, David asked how Joab was doing, and how the people were doing, and how the war prospered. 8And David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah departed from the king's house, and a gift *of food* from the king followed him. 9But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. 10So when they told David, saying, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "Did you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?"

11And Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are dwelling in tents, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are encamped in the open fields. Shall I then go to my house to eat and drink, and to lie with my wife? *As* you live, and *as* your soul lives, I will not do this thing."

12Then David said to Uriah, "Wait here today also, and tomorrow I will let you depart." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. 13Now when David called him, he ate and drank before him; and he made him drunk. And at evening he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

14In the morning it happened that David wrote a letter to Joab and sent *it* by the hand of Uriah. 15And he wrote in the letter, saying, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retreat from him, that he may be struck down and die." 16So it was, while Joab besieged the city, that he assigned Uriah to a place where he knew there *were* valiant men. 17Then the men of the city came out and fought with Joab. And *some* of the people of the servants of David fell; and Uriah the Hittite died also.

18Then Joab sent and told David all the things concerning the war, 19and charged the messenger, saying, "When you have finished telling the matters of the war to the king, 20if it happens that the king's wrath rises, and he says to you: 'Why did you approach so near to the city when you fought? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? 21Who struck Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth?[a] Was it not a woman who cast a piece of a millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez? Why did you go near the wall?'—then you shall say, 'Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.' "

22So the messenger went, and came and told David all that Joab had sent by him. 23And the messenger said to David, "Surely the men prevailed against us and came out to us in the field; then we drove them back as far as the entrance of the gate. 24The archers shot from the wall at your servants; and *some* of the king's servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also."

25Then David said to the messenger, "Thus you shall say to Joab: 'Do not let this thing displease you, for the sword devours one as well as another. Strengthen your attack against the city, and overthrow it.' So encourage him."

11:21 [a]Same as *Jerubbaal* (Gideon), Judges 6:32ff

26 When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead,
she mourned for her husband. 27 And when her mourning was over,
David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and
bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.

Nathan's Parable and David's Confession

12 Then the Lord sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and
said to him: "There were two men in one city, one rich and the
other poor. 2 The rich *man* had exceedingly many flocks and herds.
3 But the poor *man* had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he
had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with
his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay
in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. 4 And a traveler came
to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his
own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him;
but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had
come to him."

5 So David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said
to Nathan, "*As* the Lord lives, the man who has done this shall surely
die! 6 And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this
thing and because he had no pity."

7 Then Nathan said to David, "You *are* the man! Thus says the
Lord God of Israel: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered
you from the hand of Saul. 8 I gave you your master's house and your
master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel
and Judah. And if *that had been* too little, I also would have given
you much more! 9 Why have you despised the commandment of the
Lord, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the
sword; you have taken his wife *to be* your wife, and have killed him
with the sword of the people of Ammon. 10 Now therefore, the sword
shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me,
and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' 11 Thus
says the Lord: 'Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your
own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give *them*
to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this
sun. 12 For you did *it* secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel,
before the sun.'"

13 So David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord."

And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin;
you shall not die. 14 However, because by this deed you have given great
occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also *who*
is born to you shall surely die." 15 Then Nathan departed to his house.

The Death of David's Son

And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and
it became ill. 16 David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and
David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. 17 So the
elders of his house arose *and went* to him, to raise him up from the
ground. But he would not, nor did he eat food with them. 18 Then on
the seventh day it came to pass that the child died. And the servants
of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead. For they said,
"Indeed, while the child was alive, we spoke to him, and he would not

unless David is familiar with it?

Odds are, David knew Uriah. The servant hopes to deftly dissuade the king. But David misses the hint. The next verse describes his first step down a greasy slope. "So David sent messengers to bring Bathsheba to him. When she came to him, he had sexual relations with her" (11:4 NCV).

David "sends" many times in this story. He *sends* Joab to battle (v. 1). He *sends* the servant to inquire about Bathsheba (v. 3). He *sends* for Bathsheba to have her come to him (v. 4). When David learns of her pregnancy, he *sends* word to Joab (v. 6) to *send* Uriah back to Jerusalem. David *sends* him to Bathsheba to rest, but Uriah is too noble. David opts to *send* Uriah back to a place in the battle where he is sure to be killed. Thinking his cover-up is complete, David *sends* for Bathsheba and marries her (v. 27).

We don't like this sending, demanding David. We prefer the pastoring David, caring for the flock; the dashing David, hiding from Saul; the worshiping David, penning psalms. We aren't prepared for the David who has lost control of his self-control, who sins as he sends.

What has happened to him? Simple. Altitude sickness. He's been too high too long. The thin air has messed with his senses. He can't hear as he used to. He can't hear the warnings of the servant or the voice of his conscience. Nor can he hear his Lord. The pinnacle has dulled his ears and blinded his eyes. Did David see Bathsheba? No. He saw Bathsheba bathing. He saw Bathsheba's body and Bathsheba's curves. He saw Bathsheba, the conquest.

But did he see Bathsheba, the human being? The wife of Uriah? The daughter of Israel? The creation of God? No. David had lost his vision. Too long at the top will do that to you. Too many hours in the bright sun and thin air leaves you breathless and dizzy. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Sometimes we can find ourselves blinded to what is right. We justify our actions or simply refuse to listen to our conscience. We are not immune to sin, but we can ignore the warning signs. What can you do to keep from falling as David did?

EXPLORATION

Put Off Sin—Proverbs 3:11, 12; Isaiah 59; Romans 6:15–23; Hebrews 12:1.

With God there are no accidents. Every incident is intended to bring us closer to Him.

—Max Lucado (A Gentle Thunder)

heed our voice. How can we tell him that the child is dead? He may do some harm!"

19 When David saw that his servants were whispering, David perceived that the child was dead. Therefore David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?"

And they said, "He is dead."

20 So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he went to his own house; and when he requested,

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus Washes Our Feet

I don't understand how God can be so kind to us, but He is. He kneels before us, takes our feet in His hands, and washes them. Please understand that in washing the disciples' feet, Jesus is washing ours. You and I are in this story. We are at the table. That's us being cleansed, not from our dirt, but from our sins . . . .

Don't miss the meaning here. To place our feet in the basin of Jesus is to place the filthiest parts of our lives into His hands. In the ancient East, people's feet were caked with mud and dirt. The servant of the feast saw to it that the feet were cleaned. Jesus is assuming the role of the servant. He will wash the grimiest part of your life.

If you let Him. The water of the Servant comes only when we confess that we are dirty. Only when we confess that we are caked with filth, that we have walked forbidden trails and followed the wrong paths.

We tend to be proud like Peter and resist. "I'm not that dirty, Jesus. Just sprinkle a few drops on me and I'll be fine."

What a lie! "If we say we have no sin, we are fooling ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

We will never be cleansed until we confess we are dirty. We will never be pure until we admit we are filthy. And we will never be able to wash the feet of those who have hurt us until we allow Jesus, the one we have hurt, to wash ours.

You see, that is the secret of forgiveness. You will never forgive anyone more than God has already forgiven you. Only by letting Him wash your feet can you have strength to wash those of another. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 425.

they set food before him, and he ate. 21 Then his servants said to him, "What *is* this that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child *while he was* alive, but when the child died, you arose and ate food."

22 And he said, "While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who can tell *whether* the Lord[a] will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' 23 But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

Solomon Is Born

24 Then David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in to her and lay with her. So she bore a son, and he[a] called his name Solomon. Now the Lord loved him, 25 and He sent *word* by the hand of Nathan the prophet: So he[a] called his name Jedidiah,[b] because of the Lord.

Rabbah Is Captured

26 Now Joab fought against Rabbah of the people of Ammon, and took the royal city. 27 And Joab sent messengers to David, and said, "I have fought against Rabbah, and I have taken the city's water *supply*. 28 Now therefore, gather the rest of the people together and encamp against the city and take it, lest I take the city and it be called after my name." 29 So David gathered all the people together and went to Rabbah, fought against it, and took it. 30 Then he took their king's crown from his head. Its weight *was* a talent of gold, with precious stones. And it was *set* on David's head. Also he brought out the spoil of the city in great abundance. 31 And he brought out the people who *were* in it, and put *them to work* with saws and iron picks and iron axes, and made them cross over to the brick works. So he did to all the cities of the people of Ammon. Then David and all the people returned to Jerusalem.

Amnon and Tamar

13 After this Absalom the son of David had a lovely sister, whose name *was* Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her. 2 Amnon was so distressed over his sister Tamar that he became sick; for she *was* a virgin. And it was improper for Amnon to do anything to her. 3 But Amnon had a friend whose name *was* Jonadab the son of Shimeah, David's brother. Now Jonadab *was* a very crafty man. 4 And he said to him, "Why *are* you, the king's son, becoming thinner day after day? Will you not tell me?"

Amnon said to him, "I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister."

5 So Jonadab said to him, "Lie down on your bed and pretend to be ill. And when your father comes to see you, say to him, 'Please let my sister Tamar come and give me food, and prepare the food in my sight, that I may see *it* and eat it from her hand.'" 6 Then Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill; and when the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king, "Please let Tamar my sister come and make a couple of cakes for me in my sight, that I may eat from her hand."

12:22 [a]A few Hebrew manuscripts and Syriac read *God*. **12:24** [a]Following Kethib, Septuagint, and Vulgate; Qere, a few Hebrew manuscripts, Syriac, and Targum read *she*. **12:25** [a]Qere, some Hebrew manuscripts, Syriac, and Targum read *she*. [b]Literally *Beloved of the Lord*

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 13:1—14:33

SITUATION
David's family was in conflict. His eldest son, Amnon, raped Tamar, his own half sister. Absalom, Tamar's brother, murdered Amnon in revenge.

OBSERVATION
Sexual sin produces disastrous consequences in a family.

INSPIRATION
What do you do with your failures? Our mistakes come to us as pebbles; small stones that serve as souvenirs of our stumbles. . . . Here are some failures that have been drug into my office.

Unfaithfulness. He wanted to try again. She said, "No way." He wanted a second chance. She said, "You blew your chance." He admitted that he made a mistake by seeing another woman. He sees now that the mistake was fatal to his marriage.

Homosexuality. His wrists bore the scars of a suicide attempt. His arms had tracks from countless needles. His eyes reflected the spirit of one hell-bent on self-destruction. His words were those of a prisoner grimly resigned to the judge's sentence. "I'm gay. My dad says I'm queer. I guess he's right. . . ."

Immorality. She came to church with a pregnant womb and a repentant spirit. "I can't have a child," she pleaded. "We'll find a home for it," she was assured. She agreed. Then she changed her mind. Her boyfriend funded the abortion. "Can God ever forgive me?" she asked. . . .

Could you do it all over again, you'd do it differently. You'd be a different person. You'd be more patient. You'd control your tongue. You'd finish what you started. You'd turn the other cheek instead of slapping his. You'd get married first. You wouldn't marry at all. You'd be honest. You'd resist the temptation. . . .

But you can't. And as many times as you tell yourself, "What's done is done," what you did can't be undone.

That's part of what Paul meant when he said, "The wages of sin is death." He didn't say, "The wages of sin is a bad mood." Or, "The wages of sin is a hard day." Nor, "The wages of sin is depression." Read it again. "The wages of sin is death." Sin is fatal.

Can anything be done with it? . . . What do you do with the stones from life's stumbles?

My oldest daughter, Jenna, is four years old. Some time ago she came to me with a confession. "Daddy, I took a crayon and drew on the wall." (Kids amaze me with their honesty.)

I sat down and lifted her up into my lap and tried to be wise. "Is that a good thing to do?" I asked her.

"No."

"What does Daddy do when you write on the wall?"

"You spank me."

"What do you think Daddy should do this time?"

"Love."

Don't we all want that? Don't we all long for a father who even though our mistakes are written all over the wall, will love us anyway? Don't we want a father who cares for us in spite of our failures?

7 And David sent home to Tamar, saying, "Now go to your brother
Amnon's house, and prepare food for him." 8 So Tamar went to her
brother Amnon's house; and he was lying down. Then she took flour
and kneaded *it,* made cakes in his sight, and baked the cakes. 9 And
she took the pan and placed *them* out before him, but he refused to
eat. Then Amnon said, "Have everyone go out from me." And they all
went out from him. 10 Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food into
the bedroom, that I may eat from your hand." And Tamar took the
cakes which she had made, and brought *them* to Amnon her brother
in the bedroom. 11 Now when she had brought *them* to him to eat, he
took hold of her and said to her, "Come, lie with me, my sister."

12 But she answered him, "No, my brother, do not force me, for no
such thing should be done in Israel. Do not do this disgraceful thing!
13 And I, where could I take my shame? And as for you, you would be
like one of the fools in Israel. Now therefore, please speak to the king;
for he will not withhold me from you." 14 However, he would not heed
her voice; and being stronger than she, he forced her and lay with her.

15 Then Amnon hated her exceedingly, so that the hatred with
which he hated her *was* greater than the love with which he had loved
her. And Amnon said to her, "Arise, be gone!"

16 So she said to him, "No, indeed! This evil of sending me away *is*
worse than the other that you did to me."

But he would not listen to her. 17 Then he called his servant who
attended him, and said, "Here! Put this *woman* out, away from me,
and bolt the door behind her." 18 Now she had on a robe of many col-
ors, for the king's virgin daughters wore such apparel. And his servant
put her out and bolted the door behind her.

19 Then Tamar put ashes on her head, and tore her robe of many
colors that *was* on her, and laid her hand on her head and went away
crying bitterly. 20 And Absalom her brother said to her, "Has Amnon
your brother been with you? But now hold your peace, my sister. He
is your brother; do not take this thing to heart." So Tamar remained
desolate in her brother Absalom's house.

21 But when King David heard of all these things, he was very angry.
22 And Absalom spoke to his brother Amnon neither good nor bad. For
Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar.

Absalom Murders Amnon

23 And it came to pass, after two full years, that Absalom had sheep-
shearers in Baal Hazor, which *is* near Ephraim; so Absalom invited all
the king's sons. 24 Then Absalom came to the king and said, "Kindly
note, your servant has sheepshearers; please, let the king and his ser-
vants go with your servant."

25 But the king said to Absalom, "No, my son, let us not all go now,
lest we be a burden to you." Then he urged him, but he would not go;
and he blessed him.

26 Then Absalom said, "If not, please let my brother Amnon go
with us."

And the king said to him, "Why should he go with you?" 27 But
Absalom urged him; so he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him.

28 Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, "Watch now,
when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say to you, 'Strike

Amnon!' then kill him. Do not be afraid. Have I not commanded you? Be courageous and valiant." 29 So the servants of Absalom did to Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king's sons arose, and each one got on his mule and fled.

30 And it came to pass, while they were on the way, that news came to David, saying, "Absalom has killed all the king's sons, and not one of them is left!" 31 So the king arose and tore his garments and lay on the ground, and all his servants stood by with their clothes torn. 32 Then Jonadab the son of Shimeah, David's brother, answered and said, "Let not my lord suppose they have killed all the young men, the king's sons, for only Amnon is dead. For by the command of Absalom this has been determined from the day that he forced his sister Tamar. 33 Now therefore, let not my lord the king take the thing to his heart, to think that all the king's sons are dead. For only Amnon is dead."

Absalom Flees to Geshur

34 Then Absalom fled. And the young man who was keeping watch lifted his eyes and looked, and there, many people were coming from the road on the hillside behind him.[a] 35 And Jonadab said to the king, "Look, the king's sons are coming; as your servant said, so it is." 36 So it was, as soon as he had finished speaking, that the king's sons indeed came, and they lifted up their voice and wept. Also the king and all his servants wept very bitterly.

37 But Absalom fled and went to Talmai the son of Ammihud, king of Geshur. And *David* mourned for his son every day. 38 So Absalom fled and went to Geshur, and was there three years. 39 And King David[a] longed to go to[b] Absalom. For he had been comforted concerning Amnon, because he was dead.

Absalom Returns to Jerusalem

14 So Joab the son of Zeruiah perceived that the king's heart *was* concerned about Absalom. 2 And Joab sent to Tekoa and brought from there a wise woman, and said to her, "Please pretend to be a mourner, and put on mourning apparel; do not anoint yourself with oil, but act like a woman who has been mourning a long time for the dead. 3 Go to the king and speak to him in this manner." So Joab put the words in her mouth.

4 And when the woman of Tekoa spoke[a] to the king, she fell on her face to the ground and prostrated herself, and said, "Help, O king!"

5 Then the king said to her, "What troubles you?"

And she answered, "Indeed I *am* a widow, my husband is dead. 6 Now your maidservant had two sons; and the two fought with each other in the field, and *there was* no one to part them, but the one struck the other and killed him. 7 And now the whole family has risen up against your maidservant, and they said, 'Deliver him who struck his brother, that we may execute him for the life of his brother whom

13:34 [a]Septuagint adds *And the watchman went and told the king, and said, "I see men from the way of Horonaim, from the regions of the mountains."*
13:39 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Syriac, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *the spirit of the king;* Targum reads *the soul of King David.* [b]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Septuagint and Vulgate read *ceased to pursue after.* **14:4** [a]Many Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *came.*

We do have that type of a father. A father who is at His best when we are at our worst. A father whose grace is strongest when our devotion is weakest. If your bag is bulky, then you're in for some thrilling news: Your failures are not fatal. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What price have you paid for sin? Remember, God does not want you to live in guilt or defeat. Embrace Christ for healing and hope. Trust Christ for tomorrow. In faith, begin to heal wounds today.

EXPLORATION
Consequences of Sin—Genesis 4:1–16; Exodus 34:6, 7; Joshua 7:24, 25; Hebrews 12:4–17; Revelation 2:20–23.

he killed; and we will destroy the heir also.' So they would extinguish my ember that is left, and leave to my husband *neither* name nor remnant on the earth."

8 Then the king said to the woman, "Go to your house, and I will give orders concerning you."

9 And the woman of Tekoa said to the king, "My lord, O king, *let* the iniquity *be* on me and on my father's house, and the king and his throne *be* guiltless."

10 So the king said, "Whoever says *anything* to you, bring him to me, and he shall not touch you anymore."

11 Then she said, "Please let the king remember the Lord your God, and do not permit the avenger of blood to destroy anymore, lest they destroy my son."

And he said, "*As* the Lord lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground."

12 Therefore the woman said, "Please, let your maidservant speak *another* word to my lord the king."

And he said, "Say on."

13 So the woman said: "Why then have you schemed such a thing against the people of God? For the king speaks this thing as one who is guilty, *in that* the king does not bring his banished one home again. 14 For we will surely die and *become* like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. Yet God does not take away a life; but He devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him. 15 Now therefore, I have come to speak of this thing to my lord the king because the people have made me afraid. And your maidservant said, 'I will now speak to the king; it may be that the king will perform the request of his maidservant. 16 For the king will hear and deliver his maidservant from the hand of the man *who would* destroy me and my son together from the inheritance of God.' 17 Your maidservant said, 'The word of my lord the king will now be comforting; for as the angel of God, so *is* my lord the king in discerning good and evil. And may the Lord your God be with you.' "

18 Then the king answered and said to the woman, "Please do not hide from me anything that I ask you."

And the woman said, "Please, let my lord the king speak."

19 So the king said, "*Is* the hand of Joab with you in all this?" And the woman answered and said, "*As* you live, my lord the king, no one can turn to the right hand or to the left from anything that my lord the king has spoken. For your servant Joab commanded me, and he put all these words in the mouth of your maidservant. 20 To bring about this change of affairs your servant Joab has done this thing; but my lord *is* wise, according to the wisdom of the angel of God, to know everything that *is* in the earth."

21 And the king said to Joab, "All right, I have granted this thing. Go therefore, bring back the young man Absalom."

22 Then Joab fell to the ground on his face and bowed himself, and thanked the king. And Joab said, "Today your servant knows that I have found favor in your sight, my lord, O king, in that the king has fulfilled the request of his servant." 23 So Joab arose and went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. 24 And the king said, "Let him return to his own house, but do not let him see my face." So Absalom returned to his own house, but did not see the king's face.

David Forgives Absalom

25 Now in all Israel there was no one who was praised as much as Absalom for his good looks. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. 26 And when he cut the hair of his head—at the end of every year he cut *it* because it was heavy on him—when he cut it, he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred shekels according to the king's standard. 27 To Absalom were born three sons, and one daughter whose name *was* Tamar. She was a woman of beautiful appearance.

28 And Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, but did not see the king's face. 29 Therefore Absalom sent for Joab, to send him to the king, but he would not come to him. And when he sent again the second time, he would not come. 30 So he said to his servants, "See, Joab's field is near mine, and he has barley there; go and set it on fire." And Absalom's servants set the field on fire.

31 Then Joab arose and came to Absalom's house, and said to him, "Why have your servants set my field on fire?"

32 And Absalom answered Joab, "Look, I sent to you, saying, 'Come here, so that I may send you to the king, to say, "Why have I come from Geshur? *It would be* better for me *to be* there still."' Now therefore, let me see the king's face; but if there is iniquity in me, let him execute me."

33 So Joab went to the king and told him. And when he had called for Absalom, he came to the king and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king. Then the king kissed Absalom.

Absalom's Treason

15 After this it happened that Absalom provided himself with chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him. 2 Now Absalom would rise early and stand beside the way to the gate. *So* it was, whenever anyone who had a lawsuit came to the king for a decision, that Absalom would call to him and say, "What city *are* you from?" And he would say, "Your servant *is* from such and such a tribe of Israel." 3 Then Absalom would say to him, "Look, your case *is* good and right; but *there is* no deputy of the king to hear you." 4 Moreover Absalom would say, "Oh, that I were made judge in the land, and everyone who has any suit or cause would come to me; then I would give him justice." 5 And *so* it was, whenever anyone came near to bow down to him, that he would put out his hand and take him and kiss him. 6 In this manner Absalom acted toward all Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

7 Now it came to pass after forty[a] years that Absalom said to the king, "Please, let me go to Hebron and pay the vow which I made to the Lord. 8 For your servant took a vow while I dwelt at Geshur in Syria, saying, 'If the Lord indeed brings me back to Jerusalem, then I will serve the Lord.'"

9 And the king said to him, "Go in peace." So he arose and went to Hebron.

10 Then Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then you shall say, 'Absalom reigns in Hebron!'" 11 And with Absalom went two hundred men invited from Jerusalem, and they went along innocently and did not know anything. 12 Then Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city—from Giloh—while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy grew strong, for the people with Absalom continually increased in number.

David Escapes from Jerusalem

13 Now a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom."

14 So David said to all his servants who *were* with him at Jerusalem, "Arise, and let us flee, or we shall not escape from Absalom. Make haste to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly and bring disaster upon us, and strike the city with the edge of the sword."

15 And the king's servants said to the king, "We *are* your servants, *ready to do* whatever my lord the king commands." 16 Then the king went out with all his household after him. But the king left ten

15:7 [a] Septuagint manuscripts, Syriac, and Josephus read *four.*

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 15:1—16:14

SITUATION

Absalom's charisma and charm won over many followers. His rebellion became so strong and widespread that David fled rather than engage in a long, bloody opposition.

OBSERVATION

Even though God had forgiven David, David's sins brought painful consequences. In this passage, David was forced to flee Jerusalem because of opposition from his own son. Imagine the pain and rejection David must have felt. Jesus could have associated with those emotions as His own family and followers fled from Him.

INSPIRATION

Judas wasn't the only turncoat. Matthew is admirably honest when he confesses, "all the disciples forsook Him and fled" (Matthew 26:56).

For such a short word, "all" sure packs some pain. "All the disciples . . . fled." John did. Matthew did. Simon did. Thomas did. They all did. We don't have to go far to find the last time this word was used. Note the verse just a few lines before our text: "Peter said to Him, 'Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!' And so said *all* the disciples" (26:35, italics mine).

All pledged loyalty, and yet all ran. From the outside looking in, all we see is betrayal. The disciples have left Him. The people have rejected Him. And God hasn't heard Him. Never has so much trash been dumped on one being.

Stack all the disloyalties of deadbeat dads and cheating wives and prodigal kids and dishonest workers in one pile, and you begin to see what Jesus had to face that night. From a human point of view, Jesus' world has collapsed. No answer from heaven, no help from the people, no loyalty from His friends.

Jesus, neck deep in rubbish. That's how I would have described the scene. That's how a reporter would have described it. That's how a witness would have portrayed it. But that's not how Jesus saw it. He saw something else entirely. He wasn't oblivious to the trash; He just wasn't limited to it. Somehow He was able to see good in the bad, the purpose in the pain, and God's presence in the problem.

We could use a little of Jesus' 20/20 vision, couldn't we? You and I live in a trashy world. Unwanted garbage comes our way on a regular basis. We, too, have unanswered prayers and unfruitful dreams and unbelievable betrayals, do we not? Haven't you been handed a trash sack of mishaps and heartaches? Sure you have. May I ask, what are you going to do with it? (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

So what are you going to do with the pain, rejection, and trash in your life? Take time to reflect on how Jesus dealt with His own pain and rejection. Ask Him to help you overcome the negatives in your life with a positive response. Ask Him to help you see the purpose in the pain.

EXPLORATION

Rebellion—Numbers 16; 1 Kings 1—2; 12:16–20; 15:27—16:7; Hosea 9:15; 13:16.

women, concubines, to keep the house. 17 And the king went out with all the people after him, and stopped at the outskirts. 18 Then all his servants passed before him; and all the Cherethites, all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men who had followed him from Gath, passed before the king.

19 Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why are you also going with us? Return and remain with the king. For you *are* a foreigner and also an exile from your own place. 20 In fact, you came *only* yesterday. Should I make you wander up and down with us today, since I go I know not where? Return, and take your brethren back. Mercy and truth *be* with you."

21 But Ittai answered the king and said, "*As* the Lord lives, and *as* my lord the king lives, surely in whatever place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also your servant will be."

22 So David said to Ittai, "Go, and cross over." Then Ittai the Gittite and all his men and all the little ones who *were* with him crossed over. 23 And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people crossed over. The king himself also crossed over the Brook Kidron, and all the people crossed over toward the way of the wilderness.

24 There was Zadok also, and all the Levites with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God. And they set down the ark of God, and Abiathar went up until all the people had finished crossing over from the city. 25 Then the king said to Zadok, "Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me back and show me *both* it and His dwelling place. 26 But if He says thus: 'I have no delight in you,' here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him." 27 The king also said to Zadok the priest, "*Are* you *not* a seer? Return to the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz your son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. 28 See, I will wait in the plains of the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me." 29 Therefore Zadok and Abiathar carried the ark of God back to Jerusalem. And they remained there.

30 So David went up by the Ascent of the *Mount of* Olives, and wept as he went up; and he had his head covered and went barefoot. And all the people who *were* with him covered their heads and went up, weeping as they went up. 31 Then *someone* told David, saying, "Ahithophel *is* among the conspirators with Absalom." And David said, "O Lord, I pray, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness!"

32 Now it happened when David had come to the top *of the mountain,* where he worshiped God—there was Hushai the Archite coming to meet him with his robe torn and dust on his head. 33 David said to him, "If you go on with me, then you will become a burden to me. 34 But if you return to the city, and say to Absalom, 'I will be your servant, O king; *as* I *was* your father's servant previously, so I *will* now also *be* your servant,' then you may defeat the counsel of Ahithophel for me. 35 And *do* you not *have* Zadok and Abiathar the priests with you there? Therefore it will be *that* whatever you hear from the king's house, you shall tell to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. 36 Indeed *they have* there with them their two sons, Ahimaaz, Zadok's *son,* and Jonathan, Abiathar's *son;* and by them you shall send me everything you hear."

37 So Hushai, David's friend, went into the city. And Absalom came into Jerusalem.

Mephibosheth's Servant

16 When David was a little past the top *of the mountain,* there was
Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth, who met him with a couple
of saddled donkeys, and on them two hundred *loaves* of bread, one
hundred clusters of raisins, one hundred summer fruits, and a skin of
wine. 2 And the king said to Ziba, "What do you mean to do with these?"

So Ziba said, "The donkeys *are* for the king's household to ride on,
the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat, and the wine
for those who are faint in the wilderness to drink."

3 Then the king said, "And where *is* your master's son?"

And Ziba said to the king, "Indeed he is staying in Jerusalem, for he
said, 'Today the house of Israel will restore the kingdom of my father
to me.' "

4 So the king said to Ziba, "Here, all that *belongs* to Mephibosheth
is yours."

And Ziba said, "I humbly bow before you, *that* I may find favor in
your sight, my lord, O king!"

Shimei Curses David

5 Now when King David came to Bahurim, there was a man from
the family of the house of Saul, whose name *was* Shimei the son of
Gera, coming from there. He came out, cursing continuously as he
came. 6 And he threw stones at David and at all the servants of King
David. And all the people and all the mighty men *were* on his right
hand and on his left. 7 Also Shimei said thus when he cursed: "Come
out! Come out! You bloodthirsty man, you rogue! 8 The Lord has
brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place
you have reigned; and the Lord has delivered the kingdom into the
hand of Absalom your son. So now you *are caught* in your own evil,
because you are a bloodthirsty man!"

9 Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should
this dead dog curse my lord the king? Please, let me go over and take
off his head!"

10 But the king said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of
Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the Lord has said to him, 'Curse
David.' Who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?' "

11 And David said to Abishai and all his servants, "See how my son
who came from my own body seeks my life. How much more now
may this Benjamite? Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the Lord
has ordered him. 12 It may be that the Lord will look on my affliction,[a]
and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing this day."
13 And as David and his men went along the road, Shimei went along
the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went, threw stones at him
and kicked up dust. 14 Now the king and all the people who *were* with
him became weary; so they refreshed themselves there.

The Advice of Ahithophel

15 Meanwhile Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came
to Jerusalem; and Ahithophel *was* with him. 16 And so it was, when

16:12 [a] Following Kethib, Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate; Qere reads *my eyes;* Targum reads *tears of my eyes.*

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 16:15—17:23

SITUATION

Ahithophel and Hushai competed as advisers to Absalom during the revolution. Most leaders in those times relied on advisers to make important policy decisions.

OBSERVATION

God enables His chosen leaders (such as David) to prevail, even through the most complex and adverse circumstances. And He supplies His Holy Spirit to guide and comfort.

INSPIRATION

Pat is my biking buddy. A few years ago I took up road biking as a hobby and exercise. I bought the helmet, gloves, and thin-wheeled bike. I clipped my shoes in the pedals and almost died on the first ride. Hills are Everestish for the old and overweight. I literally had to walk my bike home.

Pat heard of my interest and offered to ride with me. Pat prefers biking to breathing. To him, biking *is* breathing. If he didn't have a job and five kids, the Tour de France might have known one more American. He has pistons for legs and a locomotive engine for a heart. When I complained about the steep roads and stiff winds, he made this offer: "No problem. You can ride on my wheel."

To ride on a biker's wheel is to draft on him. When Pat and I pedal into a stiff wind, I pull in behind him as close as I dare. My front wheel is within a foot of his rear one. He vanguards into the breeze, leaving me a cone of calm in which to ride.

And when we bike up stiff hills? I'm a bit embarrassed to admit this, but Pat has been known to place a hand on my back and push me up the incline.

Couldn't you use such a friend? You have one. When you place your faith in Christ, Christ places His Spirit before, behind, and within you. Not a strange spirit, but the *same* Spirit: the parakletos. Everything Jesus did for His followers, His Spirit does for you. Jesus taught; the Spirit teaches. Jesus healed; the Spirit heals. Jesus comforted; His Spirit comforts. As Jesus sends you into new seasons, He sends His Counselor to go with you. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Isolate a major problem you will face today. Choose a Christian response to it by seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He will show you what to do.

EXPLORATION

God's Purposes—Genesis 45:4–7; 50:19, 20; Isaiah 46:8–11; Matthew 25:34; 2 Timothy 1:8, 9.

Your home is your giant-size privilege, your towering priority.

—Max Lucado (Facing Your Giants)

Hushai the Archite, David's friend, came to Absalom, that Hushai said to Absalom, "*Long* live the king! *Long* live the king!"

17 So Absalom said to Hushai, "*Is* this your loyalty to your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?"

18 And Hushai said to Absalom, "No, but whom the Lord and this people and all the men of Israel choose, his I will be, and with him I will remain. 19 Furthermore, whom should I serve? *Should I* not *serve* in the presence of his son? As I have served in your father's presence, so will I be in your presence."

20 Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give advice as to what we should do."

21 And Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Go in to your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house; and all Israel will hear that you are abhorred by your father. Then the hands of all who are with you will be strong." 22 So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the top of the house, and Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.

23 Now the advice of Ahithophel, which he gave in those days, *was* as if one had inquired at the oracle of God. So *was* all the advice of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom.

17 Moreover Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Now let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue David tonight. 2 I will come upon him while he *is* weary and weak, and make him afraid. And all the people who *are* with him will flee, and I will strike only the king. 3 Then I will bring back all the people to you. When all return except the man whom you seek, all the people will be at peace." 4 And the saying pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel.

The Advice of Hushai

5 Then Absalom said, "Now call Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear what he says too." 6 And when Hushai came to Absalom, Absalom spoke to him, saying, "Ahithophel has spoken in this manner. Shall we do as he says? If not, speak up."

7 So Hushai said to Absalom: "The advice that Ahithophel has given *is* not good at this time. 8 For," said Hushai, "you know your father and his men, that they *are* mighty men, and they *are* enraged in their minds, like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field; and your father *is* a man of war, and will not camp with the people. 9 Surely by now he is hidden in some pit, or in some *other* place. And it will be, when some of them are overthrown at the first, that whoever hears *it* will say, 'There is a slaughter among the people who follow Absalom.' 10 And even he *who is* valiant, whose heart *is* like the heart of a lion, will melt completely. For all Israel knows that your father *is* a mighty man, and *those* who *are* with him *are* valiant men. 11 Therefore I advise that all Israel be fully gathered to you, from Dan to Beersheba, like the sand that *is* by the sea for multitude, and that you go to battle in person. 12 So we will come upon him in some place where he may be found, and we will fall on him as the dew falls on the ground. And of him and all the men who *are* with him there shall not be left so much as one. 13 Moreover, if he has withdrawn into a city, then all Israel shall bring ropes to that city; and we will pull it into the river, until there is not one small stone found there."

14 So Absalom and all the men of Israel said, "The advice of Hushai
the Archite *is* better than the advice of Ahithophel." For the Lord had
purposed to defeat the good advice of Ahithophel, to the intent that
the Lord might bring disaster on Absalom.

Hushai Warns David to Escape

15 Then Hushai said to Zadok and Abiathar the priests, "Thus and
so Ahithophel advised Absalom and the elders of Israel, and thus
and so I have advised. 16 Now therefore, send quickly and tell David,
saying, 'Do not spend this night in the plains of the wilderness, but
speedily cross over, lest the king and all the people who *are* with him
be swallowed up.'" 17 Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz stayed at En Rogel,
for they dared not be seen coming into the city; so a female servant
would come and tell them, and they would go and tell King David.
18 Nevertheless a lad saw them, and told Absalom. But both of them
went away quickly and came to a man's house in Bahurim, who had a
well in his court; and they went down into it. 19 Then the woman took
and spread a covering over the well's mouth, and spread ground grain
on it; and the thing was not known. 20 And when Absalom's servants
came to the woman at the house, they said, "Where *are* Ahimaaz and
Jonathan?"

So the woman said to them, "They have gone over the water
brook."

And when they had searched and could not find *them,* they
returned to Jerusalem. 21 Now it came to pass, after they had departed,
that they came up out of the well and went and told King David, and
said to David, "Arise and cross over the water quickly. For thus has
Ahithophel advised against you." 22 So David and all the people who
were with him arose and crossed over the Jordan. By morning light not
one of them was left who had not gone over the Jordan.

23 Now when Ahithophel saw that his advice was not followed, he
saddled a donkey, and arose and went home to his house, to his city.
Then he put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died;
and he was buried in his father's tomb.

24 Then David went to Mahanaim. And Absalom crossed over the
Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him. 25 And Absalom made
Amasa captain of the army instead of Joab. This Amasa *was* the son
of a man whose name *was* Jithra,[a] an Israelite,[b] who had gone in to
Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister of Zeruiah, Joab's mother. 26 So
Israel and Absalom encamped in the land of Gilead.

27 Now it happened, when David had come to Mahanaim, that
Shobi the son of Nahash from Rabbah of the people of Ammon,
Machir the son of Ammiel from Lo Debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite
from Rogelim, 28 brought beds and basins, earthen vessels and wheat,
barley and flour, parched *grain* and beans, lentils and parched *seeds,*
29 honey and curds, sheep and cheese of the herd, for David and the
people who *were* with him to eat. For they said, "The people are hun-
gry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness."

17:25 [a]Spelled *Jether* in 1 Chronicles 2:17 and elsewhere [b]Following Masoretic Text, some manuscripts of the Septuagint, and Targum; some manuscripts of the Septuagint read *Ishmaelite* (compare 1 Chronicles 2:17); Vulgate reads *of Jezrael.*

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 17:24—19:43

SITUATION

The armies of David and Absalom fought each other, resulting in Absalom's death and David's mourning for his son. David returned to Jerusalem and reached out to bring those who supported Absalom back into the kingdom of Israel.

OBSERVATION

God desires that His people be unified and avoid petty squabbles, arguments and fights over minor issues. The difficulties in David's family could have been avoided if David had been a father in addition to being a king.

INSPIRATION

How do we explain David's disastrous home? How do we explain David's silence when it comes to his family? No psalms written about his children. Surely, out of all his wives, one was worthy of a sonnet or song. But he never talked about them.

Aside from the prayer he offered for Bathsheba's baby, Scripture gives no indication that he ever prayed for his family. He prayed about the Philistines, interceded for his warriors. He offered prayers for Jonathan, his friend, and for Saul, his archrival. But as far as his family is concerned, it's as if they never existed.

Was David too busy to notice them? Maybe. He had a city to settle and a kingdom to build.

Was he too important to care for them? "Let the wives raise the kids; I'll lead the nation."

Was he too guilty to shepherd them? After all, how could David, who had seduced Bathsheba and

intoxicated and murdered Uriah, correct his sons when they raped and murdered?

Too busy. Too important. Too guilty. And now? Too late. A dozen exits too late. But it's not too late for you. Your home is your giant-size privilege, your towering priority. Do not make David's tragic mistake. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Take stock of your relationship with your family. If you're a parent, are you parenting in a way that honors God? What would God call you to do better?

EXPLORATION

United Together with Christ—Romans 7:4; 1 Corinthians 6:15; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:30; 1 John 2:24.

Godly sorrow makes people change their hearts and lives. This leads to salvation, and you cannot be sorry for that.

—Max Lucado (A Gentle Thunder)

Absalom's Defeat and Death

18 And David numbered the people who *were* with him, and set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds over them. 2 Then David sent out one third of the people under the hand of Joab, one third under the hand of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and one third under the hand of Ittai the Gittite. And the king said to the people, "I also will surely go out with you myself."

3 But the people answered, "You shall not go out! For if we flee away, they will not care about us; nor if half of us die, will they care about us. But *you are* worth ten thousand of us now. For you are now more help to us in the city."

4 Then the king said to them, "Whatever seems best to you I will do." So the king stood beside the gate, and all the people went out by hundreds and by thousands. 5 Now the king had commanded Joab, Abishai, and Ittai, saying, "*Deal* gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains orders concerning Absalom.

6 So the people went out into the field of battle against Israel. And the battle was in the woods of Ephraim. 7 The people of Israel were overthrown there before the servants of David, and a great slaughter of twenty thousand took place there that day. 8 For the battle there was scattered over the face of the whole countryside, and the woods devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.

9 Then Absalom met the servants of David. Absalom rode on a mule. The mule went under the thick boughs of a great terebinth tree, and his head caught in the terebinth; so he was left hanging between heaven and earth. And the mule which *was* under him went on. 10 Now a certain man saw *it* and told Joab, and said, "I just saw Absalom hanging in a terebinth tree!"

11 So Joab said to the man who told him, "You just saw *him!* And why did you not strike him there to the ground? I would have given you ten *shekels* of silver and a belt."

12 But the man said to Joab, "Though I were to receive a thousand *shekels* of silver in my hand, I would not raise my hand against the king's son. For in our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, saying, 'Beware lest anyone *touch* the young man Absalom!'[a] 13 Otherwise I would have dealt falsely against my own life. For there is nothing hidden from the king, and you yourself would have set yourself against *me.*"

14 Then Joab said, "I cannot linger with you." And he took three spears in his hand and thrust them through Absalom's heart, while he was *still* alive in the midst of the terebinth tree. 15 And ten young men who bore Joab's armor surrounded Absalom, and struck and killed him.

16 So Joab blew the trumpet, and the people returned from pursuing Israel. For Joab held back the people. 17 And they took Absalom and cast him into a large pit in the woods, and laid a very large heap of stones over him. Then all Israel fled, everyone to his tent.

18 Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up a pillar for himself, which *is* in the King's Valley. For he said, "I have no son to

18:12 [a] The ancient versions read *'Protect the young man Absalom for me!'*

keep my name in remembrance." He called the pillar after his own name. And to this day it is called Absalom's Monument.

David Hears of Absalom's Death

19 Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said, "Let me run now and take the news to the king, how the Lord has avenged him of his enemies."

20 And Joab said to him, "You shall not take the news this day, for you shall take the news another day. But today you shall take no news, because the king's son is dead." 21 Then Joab said to the Cushite, "Go, tell the king what you have seen." So the Cushite bowed himself to Joab and ran.

22 And Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said again to Joab, "But whatever happens, please let me also run after the Cushite."

So Joab said, "Why will you run, my son, since you have no news ready?"

23 "But whatever happens," *he said,* "let me run."

So he said to him, "Run." Then Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain, and outran the Cushite.

24 Now David was sitting between the two gates. And the watchman went up to the roof over the gate, to the wall, lifted his eyes and looked, and there was a man, running alone. 25 Then the watchman cried out and told the king. And the king said, "If he *is* alone, *there is* news in his mouth." And he came rapidly and drew near.

26 Then the watchman saw *another* man running, and the watchman called to the gatekeeper and said, "There is *another* man, running alone!"

And the king said, "He also brings news."

27 So the watchman said, "I think the running of the first is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok."

And the king said, "He *is* a good man, and comes with good news."

28 So Ahimaaz called out and said to the king, "All is well!" Then he bowed down with his face to the earth before the king, and said, "Blessed *be* the Lord your God, who has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king!"

29 The king said, "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

Ahimaaz answered, "When Joab sent the king's servant and *me* your servant, I saw a great tumult, but I did not know what *it was about.*"

30 And the king said, "Turn aside *and* stand here." So he turned aside and stood still.

31 Just then the Cushite came, and the Cushite said, "There is good news, my lord the king! For the Lord has avenged you this day of all those who rose against you."

32 And the king said to the Cushite, "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

So the Cushite answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise against you to do harm, be like *that* young man!"

David's Mourning for Absalom

33 Then the king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept. And as he went, he said thus: "O my son Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!"

19 And Joab was told, "Behold, the king is weeping and mourning for Absalom." 2 So the victory that day was *turned* into mourning for all the people. For the people heard it said that day, "The king is grieved for his son." 3 And the people stole back into the city that day, as people who are ashamed steal away when they flee in battle. 4 But the king covered his face, and the king cried out with a loud voice, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!"

5 Then Joab came into the house to the king, and said, "Today you have disgraced all your servants who today have saved your life, the lives of your sons and daughters, the lives of your wives and the lives of your concubines, 6 in that you love your enemies and hate your friends. For you have declared today that you regard neither princes nor servants; for today I perceive that if Absalom had lived and all of us had died today, then it would have pleased you well. 7 Now therefore, arise, go out and speak comfort to your servants. For I swear by the Lord, if you do not go out, not one will stay with you this night. And that will be worse for you than all the evil that has befallen you from your youth until now." 8 Then the king arose and sat in the gate. And they told all the people, saying, "There is the king, sitting in the gate." So all the people came before the king.

For everyone of Israel had fled to his tent.

David Returns to Jerusalem

9 Now all the people were in a dispute throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying,
"The king saved us from the hand of our
enemies, he delivered us from the hand of
the Philistines, and now he has fled from the
land because of Absalom. 10 But Absalom,
whom we anointed over us, has died in battle.
Now therefore, why do you say nothing about
bringing back the king?"

11 So King David sent to Zadok and Abiathar
the priests, saying, "Speak to the elders of
Judah, saying, 'Why are you the last to bring
the king back to his house, since the words
of all Israel have come to the king, to his *very*
house? 12 You *are* my brethren, you *are* my
bone and my flesh. Why then are you the last
to bring back the king?' 13 And say to Amasa,
'*Are* you not my bone and my flesh? God do
so to me, and more also, if you are not com-
mander of the army before me continually in
place of Joab.'" 14 So he swayed the hearts of
all the men of Judah, just as *the heart of* one
man, so that they sent *this word* to the king:
"Return, you and all your servants!"

15 Then the king returned and came to
the Jordan. And Judah came to Gilgal, to go
to meet the king, to escort the king across
the Jordan. 16 And Shimei the son of Gera, a
Benjamite, who *was* from Bahurim, hurried
and came down with the men of Judah to
meet King David. 17 *There were* a thousand
men of Benjamin with him, and Ziba the ser-
vant of the house of Saul, and his fifteen sons
and his twenty servants with him; and they
went over the Jordan before the king. 18 Then
a ferryboat went across to carry over the king's
household, and to do what he thought good.

David's Mercy to Shimei

Now Shimei the son of Gera fell down
before the king when he had crossed the Jor-
dan. 19 Then he said to the king, "Do not let
my lord impute iniquity to me, or remember
what wrong your servant did on the day that
my lord the king left Jerusalem, that the king
should take *it* to heart. 20 For I, your servant,
know that I have sinned. Therefore here I
am, the first to come today of all the house of
Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king."

21 But Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered
and said, "Shall not Shimei be put to death for
this, because he cursed the Lord's anointed?"

22 And David said, "What have I to do with
you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should be
adversaries to me today? Shall any man be put
to death today in Israel? For do I not know that
today I *am* king over Israel?" 23 Therefore the
king said to Shimei, "You shall not die." And
the king swore to him.

David and Mephibosheth Meet

24 Now Mephibosheth the son of Saul came
down to meet the king. And he had not cared
for his feet, nor trimmed his mustache, nor
washed his clothes, from the day the king
departed until the day he returned in peace.
25 So it was, when he had come to Jerusalem to
meet the king, that the king said to him, "Why
did you not go with me, Mephibosheth?"

26 And he answered, "My lord, O king, my
servant deceived me. For your servant said, 'I
will saddle a donkey for myself, that I may ride
on it and go to the king,' because your servant
is lame. 27 And he has slandered your servant
to my lord the king, but my lord the king *is* like
the angel of God. Therefore do *what is* good
in your eyes. 28 For all my father's house were
but dead men before my lord the king. Yet you
set your servant among those who eat at your
own table. Therefore what right have I still to
cry out anymore to the king?"

29 So the king said to him, "Why do you
speak anymore of your matters? I have said,
'You and Ziba divide the land.'"

30 Then Mephibosheth said to the king,
"Rather, let him take it all, inasmuch as my
lord the king has come back in peace to his
own house."

David's Kindness to Barzillai

31 And Barzillai the Gileadite came down
from Rogelim and went across the Jordan
with the king, to escort him across the Jordan.
32 Now Barzillai was a very aged man, eighty
years old. And he had provided the king with
supplies while he stayed at Mahanaim, for
he *was* a very rich man. 33 And the king said
to Barzillai, "Come across with me, and I will
provide for you while you are with me in Jeru-
salem."

34 But Barzillai said to the king, "How long
have I to live, that I should go up with the king

to Jerusalem? 35 I *am* today eighty years old. Can I discern between the good and bad? Can your servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any longer the voice of singing men and singing women? Why then should your servant be a further burden to my lord the king? 36 Your servant will go a little way across the Jordan with the king. And why should the king repay me *with* such a reward? 37 Please let your servant turn back again, that I may die in my own city, near the grave of my father and mother. But here is your servant Chimham; let him cross over with my lord the king, and do for him what seems good to you."

38 And the king answered, "Chimham shall cross over with me, and I will do for him what seems good to you. Now whatever you request of me, I will do for you." 39 Then all the people went over the Jordan. And when the king had crossed over, the king kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and he returned to his own place.

The Quarrel About the King

40 Now the king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham[a] went on with him. And all the people of Judah escorted the king, and also half the people of Israel. 41 Just then all the men of Israel came to the king, and said to the king, "Why have our brethren, the men of Judah, stolen you away and brought the king, his household, and all David's men with him across the Jordan?"

42 So all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, "Because the king *is* a close relative of ours. Why then are you angry over this matter? Have we ever eaten at the king's *expense?* Or has he given us any gift?"

43 And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, "We have ten shares in the king; therefore we also have more *right* to David than you. Why then do you despise us—were we not the first to advise bringing back our king?"

Yet the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.

The Rebellion of Sheba

20 And there happened to be there a rebel,[a] whose name *was* Sheba the son of Bichri, a Benjamite. And he blew a trumpet, and said:

"We have no share in David,
Nor do we have inheritance in the son of Jesse;
Every man to his tents, O Israel!"

2 So every man of Israel deserted David, *and* followed Sheba the son of Bichri. But the men of Judah, from the Jordan as far as Jerusalem, remained loyal to their king.

3 Now David came to his house at Jerusalem. And the king took the ten women, his concubines whom he had left to keep the house, and put them in seclusion and supported them, but did not go in to them. So they were shut up to the day of their death, living in widowhood.

19:40 [a]Masoretic Text reads *Chimhan.* **20:1** [a]Literally *man of Belial*

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 20:1–26

SITUATION
Sheba, a Benjamite, called upon the Israelites to follow him and rebel against king David. David, who had just defeated Absalom's rebellion, put down Sheba's rebellion as well.

OBSERVATION
The house of Benjamin had been a rival of David since he became king of Israel. Old jealousies and bitterness prompted Sheba to call for a revolt against David. In doing so, Sheba hoped to take the monarchy by force and return it to the house of Benjamin.

INSPIRATION
I spent too much of a high school summer sludging through sludge. Oil field work is dirty enough at best. But the dirtiest job of all? Shoveling silt out of empty oil tanks. The foreman saved such jobs for the summer help. (Thanks, boss.) We donned gas masks, pried open the metal door, and waded into ankle-deep, contaminated mire. My mom burned my work clothes. The stink stuck.

Yours can do the same. Linger too long in the stench of your hurt, and you'll smell like the toxin you despise.

The better option? Hang out with your Jonathan. Bemoan Saul less; worship Christ more. Join with David as he announces:

"The Lord lives! Blessed be my Rock! . . . It is God who avenges me, and subdues the peoples under me; He delivers me from my enemies. . . . You have delivered me from the violent man. Therefore I will

give thanks to You, O Lord, among the Gentiles, and sing praises to Your name" (Psalm 18:46–49).

Wander freely and daily through the gallery of God's goodness. Catalog His kindnesses. Everything from sunsets to salvation—look at what you have. Your Saul took much, but Christ gave you more! Let Jesus be the friend you need. Talk to Him. Spare no detail. Disclose your fear and describe your dread.

Will your Saul disappear? Who knows? And, in a sense, does it matter? You just found a friend for life. What could be better than that? (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Who or what can evoke a bitter response from you? Put the past behind you. Trust God for the strength to forgive.

EXPLORATION

Jealousy—Proverbs 6:34; Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 13:4.

4 And the king said to Amasa, "Assemble the men of Judah for me
within three days, and be present here yourself." 5 So Amasa went to
assemble *the men of* Judah. But he delayed longer than the set time
which David had appointed him. 6 And David said to Abishai, "Now
Sheba the son of Bichri will do us more harm than Absalom. Take your
lord's servants and pursue him, lest he find for himself fortified cities,
and escape us." 7 So Joab's men, with the Cherethites, the Pelethites,
and all the mighty men, went out after him. And they went out of
Jerusalem to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri. 8 When they *were* at the
large stone which *is* in Gibeon, Amasa came before them. Now Joab
was dressed in battle armor; on it was a belt *with* a sword fastened in
its sheath at his hips; and as he was going forward, it fell out. 9 Then
Joab said to Amasa, "*Are* you in health, my brother?" And Joab took
Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. 10 But Amasa did
not notice the sword that *was* in Joab's hand. And he struck him with
it in the stomach, and his entrails poured out on the ground; and he
did not *strike* him again. Thus he died.

Then Joab and Abishai his brother pursued Sheba the son of Bichri.
11 Meanwhile one of Joab's men stood near Amasa, and said, "Who-
ever favors Joab and whoever *is* for David—follow Joab!" 12 But Amasa
wallowed in *his* blood in the middle of the highway. And when the
man saw that all the people stood still, he moved Amasa from the
highway to the field and threw a garment over him, when he saw that
everyone who came upon him halted. 13 When he was removed from
the highway, all the people went on after Joab to pursue Sheba the
son of Bichri.

14 And he went through all the tribes of Israel to Abel and Beth
Maachah and all the Berites. So they were gathered together and also
went after *Sheba.*[a] 15 Then they came and besieged him in Abel of
Beth Maachah; and they cast up a siege mound against the city, and it
stood by the rampart. And all the people who *were* with Joab battered
the wall to throw it down.

16 Then a wise woman cried out from the city, "Hear, hear! Please
say to Joab, 'Come nearby, that I may speak with you.' " 17 When he
had come near to her, the woman said, "*Are* you Joab?"

He answered, "I *am.*"

Then she said to him, "Hear the words of your maidservant."

And he answered, "I am listening."

18 So she spoke, saying, "They used to talk in former times, saying,
'They shall surely seek *guidance* at Abel,' and so they would end *dis-
putes.* 19 I *am among the* peaceable *and* faithful in Israel. You seek to
destroy a city and a mother in Israel. Why would you swallow up the
inheritance of the Lord?"

20 And Joab answered and said, "Far be it, far be it from me, that
I should swallow up or destroy! 21 That *is* not so. But a man from the
mountains of Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, has raised
his hand against the king, against David. Deliver him only, and I will
depart from the city."

So the woman said to Joab, "Watch, his head will be thrown to you
over the wall." 22 Then the woman in her wisdom went to all the peo-

20:14 [a]Literally *him*

ple. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and threw *it* out to Joab. Then he blew a trumpet, and they withdrew from the city, every man to his tent. So Joab returned to the king at Jerusalem.

David's Government Officers

23 And Joab *was* over all the army of Israel; Benaiah the son of Jehoiada *was* over the Cherethites and the Pelethites; 24 Adoram *was* in charge of revenue; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud *was* recorder; 25 Sheva *was* scribe; Zadok and Abiathar *were* the priests; 26 and Ira the Jairite was a chief minister under David.

David Avenges the Gibeonites

21 Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David inquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, "*It is* because of Saul and *his* bloodthirsty house, because he killed the Gibeonites." 2 So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them. Now the Gibeonites *were* not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; the children of Israel had sworn protection to them, but Saul had sought to kill them in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah.

3 Therefore David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And with what shall I make atonement, that you may bless the inheritance of the Lord?"

4 And the Gibeonites said to him, "We will have no silver or gold from Saul or from his house, nor shall you kill any man in Israel for us."

So he said, "Whatever you say, I will do for you."

5 Then they answered the king, "As for the man who consumed us and plotted against us, *that* we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the territories of Israel, 6 let seven men of his descendants be delivered to us, and we will hang them before the Lord in Gibeah of Saul, *whom* the Lord chose."

And the king said, "I will give *them.*"

7 But the king spared Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because of the Lord's oath that *was* between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul. 8 So the king took Armoni and Mephibosheth, the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, and the five sons of Michal[a] the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite; 9 and he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the hill before the Lord. So they fell, *all* seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first *days,* in the beginning of barley harvest.

10 Now Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until the late rains poured on them from heaven. And she did not allow the birds of the air to rest on them by day nor the beasts of the field by night.

11 And David was told what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done. 12 Then David went and took the bones of Saul, and the bones of Jonathan his son, from the men of Jabesh

21:8 [a] Or *Merab* (compare 1 Samuel 18:19 and 25:44; 2 Samuel 3:14 and 6:23)

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 21:1—23:7

SITUATION

The last four chapters of this book are an appendix. They record many events that occurred earlier in David's reign.

OBSERVATION

David remembered the pledge he had made to Jonathan that he would preserve his family forever. David's grace is seen in the way he continued that pledge by showing grace to Mephibosheth.

INSPIRATION

What is the grace of God? The grace of God says you serve God *because* you're saved, not in order to *be* saved. You love people *because* you're saved, and not in order to *be* saved. You're not trying to keep a legalistic system, you're responding to a system of love and peace.

What is grace? It's what someone gives us out of the goodness of their heart, not out of the perfection of ours. The story of grace is the good news that says that when we come, he gives. That's what grace is.

Grace is a pleasant surprise. Grace is a kind gesture. Grace is something you did not expect. It is something you certainly could never earn. But grace is something you'd never turn down.

You know what happens when someone sees the grace of God? When someone really tastes the forgiving and liberating grace of God? Someone who tastes God's grace is the hardest worker, the most morally pure

individual, and the person most willing to forgive.

Always remember that Jesus says, "My grace is deeper than your sins." (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "Grace")

APPLICATION

David remembered his promise for the rest of his life. Is there someone in your circle of friends and family who needs some extra kindness right now? Make a list this week of a few people to whom you could extend God's grace. Then think of creative ways to show it!

EXPLORATION

Source of Grace—
2 Corinthians 9:8; 12:9; Ephesians 3:7; Hebrews 4:14–16.

If you're out to settle the score, you'll never rest. How can you? For one thing, your enemy may never pay up.

—Max Lucado (He Chose the Nails)

Gilead who had stolen them from the street of Beth Shan,[a] where the Philistines had hung them up, after the Philistines had struck down Saul in Gilboa. 13 So he brought up the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from there; and they gathered the bones of those who had been hanged. 14 They buried the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son in the country of Benjamin in Zelah, in the tomb of Kish his father. So they performed all that the king commanded. And after that God heeded the prayer for the land.

Philistine Giants Destroyed

15 When the Philistines were at war again with Israel, David and his servants with him went down and fought against the Philistines; and David grew faint. 16 Then Ishbi-Benob, who *was* one of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose bronze spear *was* three hundred *shekels,* who was bearing a new *sword,* thought he could kill David. 17 But Abishai the son of Zeruiah came to his aid, and struck the Philistine and killed him. Then the men of David swore to him, saying, "You shall go out no more with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel."

18 Now it happened afterward that there was again a battle with the Philistines at Gob. Then Sibbechai the Hushathite killed Saph,[a] who *was* one of the sons of the giant. 19 Again there was war at Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanan the son of Jaare-Oregim[a] the Bethlehemite killed *the brother of* Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear *was* like a weaver's beam.

20 Yet again there was war at Gath, where there was a man of *great* stature, who had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in number; and he also was born to the giant. 21 So when he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimea,[a] David's brother, killed him.

22 These four were born to the giant in Gath, and fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants.

Praise for God's Deliverance

22 Then David spoke to the Lord the words of this song, on the day when the Lord had delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. 2 And he said:[a]

"The Lord *is* my rock and my fortress and my deliverer;
3 The God of my strength, in whom I will trust;
My shield and the horn of my salvation,
My stronghold and my refuge;
My Savior, You save me from violence.
4 I will call upon the Lord, *who is worthy* to be praised;
So shall I be saved from my enemies.

5 "When the waves of death surrounded me,
The floods of ungodliness made me afraid.
6 The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me;

21:12 [a]Spelled *Beth Shean* in Joshua 17:11 and elsewhere **21:18** [a]Spelled *Sippai* in 1 Chronicles 20:4 **21:19** [a]Spelled *Jair* in 1 Chronicles 20:5 **21:21** [a]Spelled *Shammah* in 1 Samuel 16:9 and elsewhere **22:2** [a]Compare Psalm 18

The snares of death confronted me.
7 In my distress I called upon the Lord,
And cried out to my God;
He heard my voice from His temple,
And my cry *entered* His ears.

8 "Then the earth shook and trembled;
The foundations of heaven[a] quaked and were shaken,
Because He was angry.
9 Smoke went up from His nostrils,
And devouring fire from His mouth;
Coals were kindled by it.
10 He bowed the heavens also, and came down
With darkness under His feet.
11 He rode upon a cherub, and flew;
And He was seen[a] upon the wings of the wind.
12 He made darkness canopies around Him,
Dark waters *and* thick clouds of the skies.
13 From the brightness before Him
Coals of fire were kindled.

14 "The Lord thundered from heaven,
And the Most High uttered His voice.

22:8 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Septuagint, and Targum; Syriac and Vulgate read *hills* (compare Psalm 18:7).
22:11 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Septuagint; many Hebrew manuscripts, Syriac, and Vulgate read *He flew* (compare Psalm 18:10); Targum reads *He spoke with power*.

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: The Shepherd Who Knows Our Name

When I see a flock of sheep I see exactly that, a flock. A rabble of wool. A herd of hooves. I don't see a sheep. I see sheep. All alike. None different. That's what I see.

But not so with the shepherd. To him every sheep is different. Every face is special. Every face has a story. And every sheep has a name. *The one with the sad eyes, that's Droopy. And the fellow with one ear up and the other down, I call him Oscar. And the small one with the black patch on his leg, he's an orphan with no brothers. I call him Joseph.*

The shepherd knows his sheep. He calls them by name.

When we see a crowd, we see exactly that, a crowd. Filling a stadium or flooding a mall. When we see a crowd, we see people, not persons, but people. A herd of humans. A flock of faces. That's what we see.

But not so with the Shepherd. To Him every face is different. Every face is a story. Every face is a child. Every child has a name. *The one with the sad eyes, that's Sally. The old fellow with one eyebrow up and the other down, Harry's his name. And the young one with the limp? He's an orphan with no brothers. I call him Joey.*

The shepherd knows His sheep. He knows each one by name. The Shepherd knows you. He knows your name. And He will never forget it. *I have written your name on My hand* (Isaiah 49:16).

Quite a thought, isn't it? Your name on God's hand. Your name on God's lips. Maybe you've seen your name in some special places. On an award or diploma or walnut door. Or maybe you've heard your name from some important people—a coach, a celebrity, a teacher. But to think that your name is on God's hand, on God's lips . . . my, could it be? (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 448.

15 He sent out arrows and scattered them;
Lightning bolts, and He vanquished them.
16 Then the channels of the sea were seen,
The foundations of the world were uncovered,
At the rebuke of the Lord,
At the blast of the breath of His nostrils.

17 "He sent from above, He took me,
He drew me out of many waters.
18 He delivered me from my strong enemy,
From those who hated me;
For they were too strong for me.
19 They confronted me in the day of my calamity,
But the Lord was my support.
20 He also brought me out into a broad place;
He delivered me because He delighted in me.

21 "The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness;
According to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me.
22 For I have kept the ways of the Lord,
And have not wickedly departed from my God.
23 For all His judgments *were* before me;
And *as for* His statutes, I did not depart from them.
24 I was also blameless before Him,
And I kept myself from my iniquity.
25 Therefore the Lord has recompensed me according to my righteousness,
According to my cleanness in His eyes.[a]

26 "With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful;
With a blameless man You will show Yourself blameless;
27 With the pure You will show Yourself pure;
And with the devious You will show Yourself shrewd.
28 You will save the humble people;
But Your eyes *are* on the haughty, *that* You may bring *them* down.
29 "For You *are* my lamp, O Lord;
The Lord shall enlighten my darkness.
30 For by You I can run against a troop;
By my God I can leap over a wall.
31 *As for* God, His way *is* perfect;
The word of the Lord *is* proven;
He *is* a shield to all who trust in Him.

32 "For who *is* God, except the Lord?
And who *is* a rock, except our God?
33 God *is* my strength *and* power,[a]
And He makes my[b] way perfect.
34 He makes my[a] feet like the *feet* of deer,
And sets me on my high places.
35 He teaches my hands to make war,
So that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.

36 "You have also given me the shield of Your salvation;
Your gentleness has made me great.
37 You enlarged my path under me;
So my feet did not slip.

38 "I have pursued my enemies and destroyed them;
Neither did I turn back again till they were destroyed.
39 And I have destroyed them and wounded them,
So that they could not rise;
They have fallen under my feet.
40 For You have armed me with strength for the battle;
You have subdued under me those who rose against me.
41 You have also given me the necks of my enemies,
So that I destroyed those who hated me.
42 They looked, but *there was* none to save;
Even to the Lord, but He did not answer them.
43 Then I beat them as fine as the dust of the earth;
I trod them like dirt in the streets,
And I spread them out.

22:25 [a]Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *the cleanness of my hands in His sight* (compare Psalm 18:24); Targum reads *my cleanness before His word.* **22:33** [a]Dead Sea Scrolls, Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *It is God who arms me with strength* (compare Psalm 18:32); Targum reads *It is God who sustains me with strength.* [b]Following Qere, Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate (compare Psalm 18:32); Kethib reads *His.* **22:34** [a]Following Qere, Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate (compare Psalm 18:33); Kethib reads *His.*

44 "You have also delivered me from the
strivings of my people;
You have kept me as the head of the
nations.
A people I have not known shall serve me.
45 The foreigners submit to me;
As soon as they hear, they obey me.
46 The foreigners fade away,
And come frightened[a] from their
hideouts.

47 "The Lord lives!
Blessed *be* my Rock!
Let God be exalted,
The Rock of my salvation!
48 *It is* God who avenges me,
And subdues the peoples under me;
49 He delivers me from my enemies.
You also lift me up above those who rise
against me;
You have delivered me from the violent
man.
50 Therefore I will give thanks to You,
O Lord, among the Gentiles,
And sing praises to Your name.

51 *He is* the tower of salvation to His king,
And shows mercy to His anointed,
To David and his descendants
forevermore."

David's Last Words

23 Now these *are* the last words of David.

Thus says David the son of Jesse;
Thus says the man raised up on high,
The anointed of the God of Jacob,
And the sweet psalmist of Israel:

2 "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me,
And His word *was* on my tongue.
3 The God of Israel said,
The Rock of Israel spoke to me:
'He who rules over men *must be* just,
Ruling in the fear of God.
4 And *he shall be* like the light of the
morning *when* the sun rises,
A morning without clouds,
Like the tender grass *springing* out of the
earth,
By clear shining after rain.'

5 "Although my house *is* not so with God,
Yet He has made with me an everlasting
covenant,
Ordered in all *things* and secure.
For *this is* all my salvation and all *my*
desire;
Will He not make *it* increase?
6 But *the sons* of rebellion *shall* all *be* as
thorns thrust away,
Because they cannot be taken with hands.
7 But the man *who* touches them
Must be armed with iron and the shaft of
a spear,
And they shall be utterly burned with fire
in *their* place."

David's Mighty Men

8 These *are* the names of the mighty men
whom David had: Josheb-Basshebeth[a] the
Tachmonite, chief among the captains.[b] He was
called Adino the Eznite, because he had killed
eight hundred men at one time. 9 And after him
was Eleazar the son of Dodo,[a] the Ahohite, *one*
of the three mighty men with David when they
defied the Philistines *who* were gathered there
for battle, and the men of Israel had retreated.
10 He arose and attacked the Philistines until
his hand was weary, and his hand stuck to the
sword. The Lord brought about a great victory
that day; and the people returned after him
only to plunder. 11 And after him *was* Shammah
the son of Agee the Hararite. The Philistines
had gathered together into a troop where there
was a piece of ground full of lentils. So the peo-
ple fled from the Philistines. 12 But he stationed
himself in the middle of the field, defended it,
and killed the Philistines. So the Lord brought
about a great victory.

13 Then three of the thirty chief men went
down at harvest time and came to David at the
cave of Adullam. And the troop of Philistines
encamped in the Valley of Rephaim. 14 David
was then in the stronghold, and the garrison
of the Philistines *was* then *in* Bethlehem.

22:46 [a]Following Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate (compare Psalm 18:45); Masoretic Text reads *gird themselves*. **23:8** [a]Literally *One Who Sits in the Seat* (compare 1 Chronicles 11:11) [b]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Septuagint and Vulgate read *the three*. **23:9** [a]Spelled *Dodai* in 1 Chronicles 27:4

Life Lessons

2 Samuel 23:8—24:25

SITUATION
David's reign brought great peace, prosperity, and military success. David and the people began to be proud, and God punished them for this sin.

OBSERVATION
We must find our strength and security only in God and never in worldly possessions.

INSPIRATION
Giving characterizes God's creation. From the first page of Scripture, He is presented as a philanthropic Creator. He produces in pluralities: star *s*, plant *s*, bird *s*, and animal *s*. Every gift arrives in bulk, multiples, and medleys. God begets Adam and Eve . . . and tells them to follow suit: "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28).

Scrooge didn't create the world; God did.

Psalm 104 celebrates this lavish creation with twenty-three verses of itemized blessings: the heavens and the earth, the waters and streams and trees and birds and goats and wine and oil and bread and people and lions. God is the source of "innumerable teeming things, living things both small and great. . . . These all wait for You, that You may give them their food in due season" (vv. 25, 27).

And he does. God is the great Giver. The great Provider. The Fount of every blessing. Absolutely generous and utterly dependable. The resounding and recurring message of Scripture is clear: God owns it all. God shares it all. Trust Him, not stuff! (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

15 And David said with longing, "Oh, that someone would give me a
drink of the water from the well of Bethlehem, which *is* by the gate!"
16 So the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines,
drew water from the well of Bethlehem that *was* by the gate, and took
it and brought *it* to David. Nevertheless he would not drink it, but
poured it out to the Lord. 17 And he said, "Far be it from me, O Lord,
that I should do this! Is *this not* the blood of the men who went in
jeopardy of their lives?" Therefore he would not drink it.

These things were done by the three mighty men.

18 Now Abishai the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruiah, was chief of
another three.[a] He lifted his spear against three hundred *men,* killed
them, and won a name among *these* three. 19 Was he not the most
honored of three? Therefore he became their captain. However, he did
not attain to the *first* three.

20 Benaiah *was* the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man from
Kabzeel, who had done many deeds. He had killed two lion-like
heroes of Moab. He also had gone down and killed a lion in the midst
of a pit on a snowy day. 21 And he killed an Egyptian, a spectacular
man. The Egyptian *had* a spear in his hand; so he went down to him
with a staff, wrested the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and killed
him with his own spear. 22 These *things* Benaiah the son of Jehoiada
did, and won a name among three mighty men. 23 He was more hon-
ored than the thirty, but he did not attain to the *first* three. And David
appointed him over his guard.

24 Asahel the brother of Joab *was* one of the thirty; Elhanan the
son of Dodo of Bethlehem, 25 Shammah the Harodite, Elika the
Harodite, 26 Helez the Paltite, Ira the son of Ikkesh the Tekoite,
27 Abiezer the Anathothite, Mebunnai the Hushathite, 28 Zalmon the
Ahohite, Maharai the Netophathite, 29 Heleb the son of Baanah (the
Netophathite), Ittai the son of Ribai from Gibeah of the children of
Benjamin, 30 Benaiah a Pirathonite, Hiddai from the brooks of Gaash,
31 Abi-Albon the Arbathite, Azmaveth the Barhumite, 32 Eliahba the
Shaalbonite (of the sons of Jashen), Jonathan, 33 Shammah the
Hararite, Ahiam the son of Sharar the Hararite, 34 Eliphelet the son of
Ahasbai, the son of the Maachathite, Eliam the son of Ahithophel the
Gilonite, 35 Hezrai[a] the Carmelite, Paarai the Arbite, 36 Igal the son of
Nathan of Zobah, Bani the Gadite, 37 Zelek the Ammonite, Naharai the
Beerothite (armorbearer of Joab the son of Zeruiah), 38 Ira the Ithrite,
Gareb the Ithrite, 39 *and* Uriah the Hittite: thirty-seven in all.

David's Census of Israel and Judah

24 Again the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel, and
He moved David against them to say, "Go, number Israel and
Judah."

2 So the king said to Joab the commander of the army who *was*
with him, "Now go throughout all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to
Beersheba, and count the people, that I may know the number of the
people."

3 And Joab said to the king, "Now may the Lord your God add to the

23:18 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Septuagint, and Vulgate; some Hebrew manuscripts and Syriac read *thirty;* Targum reads *the mighty men.* **23:35** [a]Spelled *Hezro* in 1 Chronicles 11:37

people a hundred times more than there are, and may the eyes of my lord the king see *it.* But why does my lord the king desire this thing?" 4 Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab and against the captains of the army. Therefore Joab and the captains of the army went out from the presence of the king to count the people of Israel.

5 And they crossed over the Jordan and camped in Aroer, on the right side of the town which *is* in the midst of the ravine of Gad, and toward Jazer. 6 Then they came to Gilead and to the land of Tahtim Hodshi; they came to Dan Jaan and around to Sidon; 7 and they came to the stronghold of Tyre and to all the cities of the Hivites and the Canaanites. Then they went out to South Judah *as far as* Beersheba. 8 So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. 9 Then Joab gave the sum of the number of the people to the king. And there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men.

The Judgment on David's Sin

10 And David's heart condemned him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done; but now, I pray, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly."

11 Now when David arose in the morning, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, 12 "Go and tell David, 'Thus says the Lord: "I offer you three *things;* choose one of them for yourself, that I may do *it* to you."' " 13 So Gad came to David and told him; and he said to him, "Shall seven[a] years of famine come to you in your land? Or shall you flee three months before your enemies, while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' plague in your land? Now consider and see what answer I should take back to Him who sent me."

14 And David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Please let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies *are* great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man."

15 So the Lord sent a plague upon Israel from the morning till the appointed time. From Dan to Beersheba seventy thousand men of the people died. 16 And when the angel[a] stretched out His hand over Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord relented from the destruction, and said to the angel who was destroying the people, "It is enough; now restrain your hand." And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Araunah[b] the Jebusite.

17 Then David spoke to the Lord when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, "Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father's house."

The Altar on the Threshing Floor

18 And Gad came that day to David and said to him, "Go up, erect an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite."

24:13 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *three* (compare 1 Chronicles 21:12). **24:16** [a]Or *Angel* [b]Spelled *Ornan* in 1 Chronicles 21:15

APPLICATION

What gives your life security or significance apart from God: Money? Status? Position? Possessions? Imagine that you lost them all. How would you feel? Learn to see all that you have as a gift from God to be used only for Him, not for personal pride.

EXPLORATION

Pride—Judges 7:2; 1 Samuel 2:3; Proverbs 18:11, 12; Jeremiah 9:23, 24; Zechariah 4:6; Romans 12:3; 1 Corinthians 4:6–10; 2 Corinthians 10:12; Galatians 6:3; Revelation 3:17.

If He is able to place the stars in their sockets and suspend the sky like a curtain, do you think it remotely possible that God is able to guide your life?

—Max Lucado (The Great House of God)

See your struggles as God's canvas. On it He will paint His multicolored supremacy.

—Max Lucado (Facing Your Giants)

19 So David, according to the word of Gad, went up as the Lord commanded. 20 Now Araunah looked, and saw the king and his servants coming toward him. So Araunah went out and bowed before the king with his face to the ground.

21 Then Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?"

And David said, "To buy the threshing floor from you, to build an altar to the Lord, that the plague may be withdrawn from the people."

22 Now Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up whatever *seems* good to him. Look, *here are* oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing implements and the yokes of the oxen for wood. 23 All these, O king, Araunah has given to the king."

And Araunah said to the king, "May the Lord your God accept you."

24 Then the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will surely buy *it* from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. 25 And David built there an altar to the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the Lord heeded the prayers for the land, and the plague was withdrawn from Israel.

THE BOOK OF

1 KINGS

INTRODUCTION

The book starts with Solomon and ends with Elijah. The difference between the two gives you an idea as to what lies between.

Solomon might never have been born had it not been for the palace scandal between David and Bathsheba. Not the best of beginnings. He picked up some of his father's traits, both good and bad. Like his dad, he got off to a good start. But like his dad, he had a weakness for women that undid him.

You have to wonder what it was like growing up in a house where your father had several wives and your siblings wore swords to the dinner table. Solomon did well at first, praying for wisdom and building a temple that would have bankrupted most nations.

He took seven years building it. But then he spent thirteen years building a palace for himself. Somewhere around mid-life he got off track. His taste for wives (he was known to have accumulated some seven hundred or so) led him to worship whom they worshiped. This, in turn, led him away from God. His nation followed suit, and even the preaching of Elijah couldn't bring them back.

Not that Elijah didn't try. Toward the end of this book you'll read of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. In a classic my-God-is-greater-than-yours encounter, Jehovah won hands down. God was exalted. But Queen Jezebel, a leading Baal-worshiper, was infuriated.

She ordered Elijah's death, so Elijah ran. He ran until he was so tired and discouraged that he sat down under a bush and said, "Take my life" (19:4).

What does God do with tired servants who want to quit? In a tender moment the God who'd brought fire on the mountain sent food to the prophet and whispered His affection in a "still small voice" (19:12).

What a Father.

What a book! In between Solomon and

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Unknown, though some think Jeremiah the prophet

Date Written: After the death of Solomon, 900–500 B.C.

Key Themes:

- Solomon's priority on wisdom gave him everything he needed.
- Even the greatest and richest King Solomon was not happy once he lost sight of his relationship with God.
- After the kingdom divided, prophets such as Elijah still spoke out for God.

Key Verse:

"I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand, because I have made him ruler all the days of his life for the sake of My servant David, whom I chose because he kept My commandments and My statutes" (1 Kings 11:34).

Contents:

I. The Rise of Solomon's Kingdom 1:1—10:29

II. Solomon's Decline 11:1–43

III. The Divided Kingdom 12:1—22:53

Elijah, you'll find it all. Rebellion, corruption, courage, faith. You'll see that their world is much like ours. Things haven't changed much.

And God? God hasn't changed at all. The quiet, gentle sound that encouraged Elijah? Listen as you read. It will encourage you.

Life LESSONS

1 Kings 1:1–53

SITUATION
When David's life and reign drew to a close, his sons competed for his throne. David appointed Solomon as his heir.

OBSERVATION
Although David served well as a king, he often failed as a parent. We can be successful in our public life and a failure in private. Our families should be our first ministry priority.

INSPIRATION
Incest. Deceit. One daughter raped. One son dead. Another with blood on his hands. A palace in turmoil.

Again it was time for David to step up. Display his Goliath-killing courage, Saul-pardoning mercy, Brook-Besor leadership. David's family needed to see the best of David. But they saw none of David. He didn't intervene or respond. He wept. But wept in solitude.

Absalom interpreted the silence as anger and fled Jerusalem to hide in his grandfather's house. David made no attempt to see his son. For three years they lived in two separate cities. Absalom returned to Jerusalem, but David still refused to see him. Absalom

Adonijah Presumes to Be King

Now King David was old, advanced in years; and they put covers
on him, but he could not get warm. 2 Therefore his servants said
to him, "Let a young woman, a virgin, be sought for our lord the king,
and let her stand before the king, and let her care for him; and let
her lie in your bosom, that our lord the king may be warm." 3 So they
sought for a lovely young woman throughout all the territory of Israel,
and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king.
4 The young woman *was* very lovely; and she cared for the king, and
served him; but the king did not know her.

5 Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, "I will
be king"; and he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and
fifty men to run before him. 6 (And his father had not rebuked him at
any time by saying, "Why have you done so?" He *was* also very good-
looking. *His mother* had borne him after Absalom.) 7 Then he con-
ferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar the priest, and
they followed and helped Adonijah. 8 But Zadok the priest, Benaiah
the son of Jehoiada, Nathan the prophet, Shimei, Rei, and the mighty
men who *belonged* to David were not with Adonijah.

9 And Adonijah sacrificed sheep and oxen and fattened cattle by
the stone of Zoheleth, which *is* by En Rogel; he also invited all his
brothers, the king's sons, and all the men of Judah, the king's servants.
10 But he did not invite Nathan the prophet, Benaiah, the mighty men,
or Solomon his brother.

11 So Nathan spoke to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, saying,
"Have you not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith has become
king, and David our lord does not know *it?* 12 Come, please, let me
now give you advice, that you may save your own life and the life of
your son Solomon. 13 Go immediately to King David and say to him,
'Did you not, my lord, O king, swear to your maidservant, saying,
"Assuredly your son Solomon shall reign after me, and he shall sit on
my throne"? Why then has Adonijah become king?' 14 Then, while you
are still talking there with the king, I also will come in after you and
confirm your words."

15 So Bathsheba went into the chamber to the king. (Now the king
was very old, and Abishag the Shunammite was serving the king.)
16 And Bathsheba bowed and did homage to the king. Then the king
said, "What is your wish?"

17 Then she said to him, "My lord, you swore by the Lord your God
to your maidservant, *saying,* 'Assuredly Solomon your son shall reign

after me, and he shall sit on my throne.' 18So now, look! Adonijah has become king; and now, my lord the king, you do not know about *it.* 19He has sacrificed oxen and fattened cattle and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the sons of the king, Abiathar the priest, and Joab the commander of the army; but Solomon your servant he has not invited. 20And as for you, my lord, O king, the eyes of all Israel *are* on you, that you should tell them who will sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. 21Otherwise it will happen, when my lord the king rests with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon will be counted as offenders."

22And just then, while she was still talking with the king, Nathan the prophet also came in. 23So they told the king, saying, "Here is Nathan the prophet." And when he came in before the king, he bowed down before the king with his face to the ground. 24And Nathan said, "My lord, O king, have you said, 'Adonijah shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne'? 25For he has gone down today, and has sacrificed oxen and fattened cattle and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the king's sons, and the commanders of the army, and Abiathar the priest; and look! They are eating and drinking before him; and they say, '*Long* live King Adonijah!' 26But he has not invited me—me your servant—nor Zadok the priest, nor Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, nor your servant Solomon. 27Has this thing been done by my lord the king, and you have not told your servant who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?"

David Proclaims Solomon King

28Then King David answered and said, "Call Bathsheba to me." So she came into the king's presence and stood before the king. 29And the king took an oath and said, "*As* the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life from every distress, 30just as I swore to you by the Lord God of Israel, saying, 'Assuredly Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he shall sit on my throne in my place,' so I certainly will do this day."

31Then Bathsheba bowed with *her* face to the earth, and paid homage to the king, and said, "Let my lord King David live forever!"

32And King David said, "Call to me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada." So they came before the king. 33The king also said to them, "Take with you the servants of your lord, and have Solomon my son ride on my own mule, and take him down to Gihon. 34There let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king over Israel; and blow the horn, and say, '*Long* live King Solomon!' 35Then you shall come up after him, and he shall come and sit on my throne, and he shall be king in my place. For I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and Judah."

36Benaiah the son of Jehoiada answered the king and said, "Amen! May the Lord God of my lord the king say so *too.* 37As the Lord has been with my lord the king, even so may He be with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord King David."

38So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the Cherethites, and the Pelethites went down and had Solomon ride on King David's mule, and took him to Gihon. 39Then Zadok the priest took a horn of oil from the tabernacle and anointed Solomon. And they blew the horn, and all the people said, *"Long*

married and had four children. "Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, but did not see the king's face" (2 Samuel 14:28).

Such shunning could not have been easy. Jerusalem was a small town. Avoiding Absalom demanded daily plotting and spying. But David succeeded in neglecting his son.

More accurately, he neglected all his children. A passage from later in his life exposes his parenting philosophy. One of his sons, Adonijah, staged a coup. He assembled chariots and horsemen and personal bodyguards to take the throne. Did David object? Are you kidding? "His father had not rebuked him at any time by saying, 'Why have you done so?'" (1 Kings 1:6). . . .

When it came to his family, David blew it. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

If you are a parent, take time with each child today: listen, talk, and care. As a son or daughter, plan to spend time with your parents. Be concerned for their needs. Be eager to pray for family needs.

EXPLORATION

Family Responsibility—Deuteronomy 6:4–7; 11:18–21; 32:46; Psalm 127:3; Proverbs 20:7; 22:6; Isaiah 38:19; Matthew 19:14; Ephesians 6:4; 1 Thessalonians 2:10–12; 1 Timothy 3:14, 15; 2 Timothy 1:3–7.

live King Solomon!" [40]And all the people went up after him; and the people played the flutes and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth *seemed to* split with their sound.

[41]Now Adonijah and all the guests who *were* with him heard *it* as they finished eating. And when Joab heard the sound of the horn, he said, "Why *is* the city in such a noisy uproar?" [42]While he was still speaking, there came Jonathan, the son of Abiathar the priest. And Adonijah said to him, "Come in, for you *are* a prominent man, and bring good news."

[43]Then Jonathan answered and said to Adonijah, "No! Our lord King David has made Solomon king. [44]The king has sent with him Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the Cherethites, and the Pelethites; and they have made him ride on the king's mule. [45]So Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king at Gihon; and they have gone up from there rejoicing, so that the city is in an uproar. This *is* the noise that you have heard. [46]Also Solomon sits on the throne of the kingdom. [47]And moreover the king's servants have gone to bless our lord King David, saying, 'May God make the name of Solomon better than your name, and may He make his throne greater than your throne.' Then the king bowed himself on the bed. [48]Also the king said thus, 'Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel, who has given *one* to sit on my throne this day, while my eyes see *it!*' "

[49]So all the guests who were with Adonijah were afraid, and arose, and each one went his way.

[50]Now Adonijah was afraid of Solomon; so he arose, and went and took hold of the horns of the altar. [51]And it was told Solomon, saying, "Indeed Adonijah is afraid of King Solomon; for look, he has taken hold of the horns of the altar, saying, 'Let King Solomon swear to me today that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.' "

[52]Then Solomon said, "If he proves himself a worthy man, not one hair of him shall fall to the earth; but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die." [53]So King Solomon sent them to bring him down from the altar. And he came and fell down before King Solomon; and Solomon said to him, "Go to your house."

David's Instructions to Solomon

2 Now the days of David drew near that he should die, and he charged Solomon his son, saying: [2]"I go the way of all the earth; be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man. [3]And keep the charge of the Lord your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn; [4]that the Lord may fulfill His word which He spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul,' He said, 'you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'

[5]"Moreover you know also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, *and* what he did to the two commanders of the armies of Israel, to Abner the son of Ner and Amasa the son of Jether, whom he killed. And he shed the blood of war in peacetime, and put the blood of war on his belt that *was* around his waist, and on his sandals that *were* on

Life Lessons

1 Kings 2:1–46

SITUATION
David gave final instructions to Solomon that would ensure success. At David's death, Solomon consolidated his power and administration.

OBSERVATION
At his death, the great King David exhorted his son: obey God, follow Him, and be kind to others.

INSPIRATION
Self-promotion. Self-preservation. Self-centeredness. It's all about me!

They all told us it was, didn't they? Weren't we urged to look out for number one? Find our place in the sun? Make a name for ourselves? We thought self-celebration would make us happy . . .

But what chaos this philosophy creates. What if a symphony orchestra followed such an approach? Can you imagine an orchestra with an "It's all about me" outlook? Each artist clamoring for self-expression. Tubas blasting nonstop. Percussionists pounding to get attention. The cellist shoving the flutist out of the center-stage chair. The trumpeter standing atop the conductor's stool tooting his horn. Sheet music disregarded. Conductor ignored. What do you have but an endless tune-up session!

Harmony? Hardly.

Happiness? Are the musicians happy to be in the group? Not at all. Who enjoys contributing to a cacophony?

You don't. We don't. We

his feet. 6 Therefore do according to your wisdom, and do not let his gray hair go down to the grave in peace.

7 "But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table, for so they came to me when I fled from Absalom your brother.

8 "And see, *you have* with you Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite from Bahurim, who cursed me with a malicious curse in the day when I went to Mahanaim. But he came down to meet me at the Jordan, and I swore to him by the Lord, saying, 'I will not put you to death with the sword.' 9 Now therefore, do not hold him guiltless, for you *are* a wise man and know what you ought to do to him; but bring his gray hair down to the grave with blood."

Death of David

10 So David rested with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David. 11 The period that David reigned over Israel *was* forty years; seven years he reigned in Hebron, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years. 12 Then Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.

Solomon Executes Adonijah

13 Now Adonijah the son of Haggith came to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon. So she said, "Do you come peaceably?"

And he said, "Peaceably." 14 Moreover he said, "I have something *to say* to you."

And she said, "Say it."

15 Then he said, "You know that the kingdom was mine, and all Israel had set their expectations on me, that I should reign. However, the kingdom has been turned over, and has become my brother's; for it was his from the Lord. 16 Now I ask one petition of you; do not deny me."

And she said to him, "Say it."

17 Then he said, "Please speak to King Solomon, for he will not refuse you, that he may give me Abishag the Shunammite as wife."

18 So Bathsheba said, "Very well, I will speak for you to the king."

19 Bathsheba therefore went to King Solomon, to speak to him for Adonijah. And the king rose up to meet her and bowed down to her, and sat down on his throne and had a throne set for the king's mother; so she sat at his right hand. 20 Then she said, "I desire one small petition of you; do not refuse me."

And the king said to her, "Ask it, my mother, for I will not refuse you."

21 So she said, "Let Abishag the Shunammite be given to Adonijah your brother as wife."

22 And King Solomon answered and said to his mother, "Now why do you ask Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? Ask for him the kingdom also—for he *is* my older brother—for him, and for Abiathar the priest, and for Joab the son of Zeruiah." 23 Then King Solomon swore by the Lord, saying, "May God do so to me, and more also, if Adonijah has not spoken this word against his own life! 24 Now therefore, *as* the Lord lives, who has confirmed me and set me on the throne of David my father, and who has established a

were not made to live this way. But aren't we guilty of doing just that?

No wonder our homes are so noisy, businesses so stress-filled, government so cutthroat, and harmony so rare. If you think it's all about you, and I think it's all about me, we have no hope for a melody. We've chased so many skinny rabbits that we've missed the fat one: the God-centered life. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

If you want success in life, then all your activities must reflect God's will. Today, make God the center of your life. Ask God to show you what successful living means for you. Then, rest easy in God's peace and His plans.

EXPLORATION

Success—Joshua 1:6–8; 2 Samuel 5:12; 1 Chronicles 18:13; Proverbs 3:6; 16:3; Matthew 6:33, 34.

The problem with pecking orders is not the order. The problem is with the pecking.

—Max Lucado (A Love Worth Giving)

house[a] for me, as He promised, Adonijah shall be put to death today!"

25 So King Solomon sent by the hand of Benaiah the son of Jehoiada; and he struck him down, and he died.

Abiathar Exiled, Joab Executed

26 And to Abiathar the priest the king said, "Go to Anathoth, to your own fields, for you *are* deserving of death; but I will not put you to death at this time, because you carried the ark of the Lord God before my father David, and because you were afflicted every time my father was afflicted." 27 So Solomon removed Abiathar from being priest to the Lord, that he might fulfill the word of the Lord which He spoke concerning the house of Eli at Shiloh.

28 Then news came to Joab, for Joab had defected to Adonijah, though he had not defected to Absalom. So Joab fled to the tabernacle of the Lord, and took hold of the horns of the altar. 29 And King Solomon was told, "Joab has fled to the tabernacle of the Lord; there *he is,* by the altar." Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, "Go, strike him down." 30 So Benaiah went to the tabernacle of the Lord, and said to him, "Thus says the king, 'Come out!' "

And he said, "No, but I will die here." And Benaiah brought back word to the king, saying, "Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me."

31 Then the king said to him, "Do as he has said, and strike him down and bury him, that you may take away from me and from the house of my father the innocent blood which Joab shed. 32 So the Lord will return his blood on his head, because he struck down two men more righteous and better than he, and killed them with the sword—Abner the son of Ner, the commander of the army of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, the commander of the army of Judah—though my father David did not know *it.* 33 Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab and upon the head of his descendants forever. But upon David and his descendants, upon his house and his throne, there shall be peace forever from the Lord."

34 So Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up and struck and killed him; and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness. 35 The king put Benaiah the son of Jehoiada in his place over the army, and the king put Zadok the priest in the place of Abiathar.

Shimei Executed

36 Then the king sent and called for Shimei, and said to him, "Build yourself a house in Jerusalem and dwell there, and do not go out from there anywhere. 37 For it shall be, on the day you go out and cross the Brook Kidron, know for certain you shall surely die; your blood shall be on your own head."

38 And Shimei said to the king, "The saying *is* good. As my lord the king has said, so your servant will do." So Shimei dwelt in Jerusalem many days.

39 Now it happened at the end of three years, that two slaves of Shimei ran away to Achish the son of Maachah, king of Gath. And they told Shimei, saying, "Look, your slaves *are* in Gath!" 40 So Shimei arose, saddled his donkey, and went to Achish at Gath to seek his slaves. And Shimei went and brought his slaves from Gath. 41 And Solomon was told that Shimei had gone from Jerusalem to Gath and had come back. 42 Then the king sent and called for Shimei, and said to him, "Did I not make you swear by the Lord, and warn you, saying, 'Know for certain that on the day you go out and travel anywhere, you shall surely die'? And you said to me, 'The word I have heard *is* good.' 43 Why then have you not kept the oath of the Lord and the commandment that I gave you?" 44 The king said moreover to Shimei, "You know, as your heart acknowledges, all the wickedness that you did to my father David; therefore the Lord will return your wickedness on your own head. 45 But King Solomon *shall be* blessed, and the throne of David shall be established before the Lord forever."

46 So the king commanded Benaiah the son of Jehoiada; and he went out and struck him down, and he died. Thus the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon.

Solomon Requests Wisdom

3 Now Solomon made a treaty with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and married Pharaoh's

2:24 [a] That is, a royal dynasty

daughter; then he brought her to the City of David until he had finished building his own house, and the house of the Lord, and the wall all around Jerusalem. 2 Meanwhile the people sacrificed at the high places, because there was no house built for the name of the Lord until those days. 3 And Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David, except that he sacrificed and burned incense at the high places.

4 Now the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that *was* the great high place: Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. 5 At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask! What shall I give you?"

6 And Solomon said: "You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as *it is* this day. 7 Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I *am* a little child; I do not know *how* to go out or come in. 8 And Your servant *is* in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. 9 Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"

10 The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. 11 Then God said to him: "Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, 12 behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. 13 And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days. 14 So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days."

15 Then Solomon awoke; and indeed it had been a dream. And he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, offered up burnt offerings, offered peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants.

Solomon's Wise Judgment

16 Now two women *who were* harlots came to the king, and stood before him. 17 And one woman said, "O my lord, this woman and I dwell in the same house; and I gave birth while she *was* in the house. 18 Then it happened, the third day after I had given birth, that this woman also gave birth. And we *were* together; no one *was* with us in the house, except the two of us in the house. 19 And this woman's son died in the night, because she lay on him. 20 So she arose in the middle of the night and took my son from my side, while your maidservant slept, and laid him in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom. 21 And when I rose in the morning to nurse my son, there he was, dead. But when I had examined him in the morning, indeed, he was not my son whom I had borne."

Life Lessons

1 Kings 3:1—4:34

SITUATION

Solomon carefully lived by God's rules, and God gave him success. Solomon asked God for wisdom, and with it, God gave him economic prosperity and fame.

OBSERVATION

God expects all people to use their gifts to do His will. When they do, everyone else benefits.

INSPIRATION

I recently flew to St. Louis on a commercial airline. The attendant was so grumpy I thought she'd had lemons for breakfast. She made her instructions clear: sit down, buckle up, and shut up! I dared not request anything lest she push the eject button.

Perhaps I caught her on the wrong day, or maybe she caught herself in the wrong career.

Two weeks later I took another flight. This attendant had been imported from heaven. She introduced herself to each passenger, had us greet each other, and then sang a song over the intercom! I had to ask her, "Do you like your work?"

"I love it!" she beamed. "For years I taught elementary school and relished each day. But then they promoted me. I went from a class of kids to an office of papers. Miserable! I resigned, took some months to study myself, found this opportunity, and snagged it. Now I can't wait to come to work!" . . .

You can do something no one else can do in a fashion no one else can do it. Exploring and extracting

your uniqueness excites you, honors God, and expands his kingdom. So "make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourself into that" (Galatians 6:4 MSG).

Discover and deploy your knacks. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

If you were given Solomon's opportunity to ask for anything, what would you choose? Would your requests benefit others if God granted them? In your prayers today, ask God for your heart's desire. Trust in God's generosity to you.

EXPLORATION

Wisdom—Job 28:13; Psalm 119:97–104; Proverbs 1:7–9, 20–28; 2:9, 10; Ecclesiastes 8:1.

22 Then the other woman said, "No! But the living one *is* my son,
and the dead one *is* your son."

And the first woman said, "No! But the dead one *is* your son, and
the living one *is* my son."

Thus they spoke before the king.

23 And the king said, "The one says, 'This *is* my son, who lives, and
your son *is* the dead one'; and the other says, 'No! But your son *is* the
dead one, and my son *is* the living one.' " 24 Then the king said, "Bring
me a sword." So they brought a sword before the king. 25 And the king
said, "Divide the living child in two, and give half to one, and half to
the other."

26 Then the woman whose son *was* living spoke to the king, for she
yearned with compassion for her son; and she said, "O my lord, give
her the living child, and by no means kill him!"

But the other said, "Let him be neither mine nor yours, *but* divide
him."

27 So the king answered and said, "Give the first woman the living
child, and by no means kill him; she *is* his mother."

28 And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had ren-
dered; and they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God
was in him to administer justice.

Solomon's Administration

4 So King Solomon was king over all Israel. 2 And these *were* his
officials: Azariah the son of Zadok, the priest; 3 Elihoreph and
Ahijah, the sons of Shisha, scribes; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud,
the recorder; 4 Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, over the army; Zadok and
Abiathar, the priests; 5 Azariah the son of Nathan, over the officers;
Zabud the son of Nathan, a priest *and* the king's friend; 6 Ahishar, over
the household; and Adoniram the son of Abda, over the labor force.

7 And Solomon had twelve governors over all Israel, who provided
food for the king and his household; each one made provision for one
month of the year. 8 These *are* their names: Ben-Hur,[a] in the moun-
tains of Ephraim; 9 Ben-Deker,[a] in Makaz, Shaalbim, Beth Shemesh,
and Elon Beth Hanan; 10 Ben-Hesed,[a] in Arubboth; to him *belonged*
Sochoh and all the land of Hepher; 11 Ben-Abinadab,[a] *in* all the regions
of Dor; he had Taphath the daughter of Solomon as wife; 12 Baana
the son of Ahilud, *in* Taanach, Megiddo, and all Beth Shean, which *is*
beside Zaretan below Jezreel, from Beth Shean to Abel Meholah, as far
as the other side of Jokneam; 13 Ben-Geber,[a] in Ramoth Gilead; to him
belonged the towns of Jair the son of Manasseh, in Gilead; to him *also*
belonged the region of Argob in Bashan—sixty large cities with walls
and bronze gate-bars; 14 Ahinadab the son of Iddo, *in* Mahanaim;
15 Ahimaaz, in Naphtali; he also took Basemath the daughter of
Solomon as wife; 16 Baanah the son of Hushai, in Asher and Aloth;
17 Jehoshaphat the son of Paruah, in Issachar; 18 Shimei the son of
Elah, in Benjamin; 19 Geber the son of Uri, in the land of Gilead, *in* the
country of Sihon king of the Amorites, and of Og king of Bashan. *He*
was the only governor who *was* in the land.

4:8 [a]Literally *Son of Hur* **4:9** [a]Literally *Son of Deker* **4:10** [a]Literally *Son of Hesed*
4:11 [a]Literally *Son of Abinadab* **4:13** [a]Literally *Son of Geber*

Prosperity and Wisdom of Solomon's Reign

20 Judah and Israel *were* as numerous as the sand by the sea in
multitude, eating and drinking and rejoicing. 21 So Solomon reigned
over all kingdoms from the River[a] *to* the land of the Philistines, as far
as the border of Egypt. *They* brought tribute and served Solomon all
the days of his life.

22 Now Solomon's provision for one day was thirty kors of fine flour,
sixty kors of meal, 23 ten fatted oxen, twenty oxen from the pastures,
and one hundred sheep, besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and fatted
fowl.

24 For he had dominion over all *the region* on this side of the River[a]
from Tiphsah even to Gaza, namely over all the kings on this side of
the River; and he had peace on every side all around him. 25 And Judah
and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and his fig tree, from
Dan as far as Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.

26 Solomon had forty[a] thousand stalls of horses for his chariots,
and twelve thousand horsemen. 27 And these governors, each man
in his month, provided food for King Solomon and for all who came
to King Solomon's table. There was no lack in their supply. 28 They
also brought barley and straw to the proper place, for the horses and
steeds, each man according to his charge.

29 And God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great under-
standing, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore. 30 Thus
Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and
all the wisdom of Egypt. 31 For he was wiser than all men—than Ethan
the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and
his fame was in all the surrounding nations. 32 He spoke three thousand
proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five. 33 Also he spoke of
trees, from the cedar tree of Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs
out of the wall; he spoke also of animals, of birds, of creeping things,
and of fish. 34 And men of all nations, from all the kings of the earth
who had heard of his wisdom, came to hear the wisdom of Solomon.

Solomon Prepares to Build the Temple

5 Now Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon, because he
heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father, for
Hiram had always loved David. 2 Then Solomon sent to Hiram, saying:

3 You know how my father David could not build a house for the
name of the Lord his God because of the wars which were fought
against him on every side, until the Lord put *his foes*[a] under the
soles of his feet.
4 But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side; *there*
is neither adversary nor evil occurrence.
5 And behold, I propose to build a house for the name of the Lord
my God, as the Lord spoke to my father David, saying, "Your son,
whom I will set on your throne in your place, he shall build the
house for My name."

4:21 [a]That is, the Euphrates **4:24** [a]That is, the Euphrates **4:26** [a]Following Masoretic Text and most other authorities; some manuscripts of the Septuagint read *four* (compare 2 Chronicles 9:25). **5:3** [a]Literally *them*

Life Lessons

1 Kings 5:1—6:38

SITUATION
Solomon began to build the great temple in Jerusalem. The king of Tyre allowed the wood from his forest to be used for building materials. In order to keep family ties strong, Solomon rotated the workmen so that only one-third of the workforce lived away from home at a time.

OBSERVATION
During the temple construction, God reaffirmed to Solomon the promise He had previously made to David. It was predicated on Solomon obeying the Lord's laws and commands.

INSPIRATION
It's a wonderful day indeed when we stop working for God and begin working with God. (Go ahead, read the sentence again.)

For years I viewed God as a compassionate CEO and my role as a loyal sales representative. He had His office, and I had my territory. I could contact Him as much as I wanted. He was always a phone or fax away. He encouraged me, rallied behind me, and supported me, but He didn't go with me. At least I didn't think He did. Then I read 2 Corinthians 6:1 (NCV): "We are workers together with God."

Workers with God? Co-laborers? God and I work together? Imagine the paradigm shift this truth creates. Rather than report to God, we work with God. Rather than check in with Him and then leave, we check in with Him and then follow. We are always in the presence of God. We never

leave church. There is never a non-sacred moment! His presence never diminishes. Our awareness of His presence may falter, but the reality of His presence never changes. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you desire to commune with God on a regular basis? He is always available. What can you do today to remind yourself of God's constant presence?

EXPLORATION

Obedience—Exodus 19:5; 24:7; 1 Kings 3:14; Psalm 25:10; Proverbs 1:33; Luke 8:21; John 14:15; Acts 5:29; 1 Peter 1:14; 1 John 5:2.

God will not lead you to violate his Word.

—Max Lucado (Facing Your Giants)

6 Now therefore, command that they cut down cedars for me from
Lebanon; and my servants will be with your servants, and I will
pay you wages for your servants according to whatever you say.
For you know *there is* none among us who has skill to cut timber
like the Sidonians.

7 So it was, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, that he rejoiced greatly and said,

Blessed *be* the Lord this day, for He has given David a wise son
over this great people!

8 Then Hiram sent to Solomon, saying:

I have considered *the message* which you sent me, *and* I will do
all you desire concerning the cedar and cypress logs.
9 My servants shall bring *them* down from Lebanon to the sea; I
will float them in rafts by sea to the place you indicate to me, and
will have them broken apart there; then you can take *them* away.
And you shall fulfill my desire by giving food for my household.

10 Then Hiram gave Solomon cedar and cypress logs *according to* all his desire. 11 And Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand kors of wheat *as* food for his household, and twenty[a] kors of pressed oil. Thus Solomon gave to Hiram year by year.

12 So the Lord gave Solomon wisdom, as He had promised him; and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon, and the two of them made a treaty together.

13 Then King Solomon raised up a labor force out of all Israel; and the labor force was thirty thousand men. 14 And he sent them to Lebanon, ten thousand a month in shifts: they were one month in Lebanon *and* two months at home; Adoniram *was* in charge of the labor force. 15 Solomon had seventy thousand who carried burdens, and eighty thousand who quarried *stone* in the mountains, 16 besides three thousand three hundred[a] from the chiefs of Solomon's deputies, who supervised the people who labored in the work. 17 And the king commanded them to quarry large stones, costly stones, *and* hewn stones, to lay the foundation of the temple.[a] 18 So Solomon's builders, Hiram's builders, and the Gebalites quarried *them;* and they prepared timber and stones to build the temple.

Solomon Builds the Temple

6 And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth[a] year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which *is* the second month, that he began to build the house of the Lord. 2 Now the house which King Solomon built for the Lord, its length *was* sixty

5:11 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint and Syriac read *twenty thousand*. **5:16** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *three thousand six hundred*. **5:17** [a]Literally *house,* and so frequently throughout this book **6:1** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *fortieth*.

cubits, its width twenty, and its height thirty cubits. 3The vestibule in front of the sanctuary[a] of the house *was* twenty cubits long across the width of the house, *and* the width of *the vestibule*[b] *extended* ten cubits from the front of the house. 4And he made for the house windows with beveled frames.

5Against the wall of the temple he built chambers all around, *against* the walls of the temple, all around the sanctuary and the inner sanctuary.[a] Thus he made side chambers all around it. 6The lowest chamber *was* five cubits wide, the middle *was* six cubits wide, and the third *was* seven cubits wide; for he made narrow ledges around the outside of the temple, so that *the support beams* would not be fastened into the walls of the temple. 7And the temple, when it was being built, was built with stone finished at the quarry, so that no hammer or chisel *or* any iron tool was heard in the temple while it was being built. 8The doorway for the middle story[a] *was* on the right side of the temple. They went up by stairs to the middle *story,* and from the middle to the third.

9So he built the temple and finished it, and he paneled the temple with beams and boards of cedar. 10And he built side chambers against the entire temple, each five cubits high; they were attached to the temple with cedar beams.

11Then the word of the Lord came to Solomon, saying: 12"*Concerning* this temple which you are building, if you walk in My statutes, execute My judgments, keep all My commandments, and walk in them, then I will perform My word with you, which I spoke to your father David. 13And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake My people Israel."

14So Solomon built the temple and finished it. 15And he built the inside walls of the temple with cedar boards; from the floor of the temple to the ceiling he paneled the inside with wood; and he covered the floor of the temple with planks of cypress. 16Then he built the twenty-cubit room at the rear of the temple, from floor to ceiling, with cedar boards; he built *it* inside as the inner sanctuary, as the Most Holy *Place.* 17And in front of it the temple sanctuary was forty cubits *long.* 18The inside of the temple was cedar, carved with ornamental buds and open flowers. All *was* cedar; there was no stone *to be* seen.

19And he prepared the inner sanctuary inside the temple, to set the ark of the covenant of the Lord there. 20The inner sanctuary *was* twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high. He overlaid it with pure gold, and overlaid the altar of cedar. 21So Solomon overlaid the inside of the temple with pure gold. He stretched gold chains across the front of the inner sanctuary, and overlaid it with gold. 22The whole temple he overlaid with gold, until he had finished all the temple; also he overlaid with gold the entire altar that *was* by the inner sanctuary.

23Inside the inner sanctuary he made two cherubim *of* olive wood, *each* ten cubits high. 24One wing of the cherub *was* five cubits, and the other wing of the cherub five cubits: ten cubits from the tip of one wing to the tip of the other. 25And the other cherub *was* ten cubits; both cherubim *were* of the same size and shape. 26The height of one cherub *was* ten cubits, and so *was* the other cherub. 27Then he set the cherubim inside the inner room;[a] and they stretched out the wings of the cherubim so that the wing of the one touched *one* wall, and the wing of the other cherub touched the other wall. And their wings touched each other in the middle of the room. 28Also he overlaid the cherubim with gold.

29Then he carved all the walls of the temple all around, both the inner and outer *sanctuaries,* with carved figures of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers. 30And the floor of the temple he overlaid with gold, both the inner and outer *sanctuaries.*

31For the entrance of the inner sanctuary he made doors *of* olive wood; the lintel *and* doorposts *were* one-fifth *of the wall.* 32The two doors *were of* olive wood; and he carved on them figures of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, and overlaid *them* with gold; and he spread gold on the cherubim and on

6:3 [a]Hebrew *heykal;* here the main room of the temple, elsewhere called the holy place (compare Exodus 26:33 and Ezekiel 41:1) [b]Literally *it* **6:5** [a]Hebrew *debir;* here the inner room of the temple, elsewhere called the Most Holy Place (compare verse 16) **6:8** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *upper story;* Targum reads *ground story.* **6:27** [a]Literally *house*

the palm trees. 33 So for the door of the sanctuary he also made doorposts *of* olive wood, one-fourth *of the wall.* 34 And the two doors *were of* cypress wood; two panels *comprised* one folding door, and two panels *comprised* the other folding door. 35 Then he carved cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers *on them,* and overlaid *them* with gold applied evenly on the carved work.

36 And he built the inner court with three rows of hewn stone and a row of cedar beams.

37 In the fourth year the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid, in the month of Ziv. 38 And in the eleventh year, in the month of Bul, which is the eighth month, the house was finished in all its details and according to all its plans. So he was seven years in building it.

Solomon's Other Buildings

7 But Solomon took thirteen years to build his own house; so he finished all his house.

2 He also built the House of the Forest of Lebanon; its length *was* one hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits, with four rows of cedar pillars, and cedar beams on the pillars. 3 And *it was* paneled with cedar above the beams that *were* on forty-five pillars, fifteen *to* a row. 4 *There were* windows *with beveled frames in* three rows, and window *was* opposite window *in* three tiers. 5 And all the doorways and doorposts *had* rectangular frames; and window *was* opposite window *in* three tiers.

6 He also made the Hall of Pillars: its length *was* fifty cubits, and its width thirty cubits; and in front of them *was* a portico with pillars, and a canopy *was* in front of them.

7 Then he made a hall for the throne, the Hall of Judgment, where he might judge; and *it was* paneled with cedar from floor to ceiling.[a]

8 And the house where he dwelt *had* another court inside the hall, of like workmanship. Solomon also made a house like this hall for Pharaoh's daughter, whom he had taken *as wife.*

9 All these *were of* costly stones cut to size, trimmed with saws, inside and out, from the foundation to the eaves, and also on the outside to the great court. 10 The foundation *was of* costly stones, large stones, some ten cubits and some eight cubits. 11 And above *were* costly stones, hewn to size, and cedar wood. 12 The great court *was* enclosed with three rows of hewn stones and a row of cedar beams. So were the inner court of the house of the Lord and the vestibule of the temple.

Hiram the Craftsman

13 Now King Solomon sent and brought Huram[a] from Tyre. 14 He *was* the son of a widow from the tribe of Naphtali, and his father *was* a man of Tyre, a bronze worker; he was filled with wisdom and understanding and skill in working with all kinds of bronze work. So he came to King Solomon and did all his work.

7:7 [a] Literally *floor,* that is, of the upper level **7:13** [a] Hebrew *Hiram* (compare 2 Chronicles 2:13, 14)

Life Lessons

1 Kings 7:1—8:66

SITUATION
After lavishly constructing and decorating the temple, Solomon offered a prayer of thanksgiving and blessing to God. He praised God and prayed for the people.

OBSERVATION
As he finished his blessing, Solomon said that God had given rest to His people and had kept His good promises.

INSPIRATION
The bow cannot always be bent without fear of breaking. For a field to bear fruit, it must occasionally lie fallow. And for you to be healthy, you must rest. Slow down, and God will heal you. He will bring rest to your mind, to your body, and most of all to your soul. He will lead you to green pastures.

Green pastures were not the natural terrain of Judea. The hills around Bethlehem where David kept his flock were not lush and green. Even today they are white and parched. Any green pasture in Judea is the work of some shepherd. He has cleared the rough, rocky land. Stumps have been torn out, and brush has been burned. Irrigation. Cultivation. Such are the work of a shepherd.

Hence, when David says, "He makes me to lie down in green pastures" [Psalm 23:2], he is saying, "My Shepherd makes me lie down in His finished work." With His own pierced hands, Jesus created a pasture for the soul. He tore out the thorny underbrush of condemnation. He pried loose the huge boulders of sin. In their place He planted

The Bronze Pillars for the Temple

15 And he cast two pillars of bronze, each one eighteen cubits high,
and a line of twelve cubits measured the circumference of each.
16 Then he made two capitals *of* cast bronze, to set on the tops of the
pillars. The height of one capital *was* five cubits, and the height of
the other capital *was* five cubits. 17 *He made* a lattice network, with
wreaths of chainwork, for the capitals which *were* on top of the pillars:
seven chains for one capital and seven for the other capital. 18 So he
made the pillars, and two rows of pomegranates above the network
all around to cover the capitals that *were* on top; and thus he did for
the other capital.

19 The capitals which *were* on top of the pillars in the hall *were* in
the shape of lilies, four cubits. 20 The capitals on the two pillars also
had pomegranates above, by the convex surface which *was* next to the
network; and there *were* two hundred such pomegranates in rows on
each of the capitals all around.

21 Then he set up the pillars by the vestibule of the temple; he set up
the pillar on the right and called its name Jachin, and he set up the pil-
lar on the left and called its name Boaz. 22 The tops of the pillars were
in the shape of lilies. So the work of the pillars was finished.

The Sea and the Oxen

23 And he made the Sea of cast bronze, ten cubits from one brim to
the other; *it was* completely round. Its height *was* five cubits, and a
line of thirty cubits measured its circumference.

24 Below its brim *were* ornamental buds encircling it all around, ten
to a cubit, all the way around the Sea. The ornamental buds *were* cast
in two rows when it was cast. 25 It stood on twelve oxen: three looking
toward the north, three looking toward the west, three looking toward
the south, and three looking toward the east; the Sea *was set* upon
them, and all their back parts *pointed* inward. 26 It *was* a handbreadth
thick; and its brim was shaped like the brim of a cup, *like* a lily blos-
som. It contained two thousand[a] baths.

The Carts and the Lavers

27 He also made ten carts of bronze; four cubits *was* the length of
each cart, four cubits its width, and three cubits its height. 28 And this
was the design of the carts: They had panels, and the panels *were*
between frames; 29 on the panels that *were* between the frames *were*
lions, oxen, and cherubim. And on the frames *was* a pedestal on top.
Below the lions and oxen *were* wreaths of plaited work. 30 Every cart
had four bronze wheels and axles of bronze, and its four feet had
supports. Under the laver *were* supports of cast *bronze* beside each
wreath. 31 Its opening inside the crown at the top *was* one cubit in
diameter; and the opening *was* round, shaped *like* a pedestal, one
and a half cubits in outside diameter; and also on the opening *were*
engravings, but the panels were square, not round. 32 Under the pan-
els *were* the four wheels, and the axles of the wheels *were joined* to the
cart. The height of a wheel *was* one and a half cubits. 33 The workman-
ship of the wheels *was* like the workmanship of a chariot wheel; their

7:26 [a] Or *three thousand* (compare 2 Chronicles 4:5)

seeds of grace and dug ponds of mercy.

And He invites us to rest there. Can you imagine the satisfaction in the heart of the Shepherd when, with work completed, He sees His sheep rest in the tender grass?

Can you imagine the satisfaction in the heart of God when we do the same? His pasture is His gift to us. This is not a pasture that you have made. Nor is it a pasture that you deserve. It is a gift of God. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

In a world rocky with human failure, there is a land lush with divine mercy. Your Shepherd invites you there. He wants you to lie down. Nestle deeply until you are hidden, buried, in the tall shoots of his love, and there you will find rest. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Jesus said that those who are tired and have heavy loads will find rest in His presence. Ask Him to loosen your heavy load. Ask Him to give you peace and rest. If necessary, take steps to slow down your hectic pace so you can spend more time with the Lord.

EXPLORATION

Rest—Jeremiah 6:16; 31:25; Matthew 11:28–30; Mark 6:31, 32; John 7:37, 38.

axle pins, their rims, their spokes, and their hubs *were* all of cast *bronze*. 34 And *there were* four supports at the four corners of each cart; its supports *were* part of the cart itself. 35 On the top of the cart, at the height of half a cubit, *it was* perfectly round. And on the top of the cart, its flanges and its panels *were* of the same casting. 36 On the plates of its flanges and on its panels he engraved cherubim, lions, and palm trees, wherever there was a clear space on each, with wreaths all around. 37 Thus he made the ten carts. All of them were of the same mold, one measure, *and* one shape.

38 Then he made ten lavers of bronze; each laver contained forty baths, *and* each laver *was* four cubits. On each of the ten carts *was* a laver. 39 And he put five carts on the right side of the house, and five on the left side of the house. He set the Sea on the right side of the house, toward the southeast.

Furnishings of the Temple

40 Huram[a] made the lavers and the shovels and the bowls. So Huram finished doing all the work that he was to do for King Solomon *for* the house of the Lord: 41 the two pillars, the *two* bowl-shaped capitals that *were* on top of the two pillars; the two networks covering the two bowl-shaped capitals which *were* on top of the pillars; 42 four hundred pomegranates for the two networks (two rows of pomegranates for each network, to cover the two bowl-shaped capitals that *were* on top of the pillars); 43 the ten carts, and ten lavers on the carts; 44 one Sea, and twelve oxen under the Sea; 45 the pots, the shovels, and the bowls.

All these articles which Huram[a] made for King Solomon *for* the house of the Lord *were of* burnished bronze. 46 In the plain of Jordan the king had them cast in clay molds, between Succoth and Zaretan. 47 And Solomon did not weigh all the articles, because *there were* so many; the weight of the bronze was not determined.

48 Thus Solomon had all the furnishings made for the house of the Lord: the altar of gold, and the table of gold on which *was* the showbread; 49 the lampstands of pure gold, five on the right *side* and five on the left in front of the inner sanctuary, with the flowers and the lamps and the wick-trimmers of gold; 50 the basins, the trimmers, the bowls, the ladles, and the censers of pure gold; and the hinges of gold, *both* for the doors of the inner room (the Most Holy *Place*) *and* for the doors of the main hall of the temple.

51 So all the work that King Solomon had done for the house of the Lord was finished; and Solomon brought in the things which his father David had dedicated: the silver and the gold and the furnishings. He put them in the treasuries of the house of the Lord.

The Ark Brought into the Temple

8 Now Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel, to King Solomon in Jerusalem, that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord from the City of David, which *is* Zion. 2 Therefore all the men of Israel assembled with King Solomon at the feast in the month of Ethanim, which *is* the seventh month. 3 So all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark. 4 Then they brought up the ark of the Lord, the tabernacle of meeting, and all the holy furnishings that *were* in the tabernacle. The priests and the Levites brought them up. 5 Also King Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel who were assembled with him, *were* with him before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen that could not be counted or numbered for multitude. 6 Then the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the Lord to its place, into the inner sanctuary of the temple, to the Most Holy *Place,* under the wings of the cherubim. 7 For the cherubim spread *their* two wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubim overshadowed the ark and its poles. 8 The poles extended so that the ends of the poles could be seen from the holy *place,* in front of the inner sanctuary; but they could not be seen from outside. And they are there to this day. 9 Nothing *was* in the ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there at Horeb, when the Lord made *a covenant* with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt.

10 And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy *place,* that the cloud filled

7:40 [a]Hebrew *Hiram* (compare 2 Chronicles 2:13, 14) **7:45** [a]Hebrew *Hiram* (compare 2 Chronicles 2:13, 14)

the house of the Lord, 11 so that the priests
could not continue ministering because of the
cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house
of the Lord.
12 Then Solomon spoke:

"The Lord said He would dwell in the dark
cloud.
13 I have surely built You an exalted house,
And a place for You to dwell in forever."

Solomon's Speech at Completion of the Work

14 Then the king turned around and blessed
the whole assembly of Israel, while all the
assembly of Israel was standing. 15 And he
said: "Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel, who
spoke with His mouth to my father David, and
with His hand has fulfilled *it,* saying, 16 'Since
the day that I brought My people Israel out of
Egypt, I have chosen no city from any tribe of
Israel *in which* to build a house, that My name
might be there; but I chose David to be over
My people Israel.' 17 Now it was in the heart
of my father David to build a temple[a] for the
name of the Lord God of Israel. 18 But the Lord
said to my father David, 'Whereas it was in
your heart to build a temple for My name, you
did well that it was in your heart. 19 Nevertheless you shall not build the temple, but your
son who will come from your body, he shall
build the temple for My name.' 20 So the Lord
has fulfilled His word which He spoke; and I
have filled the position of my father David,
and sit on the throne of Israel, as the Lord
promised; and I have built a temple for the
name of the Lord God of Israel. 21 And there I
have made a place for the ark, in which *is* the
covenant of the Lord which He made with our
fathers, when He brought them out of the land
of Egypt."

Solomon's Prayer of Dedication

22 Then Solomon stood before the altar of
the Lord in the presence of all the assembly
of Israel, and spread out his hands toward
heaven; 23 and he said: "Lord God of Israel,
there is no God in heaven above or on earth
below like You, who keep *Your* covenant and
mercy with Your servants who walk before
You with all their hearts. 24 You have kept what
You promised Your servant David my father;
You have both spoken with Your mouth and
fulfilled *it* with Your hand, as *it is* this day.
25 Therefore, Lord God of Israel, now keep
what You promised Your servant David my
father, saying, 'You shall not fail to have a man
sit before Me on the throne of Israel, only if
your sons take heed to their way, that they
walk before Me as you have walked before
Me.' 26 And now I pray, O God of Israel, let Your
word come true, which You have spoken to
Your servant David my father.
27 "But will God indeed dwell on the earth?
Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens
cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built! 28 Yet regard the prayer
of Your servant and his supplication, O Lord
my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer
which Your servant is praying before You
today: 29 that Your eyes may be open toward
this temple night and day, toward the place of
which You said, 'My name shall be there,' that
You may hear the prayer which Your servant
makes toward this place. 30 And may You hear
the supplication of Your servant and of Your
people Israel, when they pray toward this
place. Hear in heaven Your dwelling place; and
when You hear, forgive.
31 "When anyone sins against his neighbor, and is forced to take an oath, and comes
and takes an oath before Your altar in this
temple, 32 then hear in heaven, and act, and
judge Your servants, condemning the wicked,
bringing his way on his head, and justifying
the righteous by giving him according to his
righteousness.
33 "When Your people Israel are defeated
before an enemy because they have sinned
against You, and when they turn back to You
and confess Your name, and pray and make
supplication to You in this temple, 34 then hear
in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your people
Israel, and bring them back to the land which
You gave to their fathers.
35 "When the heavens are shut up and
there is no rain because they have sinned
against You, when they pray toward this place
and confess Your name, and turn from their
sin because You afflict them, 36 then hear in

8:17 [a] Literally *house*, and so in verses 18–20

heaven, and forgive the sin of Your servants, Your people Israel, that You may teach them the good way in which they should walk; and send rain on Your land which You have given to Your people as an inheritance.

37 "When there is famine in the land, pestilence *or* blight *or* mildew, locusts *or* grasshoppers; when their enemy besieges them in the land of their cities; whatever plague or whatever sickness *there is;* 38 whatever prayer, whatever supplication is made by anyone, *or* by all Your people Israel, when each one knows the plague of his own heart, and spreads out his hands toward this temple: 39 then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and act, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men), 40 that they may fear You all the days that they live in the land which You gave to our fathers.

41 "Moreover, concerning a foreigner, who *is* not of Your people Israel, but has come from a far country for Your name's sake 42 (for they will hear of Your great name and Your strong hand and Your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this temple, 43 hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, that all peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You, as *do* Your people Israel, and that they may know that this temple which I have built is called by Your name.

44 "When Your people go out to battle against their enemy, wherever You send them, and when they pray to the Lord toward the city which You have chosen and the temple which I have built for Your name, 45 then hear in heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause.

46 "When they sin against You (for *there is* no one who does not sin), and You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to the land of the enemy, far or near; 47 *yet* when they come to themselves in the land where they were carried captive, and repent, and make supplication to You in the land of those who took them captive, saying, 'We have sinned and done wrong, we have committed wickedness'; 48 and *when* they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who led them away captive, and pray to You toward their land which You gave to their fathers, the city which You have chosen and the temple which I have built for Your name: 49 then hear in heaven Your dwelling place their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause, 50 and forgive Your people who have sinned against You, and all their transgressions which they have transgressed against You; and grant them compassion before those who took them captive, that they may have compassion on them 51 (for they *are* Your people and Your inheritance, whom You brought out of Egypt, out of the iron furnace), 52 that Your eyes may be open to the supplication of Your servant and the supplication of Your people Israel, to listen to them whenever they call to You. 53 For You separated them from among all the peoples of the earth *to be* Your inheritance, as You spoke by Your servant Moses, when You brought our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord God."

Solomon Blesses the Assembly

54 And so it was, when Solomon had finished praying all this prayer and supplication to the Lord, that he arose from before the altar of the Lord, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven. 55 Then he stood and blessed all the assembly of Israel with a loud voice, saying: 56 "Blessed *be* the Lord, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised. There has not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised through His servant Moses. 57 May the Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers. May He not leave us nor forsake us, 58 that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, which He commanded our fathers. 59 And may these words of mine, with which I have made supplication before the Lord, be near the Lord our God day and night, that He may maintain the cause of His servant and the cause of His people Israel, as each day may require, 60 that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord *is* God; *there is* no other. 61 Let your heart therefore be loyal to the Lord our God, to walk in His statutes and keep His commandments, as at this day."

Solomon Dedicates the Temple

62 Then the king and all Israel with him offered sacrifices before the
Lord. 63 And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he
offered to the Lord, twenty-two thousand bulls and one hundred and
twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedi-
cated the house of the Lord. 64 On the same day the king consecrated
the middle of the court that *was* in front of the house of the Lord; for
there he offered burnt offerings, grain offerings, and the fat of the
peace offerings, because the bronze altar that *was* before the Lord *was*
too small to receive the burnt offerings, the grain offerings, and the fat
of the peace offerings.

65 At that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a
great assembly from the entrance of Hamath to the Brook of Egypt,
before the Lord our God, seven days and seven *more* days—fourteen
days. 66 On the eighth day he sent the people away; and they blessed
the king, and went to their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the
good that the Lord had done for His servant David, and for Israel His
people.

God's Second Appearance to Solomon

9 And it came to pass, when Solomon had finished building the
house of the Lord and the king's house, and all Solomon's desire
which he wanted to do, 2 that the Lord appeared to Solomon the
second time, as He had appeared to him at Gibeon. 3 And the Lord
said to him: "I have heard your prayer and your supplication that you
have made before Me; I have consecrated this house which you have
built to put My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be
there perpetually. 4 Now if you walk before Me as your father David
walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to
all that I have commanded you, *and* if you keep My statutes and My
judgments, 5 then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over
Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, 'You shall not
fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.' 6 *But* if you or your sons
at all turn from following Me, and do not keep My commandments
and My statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other
gods and worship them, 7 then I will cut off Israel from the land which
I have given them; and this house which I have consecrated for My
name I will cut out of My sight. Israel will be a proverb and a byword
among all peoples. 8 And *as for* this house, *which* is exalted, everyone
who passes by it will be astonished and will hiss, and say, 'Why has
the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?' 9 Then they will
answer, 'Because they forsook the Lord their God, who brought their
fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, and
worshiped them and served them; therefore the Lord has brought all
this calamity on them.'"

Solomon and Hiram Exchange Gifts

10 Now it happened at the end of twenty years, when Solomon
had built the two houses, the house of the Lord and the king's house
11 (Hiram the king of Tyre had supplied Solomon with cedar and
cypress and gold, as much as he desired), *that* King Solomon then
gave Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee. 12 Then Hiram went

Life LESSONS

1 Kings 9:1–28

SITUATION
This is the story of Solomon's greatness and decline. God appeared to Solomon and promised blessing in exchange for obedience.

OBSERVATION
Solomon's sin did not catch God off guard. Although God knew Solomon would sin, He continued to bless Solomon because of God's promise to David.

INSPIRATION
The Unseen Conductor prompts this orchestra we call living. When gifted teachers aid struggling students and skilled managers disentangle bureaucratic knots, when dog lovers love dogs and number-crunchers zero balance the account, when you and I do the most what we do the best for the glory of God, we are "one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Romans 12:5).

You play no small part, because there is no small part to be played. "All of you together are Christ's body, and each one of you is a separate and necessary part of it" (1 Corinthians 12:27 NLT). "Separate" and "necessary." Unique and essential. No one else has been given your lines. God "shaped each person in turn" (Psalm 33:15 MSG). The Author of the human drama entrusted your part to you alone. Live your life, or it won't be lived. We need you to be you.

You need you to be you.

You can't be your hero, your parent, or your big brother. You might imitate

their golf swing or hair style, but you can't be them. You can only be you. All you have to give is what you've been given to give. Concentrate on who you are and what you have. "Don't compare yourself with others. Each of you must take responsibility for doing the creative best you can with your own life" (Galatians 6:4, 5 MSG). . . .

If you aren't you, we don't get you. The world misses out.

God never called you to be anyone other than you. But He does call on you to be the best *you* you can be. The big question is, at your best, who are you? (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What gifts has God given you? Money? Musical talent? Outgoing personality? Intelligence, sensitivity, or discipline? Find a way to use your gifts in service to God so that He receives the glory.

EXPLORATION

Purpose of Gifts—Romans 12:3–6; 1 Corinthians 12:12; 14:26; Ephesians 4:11–16; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6.

from Tyre to see the cities which Solomon had given him, but they did not please him. 13 So he said, "What *kind of* cities *are* these which you have given me, my brother?" And he called them the land of Cabul,[a] as they are to this day. 14 Then Hiram sent the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold.

9:13 [a] Literally *Good for Nothing*

CHRIST THROUGH THE BIBLE

Jesus: The Sinless Savior

The figure on the center cross . . . has no such shadow of sin. "We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Stainless. Selfless. Even on a sinner's cross Jesus' holiness illuminates heaven. . . .

Many could have spoken on behalf of Jesus, but none did. Until now. Kind words from the lips of a thief. He makes his request. "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42).

The Savior turns His heavy head toward the prodigal child and promises, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).

To those at the foot of the cross, the dialogue was curious. But to those at the foot of the throne, the dialogue was outrageous. They couldn't imagine it. How could the thief come to paradise? How could a soul speckled by sin go to heaven? How could a sinner be saved? They were about to see.

Did an angel move, did a demon stir as they witnessed the answering of the prayer? The sins of the thief (and all us thieves!) leave him and go to Jesus. Tiny specks at first, then large flakes, and finally layers of filth. Every evil thought. Each vile deed. The thief's ravings. His cursings. His greed. His sin. All now covering Jesus Christ. What nauseates God now covers His Son. . . .

The One with no sin becomes sin-filled. The one sin-filled becomes sinless.

It is eternity's most bizarre exchange. Paul explained it like this: "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree')" (Galatians 3:13). (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 568.

Solomon's Additional Achievements

15 And this *is* the reason for the labor force which King Solomon
raised: to build the house of the Lord, his own house, the Millo,[a] the
wall of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer. 16 (Pharaoh king of
Egypt had gone up and taken Gezer and burned it with fire, had killed
the Canaanites who dwelt in the city, and had given it *as* a dowry to
his daughter, Solomon's wife.) 17 And Solomon built Gezer, Lower Beth
Horon, 18 Baalath, and Tadmor in the wilderness, in the land *of Judah,*
19 all the storage cities that Solomon had, cities for his chariots and
cities for his cavalry, and whatever Solomon desired to build in Jeru-
salem, in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion.

20 All the people *who were* left of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites,
Hivites, and Jebusites, who *were* not of the children of Israel— 21 that
is, their descendants who were left in the land after them, whom the
children of Israel had not been able to destroy completely—from
these Solomon raised forced labor, as it is to this day. 22 But of the chil-
dren of Israel Solomon made no forced laborers, because they *were*
men of war and his servants: his officers, his captains, commanders
of his chariots, and his cavalry.

23 Others *were* chiefs of the officials who *were* over Solomon's work:
five hundred and fifty, who ruled over the people who did the work.

24 But Pharaoh's daughter came up from the City of David to her
house which *Solomon*[a] had built for her. Then he built the Millo.

25 Now three times a year Solomon offered burnt offerings and
peace offerings on the altar which he had built for the Lord, and he
burned incense with them *on the altar* that *was* before the Lord. So
he finished the temple.

26 King Solomon also built a fleet of ships at Ezion Geber, which *is*
near Elath[a] on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom. 27 Then
Hiram sent his servants with the fleet, seamen who knew the sea, to
work with the servants of Solomon. 28 And they went to Ophir, and
acquired four hundred and twenty talents of gold from there, and
brought *it* to King Solomon.

The Queen of Sheba's Praise of Solomon

10 Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon
concerning the name of the Lord, she came to test him with
hard questions. 2 She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue,
with camels that bore spices, very much gold, and precious stones;
and when she came to Solomon, she spoke with him about all that
was in her heart. 3 So Solomon answered all her questions; there was
nothing so difficult for the king that he could not explain *it* to her.
4 And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon,
the house that he had built, 5 the food on his table, the seating of his
servants, the service of his waiters and their apparel, his cupbear-
ers, and his entryway by which he went up to the house of the Lord,
there was no more spirit in her. 6 Then she said to the king: "It was a
true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your
wisdom. 7 However I did not believe the words until I came and saw

9:15 [a]Literally *The Landfill* **9:24** [a]Literally *he* (compare 2 Chronicles 8:11)
9:26 [a]Hebrew *Eloth* (compare 2 Kings 14:22)

Life Lessons

1 Kings 10:1—11:43

SITUATION
The queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's wisdom and came to see if the reports were true. Finally, toward the end of his life, Solomon's many wives influenced him to turn away from God.

OBSERVATION
Solomon had been given great gifts from God, but instead of responsibly using those gifts in obedience to God, the king allowed himself to be influenced by others. Christ's followers need to stand against pressure to compromise our faith and what we know to be true.

INSPIRATION
Hiding out with the enemy brings temporary relief.

Doesn't it always?

Stop resisting alcohol, and you'll laugh—for a while.

Move out on your spouse, and you'll relax—for a time.

Indulge in the porn, and you'll be entertained—for a season.

But then talons of temptation sink in. Waves of guilt crash in. The loneliness of breaking up rushes in. "There's a way of life that looks harmless enough; look again—it leads straight to hell. Sure, those people appear to be having a good time, but all that laughter will end in heartbreak" (Proverbs 14:12, 13 MSG). (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What responsibilities have you been given to serve God? In what areas are you vulnerable to the influence of others? Ask God to help

you stand against those influences.

EXPLORATION
Responsibility—Genesis 43:9; Deuteronomy 21:1–9; 1 Chronicles 21:8.

with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard. 8 Happy *are* your men and happy *are* these your servants, who stand continually before you *and* hear your wisdom! 9 Blessed be the Lord your God, who delighted in you, setting you on the throne of Israel! Because the Lord has loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness."

10 Then she gave the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold, spices in great quantity, and precious stones. There never again came such abundance of spices as the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon. 11 Also, the ships of Hiram, which brought gold from Ophir, brought great quantities of almug[a] wood and precious stones from Ophir. 12 And the king made steps of the almug wood for the house of the Lord and for the king's house, also harps and stringed instruments for singers. There never again came such almug wood, nor has the like been seen to this day.

13 Now King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she desired, whatever she asked, besides what Solomon had given her according to the royal generosity. So she turned and went to her own country, she and her servants.

Solomon's Great Wealth

14 The weight of gold that came to Solomon yearly was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold, 15 besides *that* from the traveling merchants, from the income of traders, from all the kings of Arabia, and from the governors of the country.

16 And King Solomon made two hundred large shields *of* hammered gold; six hundred *shekels* of gold went into each shield. 17 He also *made* three hundred shields *of* hammered gold; three minas of gold went into each shield. The king put them in the House of the Forest of Lebanon.

18 Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with pure gold. 19 The throne had six steps, and the top of the throne *was* round at the back; *there were* armrests on either side of the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the armrests. 20 Twelve lions stood there, one on each side of the six steps; nothing like *this* had been made for any *other* kingdom.

21 All King Solomon's drinking vessels *were* gold, and all the vessels of the House of the Forest of Lebanon *were* pure gold. Not *one was* silver, for this was accounted as nothing in the days of Solomon. 22 For the king had merchant ships[a] at sea with the fleet of Hiram. Once every three years the merchant ships came bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes, and monkeys.[b] 23 So King Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom.

24 Now all the earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart. 25 Each man brought his present: articles of silver and gold, garments, armor, spices, horses, and mules, at a set rate year by year.

26 And Solomon gathered chariots and horsemen; he had one

10:11 [a] Or *algum* (compare 2 Chronicles 9:10, 11) **10:22** [a] Literally *ships of Tarshish,* deep-sea vessels [b] Or *peacocks*

thousand four hundred chariots and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he stationed[a] in the chariot cities and with the king at Jerusalem. 27 The king made silver *as common* in Jerusalem as stones, and he made cedar trees as abundant as the sycamores which *are* in the lowland.

28 Also Solomon had horses imported from Egypt and Keveh; the king's merchants bought them in Keveh at the *current* price. 29 Now a chariot that was imported from Egypt cost six hundred *shekels* of silver, and a horse one hundred and fifty; and thus, through their agents,[a] they exported *them* to all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Syria.

Solomon's Heart Turns from the Lord

11 But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, *and* Hittites— 2 from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, "You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love. 3 And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. 4 For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as *was* the heart of his father David. 5 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 6 Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not fully follow the Lord, as *did* his father David. 7 Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that *is* east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. 8 And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.

9 So the Lord became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, 10 and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the Lord had commanded. 11 Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. 12 Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of the hand of your son. 13 However I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen."

Adversaries of Solomon

14 Now the Lord raised up an adversary against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite; he *was* a descendant of the king in Edom. 15 For it happened, when David was in Edom, and Joab the commander of the army had gone up to bury the slain, after he had killed every male in Edom 16 (because for six months Joab remained there with all Israel, until he had cut down every male in Edom), 17 that Hadad fled to go to Egypt, he and certain Edomites of his father's servants with him. Hadad *was* still a little child. 18 Then they arose from Midian and came to Paran; and they took men with them from Paran and came to Egypt, to Pharaoh king of Egypt, who gave him a house, apportioned food for him, and gave him land. 19 And Hadad found great favor in the sight of Pharaoh, so that he gave him as wife the sister of his own wife, that is, the sister of Queen Tahpenes. 20 Then the sister of Tahpenes bore him Genubath his son, whom Tahpenes weaned in Pharaoh's house. And Genubath was in Pharaoh's household among the sons of Pharaoh.

21 So when Hadad heard in Egypt that David rested with his fathers, and that Joab the commander of the army was dead, Hadad said to Pharaoh, "Let me depart, that I may go to my own country."

22 Then Pharaoh said to him, "But what have you lacked with me, that suddenly you seek to go to your own country?"

So he answered, "Nothing, but do let me go anyway."

10:26 [a] Following Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate (compare 2 Chronicles 9:25); Masoretic Text reads *led*.
10:29 [a] Literally *by their hands*

23 And God raised up *another* adversary
against him, Rezon the son of Eliadah, who
had fled from his lord, Hadadezer king of
Zobah. 24 So he gathered men to him and
became captain over a band *of raiders,* when
David killed those *of Zobah.* And they went
to Damascus and dwelt there, and reigned in
Damascus. 25 He was an adversary of Israel all
the days of Solomon (besides the trouble that
Hadad *caused*); and he abhorred Israel, and
reigned over Syria.

Jeroboam's Rebellion

26 Then Solomon's servant, Jeroboam the
son of Nebat, an Ephraimite from Zereda,
whose mother's name *was* Zeruah, a widow,
also rebelled against the king.
27 And this *is* what caused him to rebel
against the king: Solomon had built the Millo
and repaired the damages to the City of David
his father. 28 The man Jeroboam *was* a mighty
man of valor; and Solomon, seeing that the
young man was industrious, made him the
officer over all the labor force of the house of
Joseph.
29 Now it happened at that time, when
Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the
prophet Ahijah the Shilonite met him on the
way; and he had clothed himself with a new
garment, and the two *were* alone in the field.
30 Then Ahijah took hold of the new garment
that *was* on him, and tore it *into* twelve pieces.
31 And he said to Jeroboam, "Take for yourself
ten pieces, for thus says the Lord, the God of
Israel: 'Behold, I will tear the kingdom out of
the hand of Solomon and will give ten tribes
to you 32 (but he shall have one tribe for the
sake of My servant David, and for the sake of
Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen out of
all the tribes of Israel), 33 because they have[a]
forsaken Me, and worshiped Ashtoreth the
goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god
of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the
people of Ammon, and have not walked in
My ways to do *what is* right in My eyes and
keep My statutes and My judgments, as *did*
his father David. 34 However I will not take
the whole kingdom out of his hand, because
I have made him ruler all the days of his life
for the sake of My servant David, whom I
chose because he kept My commandments
and My statutes. 35 But I will take the kingdom
out of his son's hand and give it to you—ten
tribes. 36 And to his son I will give one tribe,
that My servant David may always have a
lamp before Me in Jerusalem, the city which I
have chosen for Myself, to put My name there.
37 So I will take you, and you shall reign over
all your heart desires, and you shall be king
over Israel. 38 Then it shall be, if you heed all
that I command you, walk in My ways, and do
what is right in My sight, to keep My statutes
and My commandments, as My servant David
did, then I will be with you and build for you
an enduring house, as I built for David, and
will give Israel to you. 39 And I will afflict the
descendants of David because of this, but not
forever.' "
40 Solomon therefore sought to kill Jero-
boam. But Jeroboam arose and fled to Egypt,
to Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt
until the death of Solomon.

Death of Solomon

41 Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, all
that he did, and his wisdom, *are* they not writ-
ten in the book of the acts of Solomon? 42 And
the period that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem
over all Israel *was* forty years. 43 Then Solomon
rested with his fathers, and was buried in the
City of David his father. And Rehoboam his
son reigned in his place.

The Revolt Against Rehoboam

12 And Rehoboam went to Shechem, for
all Israel had gone to Shechem to make
him king. 2 So it happened, when Jeroboam
the son of Nebat heard *it* (he was still in Egypt,
for he had fled from the presence of King Sol-
omon and had been dwelling in Egypt), 3 that
they sent and called him. Then Jeroboam and
the whole assembly of Israel came and spoke
to Rehoboam, saying, 4 "Your father made
our yoke heavy; now therefore, lighten the
burdensome service of your father, and his
heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will
serve you."
5 So he said to them, "Depart *for* three
days, then come back to me." And the people
departed.

11:33 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *he has.*

6 Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who stood before his
father Solomon while he still lived, and he said, "How do you advise
me to answer these people?"
7 And they spoke to him, saying, "If you will be a servant to these
people today, and serve them, and answer them, and speak good
words to them, then they will be your servants forever."
8 But he rejected the advice which the elders had given him, and
consulted the young men who had grown up with him, who stood
before him. 9 And he said to them, "What advice do you give? How
should we answer this people who have spoken to me, saying,
'Lighten the yoke which your father put on us'?"
10 Then the young men who had grown up with him spoke to him,
saying, "Thus you should speak to this people who have spoken to
you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you make *it* lighter
on us'—thus you shall say to them: 'My little *finger* shall be thicker
than my father's waist! 11 And now, whereas my father put a heavy
yoke on you, I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with
whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!' "[a]
12 So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day,
as the king had directed, saying, "Come back to me the third day."
13 Then the king answered the people roughly, and rejected the advice
which the elders had given him; 14 and he spoke to them according
to the advice of the young men, saying, "My father made your yoke
heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips,
but I will chastise you with scourges!"[a] 15 So the king did not listen to
the people; for the turn *of events* was from the Lord, that He might
fulfill His word, which the Lord had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to
Jeroboam the son of Nebat.
16 Now when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the
people answered the king, saying:

"What share have we in David?
We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse.
To your tents, O Israel!
Now, see to your own house, O David!"

So Israel departed to their tents. 17 But Rehoboam reigned over the
children of Israel who dwelt in the cities of Judah.
18 Then King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who *was* in charge of the
revenue; but all Israel stoned him with stones, and he died. Therefore
King Rehoboam mounted his chariot in haste to flee to Jerusalem.
19 So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.
20 Now it came to pass when all Israel heard that Jeroboam had
come back, they sent for him and called him to the congregation, and
made him king over all Israel. There was none who followed the house
of David, but the tribe of Judah only.
21 And when Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled all the
house of Judah with the tribe of Benjamin, one hundred and eighty
thousand chosen *men* who were warriors, to fight against the house of
Israel, that he might restore the kingdom to Rehoboam the son of Sol-

12:11 [a]Literally *scorpions* **12:14** [a]Literally *scorpions*

Life Lessons

1 Kings 12:1—14:31

SITUATION
Rehoboam, Solomon's heir, rejected the advice of experienced elders in favor of the harsh counsel of friends. This action placed such a burden on the country that the northern kingdom (Israel) chose to rebel, expressing its rebellion through idolatry.

OBSERVATION
God provides elders to help us lead well. The older and more experienced person often speaks with wisdom.

INSPIRATION
Grace defines you. As grace sinks in, earthly labels fade. Society labels you like a can on an assembly line. Stupid. Unproductive. Slow learner. Fast talker. Quitter. Cheapskate. But as grace infiltrates, criticism disintegrates. You know you aren't who they say you are. You are who God says you are. Spiritually alive. Heavenly positioned. Connected to the Father. A billboard of mercy. An honored child.

Of course, not all labels are negative. Some people regard you as handsome, clever, successful, or efficient. But even a White House office doesn't compare with being "seated with him in the heavenly realms." Grace creates the Christian's résumé. (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
You don't have to be a king to have influence. Pray that God would develop your own character.

EXPLORATION
Shepherding—Job 12:12; Matthew 23:4–12; Acts 20:28; Titus 2:1–8.

Disbelief has peculiar children. Children who are miserable on the journey, blind to the beauty, and oblivious to a once-in-a-lifetime romance with God.

—Max Lucado (A Gentle Thunder)

omon. 22 But the word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, 23 "Speak to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, to all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people, saying, 24 'Thus says the Lord: "You shall not go up nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel. Let every man return to his house, for this thing is from Me." ' " Therefore they obeyed the word of the Lord, and turned back, according to the word of the Lord.

Jeroboam's Gold Calves

25 Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, and dwelt there. Also he went out from there and built Penuel. 26 And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom may return to the house of David: 27 If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah."

28 Therefore the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!" 29 And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. 30 Now this thing became a sin, for the people went *to worship* before the one as far as Dan. 31 He made shrines[a] on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi.

32 Jeroboam ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that *was* in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did at Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And at Bethel he installed the priests of the high places which he had made. 33 So he made offerings on the altar which he had made at Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised in his own heart. And he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and offered sacrifices on the altar and burned incense.

The Message of the Man of God

13 And behold, a man of God went from Judah to Bethel by the word of the Lord, and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. 2 Then he cried out against the altar by the word of the Lord, and said, "O altar, altar! Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, a child, Josiah by name, shall be born to the house of David; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and men's bones shall be burned on you.' " 3 And he gave a sign the same day, saying, "This *is* the sign which the Lord has spoken: Surely the altar shall split apart, and the ashes on it shall be poured out."

4 So it came to pass when King Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, who cried out against the altar in Bethel, that he stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, "Arrest him!" Then his hand, which he stretched out toward him, withered, so that he could not pull it back to himself. 5 The altar also was split apart, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the Lord. 6 Then the king answered and said to the man of God, "Please entreat the favor of the Lord your

12:31 [a] Literally *a house*

God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me."

So the man of God entreated the Lord, and the king's hand was restored to him, and became as before. 7 Then the king said to the man of God, "Come home with me and refresh yourself, and I will give you a reward."

8 But the man of God said to the king, "If you were to give me half your house, I would not go in with you; nor would I eat bread nor drink water in this place. 9 For so it was commanded me by the word of the Lord, saying, 'You shall not eat bread, nor drink water, nor return by the same way you came.' " 10 So he went another way and did not return by the way he came to Bethel.

Death of the Man of God

11 Now an old prophet dwelt in Bethel, and his sons came and told him all the works that the man of God had done that day in Bethel; they also told their father the words which he had spoken to the king. 12 And their father said to them, "Which way did he go?" For his sons had seen[a] which way the man of God went who came from Judah. 13 Then he said to his sons, "Saddle the donkey for me." So they saddled the donkey for him; and he rode on it, 14 and went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak. Then he said to him, "*Are* you the man of God who came from Judah?"

And he said, "I *am.*"

15 Then he said to him, "Come home with me and eat bread."

16 And he said, "I cannot return with you nor go in with you; neither can I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place. 17 For I have been told by the word of the Lord, 'You shall not eat bread nor drink water there, nor return by going the way you came.' "

18 He said to him, "I too *am* a prophet as you *are,* and an angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord, saying, 'Bring him back with you to your house, that he may eat bread and drink water.' " (He was lying to him.)

19 So he went back with him, and ate bread in his house, and drank water.

20 Now it happened, as they sat at the table, that the word of the Lord came to the prophet who had brought him back; 21 and he cried out to the man of God who came from Judah, saying, "Thus says the Lord: 'Because you have disobeyed the word of the Lord, and have not kept the commandment which the Lord your God commanded you, 22 but you came back, ate bread, and drank water in the place of which *the Lord* said to you, "Eat no bread and drink no water," your corpse shall not come to the tomb of your fathers.' "

23 So it was, after he had eaten bread and after he had drunk, that he saddled the donkey for him, the prophet whom he had brought back. 24 When he was gone, a lion met him on the road and killed him. And his corpse was thrown on the road, and the donkey stood by it. The lion also stood by the corpse. 25 And there, men passed by and saw the corpse thrown on the road, and the lion standing by the corpse. Then they went and told *it* in the city where the old prophet dwelt.

26 Now when the prophet who had brought him back from the way heard *it,* he said, "It *is* the man of God who was disobedient to the word of the Lord. Therefore the Lord has delivered him to the lion, which has torn him and killed him, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke to him." 27 And he spoke to his sons, saying, "Saddle the donkey for me." So they saddled *it.* 28 Then he went and found his corpse thrown on the road, and the donkey and the lion standing by the corpse. The lion had not eaten the corpse nor torn the donkey. 29 And the prophet took up the corpse of the man of God, laid it on the donkey, and brought it back. So the old prophet came to the city to mourn, and to bury him. 30 Then he laid the corpse in his own tomb; and they mourned over him, *saying,* "Alas, my brother!"

31 So it was, after he had buried him, that he spoke to his sons, saying, "When I am dead, then bury me in the tomb where the man of God *is* buried; lay my bones beside his bones. 32 For the saying which he cried out by the word of the Lord against the altar in Bethel, and against all the shrines[a] on the high places which *are* in the cities of Samaria, will surely come to pass."

33 After this event Jeroboam did not turn from his evil way, but again he made priests

13:12 [a] Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate read *showed him.* **13:32** [a] Literally *houses*

from every class of people for the high places; whoever wished, he consecrated him, and he became *one* of the priests of the high places. 34 And this thing was the sin of the house of Jeroboam, so as to exterminate and destroy *it* from the face of the earth.

Judgment on the House of Jeroboam

14 At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam became sick. 2 And Jeroboam said to his wife, "Please arise, and disguise yourself, that they may not recognize you as the wife of Jeroboam, and go to Shiloh. Indeed, Ahijah the prophet *is* there, who told me that *I would be* king over this people. 3 Also take with you ten loaves, *some* cakes, and a jar of honey, and go to him; he will tell you what will become of the child." 4 And Jeroboam's wife did so; she arose and went to Shiloh, and came to the house of Ahijah. But Ahijah could not see, for his eyes were glazed by reason of his age.

5 Now the Lord had said to Ahijah, "Here is the wife of Jeroboam, coming to ask you something about her son, for he *is* sick. Thus and thus you shall say to her; for it will be, when she comes in, that she will pretend *to be* another *woman.*"

6 And so it was, when Ahijah heard the sound of her footsteps as she came through the door, he said, "Come in, wife of Jeroboam. Why do you pretend *to be* another *person?* For I *have been* sent to you *with* bad *news.* 7 Go, tell Jeroboam, 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "Because I exalted you from among the people, and made you ruler over My people Israel, 8 and tore the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it to you; and *yet* you have not been as My servant David, who kept My commandments and who followed Me with all his heart, to do only *what was* right in My eyes; 9 but you have done more evil than all who were before you, for you have gone and made for yourself other gods and molded images to provoke Me to anger, and have cast Me behind your back— 10 therefore behold! I will bring disaster on the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male in Israel, bond and free; I will take away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as one takes away refuse until it is all gone. 11 The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Jeroboam and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field; for the Lord has spoken!"' 12 Arise therefore, go to your own house. When your feet enter the city, the child shall die. 13 And all Israel shall mourn for him and bury him, for he is the only one of Jeroboam who shall come to the grave, because in him there is found something good toward the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam.

14 "Moreover the Lord will raise up for Himself a king over Israel who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam; this is the day. What? Even now! 15 For the Lord will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land which He gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the River,[a] because they have made their wooden images,[b] provoking the Lord to anger. 16 And He will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who sinned and who made Israel sin."

17 Then Jeroboam's wife arose and departed, and came to Tirzah. When she came to the threshold of the house, the child died. 18 And they buried him; and all Israel mourned for him, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke through His servant Ahijah the prophet.

Death of Jeroboam

19 Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, how he made war and how he reigned, indeed they *are* written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. 20 The period that Jeroboam reigned *was* twenty-two years. So he rested with his fathers. Then Nadab his son reigned in his place.

Rehoboam Reigns in Judah

21 And Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam *was* forty-one years old when he became king. He reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the Lord had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put His name there. His mother's name *was* Naamah, an Ammonitess. 22 Now Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord, and they provoked Him to jealousy with their sins

14:15 [a]That is, the Euphrates [b]Hebrew *Asherim,* Canaanite deities

which they committed, more than all that their fathers had done. 23 For they also built for themselves high places, *sacred* pillars, and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree. 24 And there were also perverted persons[a] in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel.

25 It happened in the fifth year of King Rehoboam *that* Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem. 26 And he took away the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house; he took away everything. He also took away all the gold shields which Solomon had made. 27 Then King Rehoboam made bronze shields in their place, and committed *them* to the hands of the captains of the guard, who guarded the doorway of the king's house. 28 And whenever the king entered the house of the Lord, the guards carried them, then brought them back into the guardroom.

29 Now the rest of the acts of Rehoboam, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 30 And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all *their* days. 31 So Rehoboam rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the City of David. His mother's name *was* Naamah, an Ammonitess. Then Abijam[a] his son reigned in his place.

Abijam Reigns in Judah

15 In the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam the son of Nebat, Abijam became king over Judah. 2 He reigned three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name *was* Maachah the granddaughter of Abishalom. 3 And he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him; his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David. 4 Nevertheless for David's sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, by setting up his son after him and by establishing Jerusalem; 5 because David did *what was* right in the eyes of the Lord, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. 6 And there was war between Rehoboam[a] and Jeroboam all the days of his life. 7 Now the rest of the acts of Abijam, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And there was war between Abijam and Jeroboam.

8 So Abijam rested with his fathers, and they buried him in the City of David. Then Asa his son reigned in his place.

Asa Reigns in Judah

9 In the twentieth year of Jeroboam king of Israel, Asa became king over Judah. 10 And he reigned forty-one years in Jerusalem. His grandmother's name *was* Maachah the granddaughter of Abishalom. 11 Asa did *what was* right in the eyes of the Lord, as *did* his father David. 12 And he banished the perverted persons[a] from the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made. 13 Also he removed

14:24 [a]Hebrew *qadesh,* that is, one practicing sodomy and prostitution in religious rituals **14:31** [a]Spelled *Abijah* in 2 Chronicles 12:16ff **15:6** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate; some Hebrew manuscripts and Syriac read *Abijam.* **15:12** [a]Hebrew *qedeshim,* that is, those practicing sodomy and prostitution in religious rituals

Life Lessons

1 Kings 15:1—16:34

SITUATION

The author of 1 Kings recounted the lives of seven evil kings. Only one king, Asa, did what was right in God's eyes. God blessed him with long life.

OBSERVATION

Asa undoubtedly faced opposition as he tore down the nation's idols. He made unpopular decisions, but remained faithful to God all his life.

INSPIRATION

Persecution comes. . . . Many saints worship at their own risk. You may be one of them. You may be the only Christian in your Iraqi university. You may be an Arab woman who offers prayers in silence or a Messianic Jew who lives in the heart of Jerusalem.

Or perhaps you indwell a society of religious freedom but a community of spiritual oppression. You may not face blades and terrorists but critics and accusers. Family members mock your beliefs. University professors belittle your convictions. Classmates snicker at your choices. Colleagues pressure you to compromise your honesty. Coworkers make it their mission to snag you in a weak moment. Knife to your neck? No. But pressure to abandon your convictions? . . .

Could you use some high-octane boldness? If you want to outlive your life, you could. As long as you are stationary, no one will complain. Dogs don't bark at parked cars. But as soon as you accelerate—once you step out of drunkenness into sobriety, dishonesty into

integrity, or lethargy into compassion—expect the yapping to begin. Expect to be criticized. Expect to be mocked. Expect to be persecuted.

So how can we prepare ourselves? Simple. Imitate the disciples. Linger long and often in the presence of Christ. Meditate on His grace. Ponder His love. Memorize His words. Gaze into His face. Talk to Him. Courage comes as we live with Jesus. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you willing to stand up for your faith? Think about the people and circumstances that might challenge your standards of humor, entertainment, or activities, and plan how you can respond.

EXPLORATION

Choosing—Joshua 24:15; Ruth 1:16; 1 Kings 18:21; 2 Kings 17:41; Matthew 6:24.

Maachah his grandmother from *being* queen mother, because she had made an obscene image of Asherah.[a] And Asa cut down her obscene image and burned *it* by the Brook Kidron. 14 But the high places were not removed. Nevertheless Asa's heart was loyal to the Lord all his days. 15 He also brought into the house of the Lord the things which his father had dedicated, and the things which he himself had dedicated: silver and gold and utensils.

16 Now there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days. 17 And Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah, and built Ramah, that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. 18 Then Asa took all the silver and gold *that was* left in the treasuries of the house of the Lord and the treasuries of the king's house, and delivered them into the hand of his servants. And King Asa sent them to Ben-Hadad the son of Tabrimmon, the son of Hezion, king of Syria, who dwelt in Damascus, saying, 19 "*Let there be* a treaty between you and me, as there was between my father and your father. See, I have sent you a present of silver and gold. Come and break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel, so that he will withdraw from me."

20 So Ben-Hadad heeded King Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel. He attacked Ijon, Dan, Abel Beth Maachah, and all Chinneroth, with all the land of Naphtali. 21 Now it happened, when Baasha heard *it,* that he stopped building Ramah, and remained in Tirzah.

22 Then King Asa made a proclamation throughout all Judah; none *was* exempted. And they took away the stones and timber of Ramah, which Baasha had used for building; and with them King Asa built Geba of Benjamin, and Mizpah.

23 The rest of all the acts of Asa, all his might, all that he did, and the cities which he built, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? But in the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet. 24 So Asa rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the City of David his father. Then Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his place.

Nadab Reigns in Israel

25 Now Nadab the son of Jeroboam became king over Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah, and he reigned over Israel two years. 26 And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin by which he had made Israel sin.

27 Then Baasha the son of Ahijah, of the house of Issachar, conspired against him. And Baasha killed him at Gibbethon, which *belonged* to the Philistines, while Nadab and all Israel laid siege to Gibbethon. 28 Baasha killed him in the third year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned in his place. 29 And it was so, when he became king, *that* he killed all the house of Jeroboam. He did not leave to Jeroboam anyone that breathed, until he had destroyed him, according to the word of the Lord which He had spoken by His servant Ahijah the Shilonite, 30 because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he had sinned and by which he had made Israel sin, because of his provocation with which he had provoked the Lord God of Israel to anger.

15:13 [a] A Canaanite goddess

31 Now the rest of the acts of Nadab, and all
that he did, *are* they not written in the book
of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 32 And
there was war between Asa and Baasha king of
Israel all their days.

Baasha Reigns in Israel

33 In the third year of Asa king of Judah,
Baasha the son of Ahijah became king over
all Israel in Tirzah, and *reigned* twenty-four
years. 34 He did evil in the sight of the Lord,
and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his
sin by which he had made Israel sin.

16 Then the word of the Lord came to Jehu
the son of Hanani, against Baasha, say-
ing: 2 "Inasmuch as I lifted you out of the dust
and made you ruler over My people Israel, and
you have walked in the way of Jeroboam, and
have made My people Israel sin, to provoke
Me to anger with their sins, 3 surely I will take
away the posterity of Baasha and the posterity
of his house, and I will make your house like
the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. 4 The
dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Baasha and
dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat
whoever dies in the fields."

5 Now the rest of the acts of Baasha, what he
did, and his might, *are* they not written in the
book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?
6 So Baasha rested with his fathers and was
buried in Tirzah. Then Elah his son reigned in
his place.

7 And also the word of the Lord came by
the prophet Jehu the son of Hanani against
Baasha and his house, because of all the evil
that he did in the sight of the Lord in provok-
ing Him to anger with the work of his hands, in
being like the house of Jeroboam, and because
he killed them.

Elah Reigns in Israel

8 In the twenty-sixth year of Asa king of
Judah, Elah the son of Baasha became king
over Israel, *and reigned* two years in Tirzah.
9 Now his servant Zimri, commander of half
his chariots, conspired against him as he was
in Tirzah drinking himself drunk in the house
of Arza, steward of *his* house in Tirzah. 10 And
Zimri went in and struck him and killed him in
the twenty-seventh year of Asa king of Judah,
and reigned in his place.

11 Then it came to pass, when he began to
reign, as soon as he was seated on his throne,
that he killed all the household of Baasha; he
did not leave him one male, neither of his rela-
tives nor of his friends. 12 Thus Zimri destroyed
all the household of Baasha, according to the
word of the Lord, which He spoke against
Baasha by Jehu the prophet, 13 for all the sins
of Baasha and the sins of Elah his son, by
which they had sinned and by which they had
made Israel sin, in provoking the Lord God of
Israel to anger with their idols.

14 Now the rest of the acts of Elah, and all
that he did, *are* they not written in the book of
the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

Zimri Reigns in Israel

15 In the twenty-seventh year of Asa king
of Judah, Zimri had reigned in Tirzah seven
days. And the people *were* encamped against
Gibbethon, which *belonged* to the Philistines.
16 Now the people *who were* encamped heard
it said, "Zimri has conspired and also has
killed the king." So all Israel made Omri, the
commander of the army, king over Israel that
day in the camp. 17 Then Omri and all Israel
with him went up from Gibbethon, and they
besieged Tirzah. 18 And it happened, when
Zimri saw that the city was taken, that he went
into the citadel of the king's house and burned
the king's house down upon himself with fire,
and died, 19 because of the sins which he had
committed in doing evil in the sight of the
Lord, in walking in the way of Jeroboam, and
in his sin which he had committed to make
Israel sin.

20 Now the rest of the acts of Zimri, and the
treason he committed, *are* they not written
in the book of the chronicles of the kings of
Israel?

Omri Reigns in Israel

21 Then the people of Israel were divided
into two parts: half of the people followed
Tibni the son of Ginath, to make him king,
and half followed Omri. 22 But the people who
followed Omri prevailed over the people who
followed Tibni the son of Ginath. So Tibni died
and Omri reigned. 23 In the thirty-first year
of Asa king of Judah, Omri became king over
Israel, *and reigned* twelve years. Six years he
reigned in Tirzah. 24 And he bought the hill of
Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver;

then he built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, Samaria, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill. 25 Omri did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all who *were* before him. 26 For he walked in all the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin by which he had made Israel sin, provoking the Lord God of Israel to anger with their idols.

27 Now the rest of the acts of Omri which he did, and the might that he showed, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

28 So Omri rested with his fathers and was buried in Samaria. Then Ahab his son reigned in his place.

Ahab Reigns in Israel

29 In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri became king over Israel; and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. 30 Now Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who *were* before him. 31 And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshiped him. 32 Then he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. 33 And Ahab made a wooden image.[a] Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. 34 In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation with Abiram his firstborn, and with his youngest *son* Segub he set up its gates, according to the word of the Lord, which He had spoken through Joshua the son of Nun.[a]

Elijah Proclaims a Drought

17 And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, "*As* the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word."

2 Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 3 "Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. 4 And it will be *that* you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there."

5 So he went and did according to the word of the Lord, for he went and stayed by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. 6 The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook. 7 And it happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.

Elijah and the Widow

8 Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 9 "Arise, go to Zarephath, which *belongs* to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you." 10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow *was* there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Please bring

16:33 [a]Hebrew *Asherah,* a Canaanite goddess **16:34** [a]Compare Joshua 6:26

Life Lessons

1 Kings 17:1–24

SITUATION
Elijah was the first of many important prophets God sent to warn Israel and Judah as the two kingdoms fell away from God. Israel especially needed these prophets because of an evil king and unfaithful priests.

OBSERVATION
The widow demonstrated her faith by feeding the prophet with her last meal. That devotion led to her son being restored to life.

INSPIRATION
We serve the God who designed the universe and set our world in motion. But those hands that hung the stars in the heavens also wiped away the tears of the widow and the leper. And they will wipe away your tears as well.

There has never been a time in the history of this globe when there was not a rain cloud somewhere on the earth. There may be blue skies for us occasionally, but the rain always comes. So, instead of looking for ways to escape problems, look for methods to face them head on.

Father, you are God and Creator, but we come to you as children coming to their father, as children who would ask their father to hold and comfort them, hoping to receive words of wisdom. (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "Sorrow")

APPLICATION
Jesus Christ is not only the Sin-bearer but also the Sorrow-bearer. He can wipe away the tears of all who are hurting. You can run to God, the Friend who

me a little water in a cup, that I may drink." 11 And as she was going to get *it,* he called to her and said, "Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand."

12 So she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I *am* gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die."

13 And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go *and* do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring *it* to me; and afterward make *some* for yourself and your son. 14 For thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth.' "

15 So she went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her household ate for *many* days. 16 The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke by Elijah.

Elijah Revives the Widow's Son

17 Now it happened after these things *that* the son of the woman who owned the house became sick. And his sickness was so serious that there was no breath left in him. 18 So she said to Elijah, "What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?"

19 And he said to her, "Give me your son." So he took him out of her arms and carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his own bed. 20 Then he cried out to the Lord and said, "O Lord my God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son?" 21 And he stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the Lord and said, "O Lord my God, I pray, let this child's soul come back to him." 22 Then the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived.

23 And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house, and gave him to his mother. And Elijah said, "See, your son lives!"

24 Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now by this I know that you *are* a man of God, *and* that the word of the Lord in your mouth *is* the truth."

Elijah's Message to Ahab

18 And it came to pass *after* many days that the word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, "Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth."

2 So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab; and *there was* a severe famine in Samaria. 3 And Ahab had called Obadiah, who *was* in charge of *his* house. (Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly. 4 For so it was, while Jezebel massacred the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah had taken one hundred prophets and hidden them, fifty to a cave, and had fed them with bread and water.) 5 And Ahab had said to Obadiah, "Go into the land to all the springs of water and to all the brooks; perhaps we may find grass to keep the horses and mules alive, so that we will not have to kill any livestock." 6 So they divided the land between

sticks closer than a brother. But God also uses human instruments. Let the body of Christ minister to you as well.

EXPLORATION

Sorrow—Genesis 21:17–20; Exodus 3:7–10; Isaiah 53:11; Matthew 11:28–30; 2 Corinthians 7:10, 11.

Life LESSONS

1 Kings 18:1–46

SITUATION
King Ahab and his wife Jezebel worshiped Baal, the most popular Canaanite god. Baal idols were often cast in the form of a bull, which represented lust, power, and fertility. Baals were believed to supply rain for crops—an irony during this time of God-appointed drought.

OBSERVATION
God demonstrated, powerfully and dramatically, His superiority to all false gods and their prophets.

INSPIRATION
God is strong. Or God is good. But God is not both. Else, how do you explain birth defects, coast-crashing hurricanes, AIDS, or the genocide of the Tutsi in the 1990s? If God cares, He isn't strong; if He is strong, He doesn't care. He can't be both.

But according to the Bible, He is exactly that. Furthermore, according to the Bible, the problem is not the strength or kindness of God. The problem is the agenda of the human race. We pursue the wrong priority. We want good health, a good income, a good night's rest, and a good retirement. Our priority is *We*.

God's priority, however, is God. Why do the heavens exist? To flaunt God. "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1).

Why do people struggle? To display His strength. "I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do it" (Isaiah 48:10, 11). The prophet

them to explore it; Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself.

7 Now as Obadiah was on his way, suddenly Elijah met him; and he recognized him, and fell on his face, and said, "*Is* that you, my lord Elijah?"

8 And he answered him, "*It is* I. Go, tell your master, 'Elijah *is here.*' "

9 So he said, "How have I sinned, that you are delivering your servant into the hand of Ahab, to kill me? 10 *As* the Lord your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to hunt for you; and when they said, '*He is* not *here,*' he took an oath from the kingdom or nation that they could not find you. 11 And now you say, 'Go, tell your master, "Elijah *is here*" '! 12 And it shall come to pass, *as soon as* I am gone from you, that the Spirit of the Lord will carry you to a place I do not know; so when I go and tell Ahab, and he cannot find you, he will kill me. But I your servant have feared the Lord from my youth. 13 Was it not reported to my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord, how I hid one hundred men of the Lord's prophets, fifty to a cave, and fed them with bread and water? 14 And now you say, 'Go, tell your master, "Elijah *is here.*" ' He will kill me!"

15 Then Elijah said, "*As* the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely present myself to him today."

16 So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him; and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

17 Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, "*Is that* you, O troubler of Israel?"

18 And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house *have,* in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and have followed the Baals. 19 Now therefore, send *and* gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah,[a] who eat at Jezebel's table."

Elijah's Mount Carmel Victory

20 So Ahab sent for all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel. 21 And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord *is* God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people answered him not a word. 22 Then Elijah said to the people, "I alone am left a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets *are* four hundred and fifty men. 23 Therefore let them give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay *it* on the wood, but put no fire *under it;* and I will prepare the other bull, and lay *it* on the wood, but put no fire *under it.* 24 Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord; and the God who answers by fire, He is God."

So all the people answered and said, "It is well spoken."

25 Now Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one bull for yourselves and prepare *it* first, for you *are* many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire *under it.*"

18:19 [a] A Canaanite goddess

26 So they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared *it,*
and called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying,
"O Baal, hear us!" But *there was* no voice; no one answered. Then they
leaped about the altar which they had made.
27 And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Cry
aloud, for he *is* a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on
a journey, *or* perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened." 28 So they
cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and
lances, until the blood gushed out on them. 29 And when midday was
past, they prophesied until the *time* of the offering of the *evening* sac-
rifice. But *there was* no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention.
30 Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." So all the
people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord *that*
was broken down. 31 And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the
number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the
Lord had come, saying, "Israel shall be your name."[a] 32 Then with the
stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord; and he made a trench
around the altar large enough to hold two seahs of seed. 33 And he put
the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid *it* on the wood, and
said, "Fill four waterpots with water, and pour *it* on the burnt sacrifice
and on the wood." 34 Then he said, "Do *it* a second time," and they
did *it* a second time; and he said, "Do *it* a third time," and they did *it*
a third time. 35 So the water ran all around the altar; and he also filled
the trench with water.
36 And it came to pass, at *the time of* the offering of the *evening*
sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "Lord God of
Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You *are* God
in Israel and I *am* Your servant, and *that* I have done all these things
at Your word. 37 Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know
that You *are* the Lord God, and *that* You have turned their hearts back
to You again."
38 Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice,
and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water
that *was* in the trench. 39 Now when all the people saw *it,* they fell on
their faces; and they said, "The Lord, He *is* God! The Lord, He *is* God!"
40 And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let
one of them escape!" So they seized them; and Elijah brought them
down to the Brook Kishon and executed them there.

The Drought Ends

41 Then Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink; for *there is* the
sound of abundance of rain." 42 So Ahab went up to eat and drink.
And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the
ground, and put his face between his knees, 43 and said to his servant,
"Go up now, look toward the sea."
So he went up and looked, and said, "*There is* nothing." And seven
times he said, "Go again."
44 Then it came to pass the seventh *time,* that he said, "There is a
cloud, as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea!" So he said, "Go

18:31 [a]Genesis 32:28

proclaimed, "You lead Your people, to make Yourself a glorious name" (Isaiah 63:14).

God unfurls his own flag. He flexes His own muscles. Heaven does not ask, "How can I make Max happy?" Heaven asks, "How can I use Max to reveal my excellencies?" He may use blessings. Then again, He may use buffetings. Both belong to Him. (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Is your God too small? Take a moment to pray as you contemplate God's almighty power. Ask Him to help you realize His greatness and worship Him.

EXPLORATION

God Is All-Powerful—
Genesis 18:14; Exodus 15:6; 1 Samuel 14:6; Psalm 93:4; 115:3; Matthew 19:26; Luke 1:37; Revelation 19:6.

Life LESSONS

1 Kings 19:1—20:43

SITUATION
In one moment God displayed His power, and Elijah triumphed over the prophets of Baal. In the next, God's prophet ran for his life from Jezebel who sought revenge. He hid in the desert.

OBSERVATION
God cares for His servants both in moments of triumph and defeat. He remains present with those who trust Him.

INSPIRATION
In the barren prairie, the hiker huddles down. The cold northerly sweeps over him, stinging his face and numbing his fingers. The whistle of the wind is deafening. The hiker hugs his knees to his chest, yearning for warmth.

He doesn't move. The sky is orange with dirt. His teeth are grainy, his eyes sooty. He thinks of quitting, Going home. Home to the mountains.

"Ahh. The mountains." The spirit that moved him in the mountains seems so far away. For a moment, his mind wanders back to his homeland. Green country. Mountain trails. Fresh water. Hikers hiking on well-marked trails. No surprises, few fears, rich companionship.

One day, while on a brisk hike, he had stopped to look out from the mountains across the neighboring desert. He felt strangely pulled to the sweeping barrenness that lay before him. The next day he paused again. And the next, and the next. "Shouldn't someone try

up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare *your chariot,* and go down before the rain stops you.' "
45 Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black
with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. So Ahab rode away
and went to Jezreel. 46 Then the hand of the Lord came upon Elijah;
and he girded up his loins and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of
Jezreel.

Elijah Escapes from Jezebel

19 And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had
executed all the prophets with the sword. 2 Then Jezebel sent a
messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do *to me,* and more also,
if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about
this time." 3 And when he saw *that,* he arose and ran for his life, and
went to Beersheba, which *belongs* to Judah, and left his servant there.
4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came
and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die,
and said, "It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I *am* no better than
my fathers!"
5 Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel[a]
touched him, and said to him, "Arise *and* eat." 6 Then he looked, and
there by his head *was* a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he
ate and drank, and lay down again. 7 And the angel[a] of the Lord came
back the second time, and touched him, and said, "Arise *and* eat,
because the journey *is* too great for you." 8 So he arose, and ate and
drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty
nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.
9 And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place;
and behold, the word of the Lord *came* to him, and He said to him,
"What are you doing here, Elijah?"
10 So he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts;
for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your
altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and
they seek to take my life."

God's Revelation to Elijah

11 Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the
Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind
tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord,
but the Lord *was* not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake,
but the Lord *was* not in the earthquake; 12 and after the earthquake
a fire, *but* the Lord *was* not in the fire; and after the fire a still small
voice.
13 So it was, when Elijah heard *it,* that he wrapped his face in his
mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly
a voice *came* to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"
14 And he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts;
because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn
down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am
left; and they seek to take my life."

19:5 [a]Or *Angel* **19:7** [a]Or *Angel*

15 Then the Lord said to him: "Go, return on your way to the
Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael *as* king
over Syria. 16 Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi *as* king
over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall
anoint *as* prophet in your place. 17 It shall be *that* whoever escapes
the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of
Jehu, Elisha will kill. 18 Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all
whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not
kissed him."

Elisha Follows Elijah

19 So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat,
who *was* plowing *with* twelve yoke *of oxen* before him, and he was
with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on
him. 20 And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, "Please let
me kiss my father and my mother, and *then* I will follow you."

And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?"

21 So *Elisha* turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and
slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen's equipment,
and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed
Elijah, and became his servant.

Ahab Defeats the Syrians

20 Now Ben-Hadad the king of Syria gathered all his forces
together; thirty-two kings *were* with him, with horses and
chariots. And he went up and besieged Samaria, and made war
against it. 2 Then he sent messengers into the city to Ahab king of
Israel, and said to him, "Thus says Ben-Hadad: 3 'Your silver and your
gold *are* mine; your loveliest wives and children are mine.' "

4 And the king of Israel answered and said, "My lord, O king, just as
you say, I and all that I have *are* yours."

5 Then the messengers came back and said, "Thus speaks Ben-
Hadad, saying, 'Indeed I have sent to you, saying, "You shall deliver
to me your silver and your gold, your wives and your children"; 6 but I
will send my servants to you tomorrow about this time, and they shall
search your house and the houses of your servants. And it shall be,
that whatever is pleasant in your eyes, they will put *it* in their hands
and take *it*.' "

7 So the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said,
"Notice, please, and see how this *man* seeks trouble, for he sent to
me for my wives, my children, my silver, and my gold; and I did not
deny him."

8 And all the elders and all the people said to him, "Do not listen
or consent."

9 Therefore he said to the messengers of Ben-Hadad, "Tell my lord
the king, 'All that you sent for to your servant the first time I will do,
but this thing I cannot do.' "

And the messengers departed and brought back word to him.

10 Then Ben-Hadad sent to him and said, "The gods do so to me,
and more also, if enough dust is left of Samaria for a handful for each
of the people who follow me."

to take life to the desert?" Slowly the flicker in his heart became a flame.

Many agreed that someone should go, but no one volunteered.

Uncharted land, fearful storms, loneliness.

But the hiker, spurred by the enthusiasm of others, determined to go. After careful preparation, he set out, alone. With the cheers of his friends behind him, he descended the grassy highlands and entered the desolate wilderness.

The first few days his steps were springy and his eye was keen. He yearned to do his part to bring life to the desert. Then came the heat. The scorpions. The monotony. The snakes. Slowly, the fire diminished. And now . . . the storm. The endless roar of the wind. The relentless, cursed cold.

"I don't know how much more I can take." Weary and beaten, the hiker considers going back. "At least I got this far." Knees tucked under him, head bowed, almost touching the ground. "Will it ever stop?"

Grimly he laughs at the irony of the situation. "Some hiker. Too tired to go on, yet too ashamed to go home." Deep, deep is the struggle. No longer can he hear the voices of friends. Long gone is the romance of his mission. No longer does he float on the fancifulness of a dream.

"Maybe someone else should do this. I'm too young, too inexperienced." The winds of discouragement and fear whip at his fire, exhausting what is left of the flame. But the coals remain, hidden and hot.

The hiker, now almost the storm's victim, looks one last time for the fire. (Is there any greater challenge than of stirring a spirit while

in the clutches of defeat?) Yearning and clawing, the temptation to quit is gradually overcome by the urge to go on. Blowing on the coals, the hiker once again hears the call to the desert. Though faint, the call is clear.

With all the strength he can summon, the hiker rises to his feet, bows his head, and takes his first step into the wind. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you facing a life challenge? Are you discouraged and wondering why circumstances have suddenly taken a turn for the worse? Where is God? Run to God to help you! Everywhere, anytime, God has resources to help you.

EXPLORATION

Desert Experiences—Matthew 4:1–11; 28:19, 20; Acts 5:1–32; 16:16–24; Hebrews 13:5–8.

11 So the king of Israel answered and said, "Tell *him,* 'Let not the one who puts on *his armor* boast like the one who takes *it off.*' "

12 And it happened when *Ben-Hadad* heard this message, as he and the kings *were* drinking at the command post, that he said to his servants, "Get ready." And they got ready to attack the city.

13 Suddenly a prophet approached Ahab king of Israel, saying, "Thus says the Lord: 'Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver it into your hand today, and you shall know that I *am* the Lord.' "

14 So Ahab said, "By whom?"

And he said, "Thus says the Lord: 'By the young leaders of the provinces.' "

Then he said, "Who will set the battle in order?"

And he answered, "You."

15 Then he mustered the young leaders of the provinces, and there were two hundred and thirty-two; and after them he mustered all the people, all the children of Israel—seven thousand.

16 So they went out at noon. Meanwhile Ben-Hadad and the thirty-two kings helping him were getting drunk at the command post. 17 The young leaders of the provinces went out first. And Ben-Hadad sent out *a patrol,* and they told him, saying, "Men are coming out of Samaria!" 18 So he said, "If they have come out for peace, take them alive; and if they have come out for war, take them alive."

19 Then these young leaders of the provinces went out of the city with the army which followed them. 20 And each one killed his man; so the Syrians fled, and Israel pursued them; and Ben-Hadad the king of Syria escaped on a horse with the cavalry. 21 Then the king of Israel went out and attacked the horses and chariots, and killed the Syrians with a great slaughter.

22 And the prophet came to the king of Israel and said to him, "Go, strengthen yourself; take note, and see what you should do, for in the spring of the year the king of Syria will come up against you."

The Syrians Again Defeated

23 Then the servants of the king of Syria said to him, "Their gods *are* gods of the hills. Therefore they were stronger than we; but if we fight against them in the plain, surely we will be stronger than they. 24 So do this thing: Dismiss the kings, each from his position, and put captains in their places; 25 and you shall muster an army like the army that you have lost, horse for horse and chariot for chariot. Then we will fight against them in the plain; surely we will be stronger than they."

And he listened to their voice and did so.

26 So it was, in the spring of the year, that Ben-Hadad mustered the Syrians and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel. 27 And the children of Israel were mustered and given provisions, and they went against them. Now the children of Israel encamped before them like two little flocks of goats, while the Syrians filled the countryside.

28 Then a man of God came and spoke to the king of Israel, and said, "Thus says the Lord: 'Because the Syrians have said, "The Lord *is* God of the hills, but He *is* not God of the valleys," therefore I will deliver all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I *am* the Lord.' " 29 And they encamped opposite each other for seven days. So

it was that on the seventh day the battle was joined; and the children of Israel killed one hundred thousand foot soldiers *of* the Syrians in one day. 30 But the rest fled to Aphek, into the city; then a wall fell on twenty-seven thousand of the men *who were* left.

And Ben-Hadad fled and went into the city, into an inner chamber.

Ahab's Treaty with Ben-Hadad

31 Then his servants said to him, "Look now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel *are* merciful kings. Please, let us put sackcloth around our waists and ropes around our heads, and go out to the king of Israel; perhaps he will spare your life." 32 So they wore sackcloth around their waists and *put* ropes around their heads, and came to the king of Israel and said, "Your servant Ben-Hadad says, 'Please let me live.' "

And he said, "*Is* he still alive? He *is* my brother."

33 Now the men were watching closely to see whether *any sign of mercy would come* from him; and they quickly grasped *at this word* and said, "Your brother Ben-Hadad."

So he said, "Go, bring him." Then Ben-Hadad came out to him; and he had him come up into the chariot.

34 So *Ben-Hadad* said to him, "The cities which my father took from your father I will restore; and you may set up marketplaces for yourself in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria."

Then *Ahab said,* "I will send you away with this treaty." So he made a treaty with him and sent him away.

Ahab Condemned

35 Now a certain man of the sons of the prophets said to his neighbor by the word of the Lord, "Strike me, please." And the man refused to strike him. 36 Then he said to him, "Because you have not obeyed the voice of the Lord, surely, as soon as you depart from me, a lion shall kill you." And as soon as he left him, a lion found him and killed him.

37 And he found another man, and said, "Strike me, please." So the man struck him, inflicting a wound. 38 Then the prophet departed and waited for the king by the road, and disguised himself with a bandage over his eyes. 39 Now as the king passed by, he cried out to the king and said, "Your servant went out into the midst of the battle; and there, a man came over and brought a man to me, and said, 'Guard this man; if by any means he is missing, your life shall be for his life, or else you shall pay a talent of silver.' 40 While your servant was busy here and there, he was gone."

Then the king of Israel said to him, "So *shall* your judgment *be;* you yourself have decided *it.*"

41 And he hastened to take the bandage away from his eyes; and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets. 42 Then he said to him, "Thus says the Lord: 'Because you have let slip out of *your* hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people.' "

43 So the king of Israel went to his house sullen and displeased, and came to Samaria.

Naboth Is Murdered for His Vineyard

21 And it came to pass after these things *that* Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which *was* in Jezreel, next to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. 2 So Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, "Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it *is* near, next to my house; and for it I will give you a vineyard better than it. *Or,* if it seems good to you, I will give you its worth in money."

3 But Naboth said to Ahab, "The Lord forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you!"

4 So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food. 5 But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said to him, "Why is your spirit so sullen that you eat no food?"

6 He said to her, "Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite, and said to him, 'Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if it pleases you, I will give you *another* vineyard for it.' And he answered, 'I will not give you my vineyard.' "

7 Then Jezebel his wife said to him, "You

now exercise authority over Israel! Arise, eat food, and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

8 And she wrote letters in Ahab's name, sealed *them* with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who *were* dwelling in the city with Naboth. 9 She wrote in the letters, saying,

> Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people; 10 and seat two men, scoundrels, before him to bear witness against him, saying, "You have blasphemed God and the king." *Then* take him out, and stone him, that he may die.

11 So the men of his city, the elders and nobles who were inhabitants of his city, did as Jezebel had sent to them, as it *was* written in the letters which she had sent to them. 12 They proclaimed a fast, and seated Naboth with high honor among the people. 13 And two men, scoundrels, came in and sat before him; and the scoundrels witnessed against him, against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, "Naboth has blasphemed God and the king!" Then they took him outside the city and stoned him with stones, so that he died. 14 Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned and is dead."

15 And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead." 16 So it was, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab got up and went down to take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.

The Lord Condemns Ahab

17 Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 18 "Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who *lives* in Samaria. There *he is,* in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone down to take possession of it. 19 You shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: "Have you murdered and also taken possession?" ' And you shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours." ' "

20 So Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?"

And he answered, "I have found *you,* because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the Lord: 21 'Behold, I will bring calamity on you. I will take away your posterity, and will cut off from Ahab every male in Israel, both bond and free. 22 I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked *Me* to anger, and made Israel sin.' 23 And concerning Jezebel the Lord also spoke, saying, 'The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall[a] of Jezreel.' 24 The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Ahab and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field."

25 But there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up. 26 And he behaved very abominably in following idols, according to all

21:23 [a] Following Masoretic Text and Septuagint; some Hebrew manuscripts, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate read *plot of ground* (compare 2 Kings 9:36).

Life Lessons

1 Kings 21:1—22:53

SITUATION

King Ahab was not content with what he already had. In partnership with his wicked wife, Jezebel, he killed the owner of a choice vineyard, and they took it for themselves. God promised to bring them to justice.

OBSERVATION

Be on the alert: jealousy may creep into life and lead you to sin. Surrounding yourself with bad company during these vulnerable times can lead to sin.

INSPIRATION

Slumps: the petri dish for bad decisions, the incubator for wrong turns, the assembly line of regretful moves. How we handle our tough times stays with us for a long time.

How do you handle yours? When hope takes the last train and joy is nothing but the name of the girl down the street . . . when you are tired of trying, tired of forgiving, tired of hard weeks or hard-headed people . . . how do you manage your dark days?

With a bottle of pills or scotch? With an hour at the bar, a day at the spa, or a week at the coast? Many opt for such treatments. So many, in fact, that we assume they reenergize the sad life. But do they? No one denies that they help for a while, but over the long haul? They numb the pain, but do they remove it? . . .

We, like sheep, follow each other over the edge, falling headlong into bars and binges and beds. . . .

Is there a solution? Indeed there is. . . . *Be*

that the Amorites had done, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel.

27 So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning.

28 And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 29 "See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house."

Micaiah Warns Ahab

22 Now three years passed without war between Syria and Israel. 2 Then it came to pass, in the third year, that Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went down to *visit* the king of Israel.

3 And the king of Israel said to his servants, "Do you know that Ramoth in Gilead *is* ours, but we hesitate to take it out of the hand of the king of Syria?" 4 So he said to Jehoshaphat, "Will you go with me to fight at Ramoth Gilead?"

Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "I *am* as you *are,* my people as your people, my horses as your horses." 5 Also Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "Please inquire for the word of the Lord today."

6 Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said to them, "Shall I go against Ramoth Gilead to fight, or shall I refrain?"

So they said, "Go up, for the Lord will deliver *it* into the hand of the king."

7 And Jehoshaphat said, "*Is there* not still a prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of Him?"[a]

8 So the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "*There is* still one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord; but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil."

And Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say such things!"

9 Then the king of Israel called an officer and said, "Bring Micaiah the son of Imlah quickly!"

10 The king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, having put on *their* robes, sat each on his throne, at a threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them. 11 Now Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah had made horns of iron for himself; and he said, "Thus says the Lord: 'With these you shall gore the Syrians until they are destroyed.'" 12 And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, "Go up to Ramoth Gilead and prosper, for the Lord will deliver *it* into the king's hand."

13 Then the messenger who had gone to call Micaiah spoke to him, saying, "Now listen, the words of the prophets with one accord encourage the king. Please, let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak encouragement."

14 And Micaiah said, "*As* the Lord lives, whatever the Lord says to me, that I will speak."

15 Then he came to the king; and the king said to him, "Micaiah,

22:7 [a]Or *him*

quick to pray. Stop talking to yourself. Talk to Christ. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Bad company can corrupt good character. And bad company can lead to bad choices. Where do you go for guidance in those times when you feel in the "slumps"? Is prayer your first reaction—or your last resort?

EXPLORATION

Bad Company—Joshua 23:12, 13; 1 Corinthians 15:33; 2 Corinthians 6:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:6.

shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall we refrain?"

And he answered him, "Go and prosper, for the Lord will deliver *it* into the hand of the king!"

16 So the king said to him, "How many times shall I make you swear that you tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?"

17 Then he said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, 'These have no master. Let each return to his house in peace.' "

18 And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell you he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?"

19 Then *Micaiah* said, "Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by, on His right hand and on His left. 20 And the Lord said, 'Who will persuade Ahab to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?' So one spoke in this manner, and another spoke in that manner. 21 Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, and said, 'I will persuade him.' 22 The Lord said to him, 'In what way?' So he said, 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And the Lord said, 'You shall persuade *him,* and also prevail. Go out and do so.' 23 Therefore look! The Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours, and the Lord has declared disaster against you."

24 Now Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah went near and struck Micaiah on the cheek, and said, "Which way did the spirit from the Lord go from me to speak to you?"

25 And Micaiah said, "Indeed, you shall see on that day when you go into an inner chamber to hide!"

26 So the king of Israel said, "Take Micaiah, and return him to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king's son; 27 and say, 'Thus says the king: "Put this *fellow* in prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and water of affliction, until I come in peace." ' "

28 But Micaiah said, "If you ever return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me." And he said, "Take heed, all you people!"

Ahab Dies in Battle

29 So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth Gilead. 30 And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself and go into battle; but you put on your robes." So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle.

31 Now the king of Syria had commanded the thirty-two captains of his chariots, saying, "Fight with no one small or great, but only with the king of Israel." 32 So it was, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, "Surely it *is* the king of Israel!" Therefore they turned aside to fight against him, and Jehoshaphat cried out. 33 And it happened, when the captains of the chariots saw that it *was* not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him. 34 Now a *certain* man drew a bow at random, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of his armor. So he said to the driver of his chariot, "Turn around and take me out of the battle, for I am wounded."

35 The battle increased that day; and the king was propped up in his chariot, facing the Syrians, and died at evening. The blood ran out from the wound onto the floor of the chariot. 36 Then, as the sun was going down, a shout went throughout the army, saying, "Every man to his city, and every man to his own country!"

37 So the king died, and was brought to Samaria. And they buried the king in Samaria. 38 Then *someone* washed the chariot at a pool in Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood while the harlots bathed,[a] according to the word of the Lord which He had spoken.

39 Now the rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, the ivory house which he built and all the cities that he built, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 40 So Ahab rested with his fathers. Then Ahaziah his son reigned in his place.

Jehoshaphat Reigns in Judah

41 Jehoshaphat the son of Asa had become king over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel. 42 Jehoshaphat *was* thirty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's

22:38 [a]Syriac and Targum read *they washed his armor.*

name *was* Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. 43 And
he walked in all the ways of his father Asa. He
did not turn aside from them, doing *what*
was right in the eyes of the Lord. Nevertheless
the high places were not taken away, *for* the
people offered sacrifices and burned incense
on the high places. 44 Also Jehoshaphat made
peace with the king of Israel.

45 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat,
the might that he showed, and how he made
war, *are* they not written in the book of the
chronicles of the kings of Judah? 46 And the
rest of the perverted persons,[a] who remained
in the days of his father Asa, he banished from
the land. 47 *There was* then no king in Edom,
only a deputy of the king.

48 Jehoshaphat made merchant ships[a] to go
to Ophir for gold; but they never sailed, for the
ships were wrecked at Ezion Geber. 49 Then
Ahaziah the son of Ahab said to Jehoshaphat,
"Let my servants go with your servants in the
ships." But Jehoshaphat would not.

50 And Jehoshaphat rested with his fathers,
and was buried with his fathers in the City
of David his father. Then Jehoram his son
reigned in his place.

Ahaziah Reigns in Israel

51 Ahaziah the son of Ahab became king
over Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year
of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned two
years over Israel. 52 He did evil in the sight of
the Lord, and walked in the way of his father
and in the way of his mother and in the way
of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made
Israel sin; 53 for he served Baal and worshiped
him, and provoked the Lord God of Israel
to anger, according to all that his father had
done.

22:46 [a]Hebrew *qadesh,* that is, one practicing sodomy and prostitution in religious rituals **22:48** [a]Or *ships of Tarshish*

THE BOOK OF

2 KINGS

INTRODUCTION

The tone for the book is set in the first two verses.

"Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab. Now Ahaziah fell through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria, and was injured; so he sent messengers and said to them, 'Go, inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury'" (1:1, 2).

In those inaugural words you find death (Ahab died), rebellion (Moab broke away), calamity (Ahaziah fell down), and superstition (Go ask . . . the god of Ekron).

What a beginning. It doesn't get any better. Second Kings is not a book for the faint of heart. But it is a book for the serious disciple. Its message is embossed at the top of every page: "The way of transgressors is hard."

Remember what Paul said about the wages of sin being death? This book proves his point. Twenty-five chapters of people reaping the harvest of sin. Story after story of people learning firsthand the eternal truth: *The consequence of persistent sin is pain.* Pain, not just in your life but in the lives of those you love.

The book relates the decline of two powers.

The northern kingdom, Israel, was headquartered in Samaria. Nineteen kings led this nation. Not one was godly. Not one! In spite of strong prophets like Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Elijah, and Elisha, the kings didn't listen.

The southern kingdom, Judah, used Jerusalem as its capital. Of its twenty sovereigns, only eight walked with God. Again powerful prophets challenged them. Obadiah, Joel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah were just a few of the men who proclaimed God's message.

But the people didn't listen. They slipped from conviction to compromise into captivity.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Unknown, though some think Jeremiah the prophet

Date Written: After the death of Solomon, 900–500 B.C.

Key Themes:

- Though Judah and Israel were declining both politically and spiritually, there were still strong spiritual leaders such as Elijah and Elisha.
- The hearts of the people were affected by the hearts of their king, whether wicked or righteous.
- Since God brought the Hebrews out of Egypt, He had promised that their disobedience would lead to destruction.
- God's promise was revealed in the exile of both Israel to the north and Judah to the south.

Key Verse:

"'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the LORD" (2 Kings 20:17).

Contents:

I. Elijah's Final Days 1:1—2:14

II. The Work of Elisha 2:15—13:25

III. Judah and Israel's Decline and Israel's Exile 14:1—17:41

IV. Judah's Further Decline and Exile 18:1—25:30

The book ends with the battered nations of Israel and Judah dragged behind the horses of their conquerors. God will leave them in captivity for seventy years. Plenty of time for them to ponder the lesson: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

It took these people several decades to get the point. I hope we are better listeners.

God Judges Ahaziah

Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab.
2 Now Ahaziah fell through the lattice of his upper room in
Samaria, and was injured; so he sent messengers and said to them,
"Go, inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover
from this injury." 3 But the angel[a] of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite,
"Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say
to them, '*Is it* because *there is* no God in Israel *that* you are going to
inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?' 4 Now therefore, thus says
the LORD: 'You shall not come down from the bed to which you have
gone up, but you shall surely die.' " So Elijah departed.

5 And when the messengers returned to him, he said to them, "Why
have you come back?"

6 So they said to him, "A man came up to meet us, and said to us,
'Go, return to the king who sent you, and say to him, "Thus says the
LORD: '*Is it* because *there is* no God in Israel *that* you are sending to
inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you shall not
come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall
surely die.' " ' "

7 Then he said to them, "What kind of man *was it* who came up to
meet you and told you these words?"

8 So they answered him, "A hairy man wearing a leather belt around
his waist."

And he said, "It *is* Elijah the Tishbite."

9 Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty men. So
he went up to him; and there he was, sitting on the top of a hill. And
he spoke to him: "Man of God, the king has said, 'Come down!' "

10 So Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, "If I *am* a man
of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and
your fifty men." And fire came down from heaven and consumed him
and his fifty. 11 Then he sent to him another captain of fifty with his
fifty men.

And he answered and said to him: "Man of God, thus has the king
said, 'Come down quickly!' "

12 So Elijah answered and said to them, "If I *am* a man of God, let
fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men."
And the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and
his fifty.

1:3 [a] Or *Angel*

Life Lessons

2 KINGS 1:1–18

SITUATION
Ahaziah served as king of the northern kingdom (Israel) for two years. As an evil king, he followed Baal.

OBSERVATION
Pagan deities are no help, and God is offended when we think otherwise.

INSPIRATION
God is . . .

A genie in a bottle. Convenient. Congenial. Need a parking place, date, field goal made or missed? All you do is rub the bottle and *poof*—it's yours. And, what's even better, this god goes back into the bottle after he's done.

A sweet grandpa. So soft hearted. So wise. So kind. But very, very, very old. Grandpas are great when they are awake, but they tend to doze off when you need them.

A busy dad. Leaves on Mondays, returns on Saturdays. Lots of road trips and business meetings. He'll show up on Sunday, however, so clean up and look spiritual. On Monday, be yourself again. He'll never know.

Ever held these views of God? If so, you know the problems they cause.

A busy dad doesn't have time for your questions. A kind grandpa is too weak to carry your load. And if your god is a genie in a bottle, then you are greater than he is. He comes and goes at your command.

A god who looks nice but does little. . . .

Is that the kind of God you want? Is that the kind of God we have? . . .

God is Yahweh—an unchanging God, an uncaused God, and an ungoverned God. . . .

Unchanging. Uncaused. Ungoverned. These are only a fraction of God's qualities, but aren't they enough to give you a glimpse of your Father? (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

False prophets and false gods have always been with us. Study the Scriptures to see their characteristics, and then learn about your God—unchanging, uncaused, ungoverned. What do these characteristics mean to you?

EXPLORATION

False Prophets—Deuteronomy 13:1–11; 18:22; Jeremiah 14:13–16; Matthew 7:15. False Gods—Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 4:28; 1 Chronicles 16:26.

13 Again, he sent a third captain of fifty with his fifty men. And the
third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before
Elijah, and pleaded with him, and said to him: "Man of God, please
let my life and the life of these fifty servants of yours be precious in
your sight. 14 Look, fire has come down from heaven and burned up
the first two captains of fifties with their fifties. But let my life now be
precious in your sight."

15 And the angel[a] of the Lord said to Elijah, "Go down with him; do
not be afraid of him." So he arose and went down with him to the king.
16 Then he said to him, "Thus says the Lord: 'Because you have sent
messengers to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, *is it* because
there is no God in Israel to inquire of His word? Therefore you shall
not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you
shall surely die.' "

17 So *Ahaziah* died according to the word of the Lord which Elijah
had spoken. Because he had no son, Jehoram[a] became king in his
place, in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat, king of
Judah.

18 Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah which he did, *are* they not
written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

Elijah Ascends to Heaven

2 And it came to pass, when the Lord was about to take up Elijah
into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from
Gilgal. 2 Then Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, please, for the Lord has
sent me on to Bethel."

But Elisha said, "*As* the Lord lives, and *as* your soul lives, I will not
leave you!" So they went down to Bethel.

3 Now the sons of the prophets who *were* at Bethel came out to
Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that the Lord will take away
your master from over you today?"

And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent!"

4 Then Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here, please, for the Lord has
sent me on to Jericho."

But he said, "*As* the Lord lives, and *as* your soul lives, I will not leave
you!" So they came to Jericho.

5 Now the sons of the prophets who *were* at Jericho came to Elisha
and said to him, "Do you know that the Lord will take away your mas-
ter from over you today?"

So he answered, "Yes, I know; keep silent!"

6 Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here, please, for the Lord has sent
me on to the Jordan."

But he said, "*As* the Lord lives, and *as* your soul lives, I will not leave
you!" So the two of them went on. 7 And fifty men of the sons of the
prophets went and stood facing *them* at a distance, while the two of
them stood by the Jordan. 8 Now Elijah took his mantle, rolled *it* up,
and struck the water; and it was divided this way and that, so that the
two of them crossed over on dry ground.

9 And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to
Elisha, "Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?"

1:15 [a]Or *Angel* **1:17** [a]The son of Ahab king of Israel (compare 3:1)

Elisha said, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me."
10 So he said, "You have asked a hard thing. *Nevertheless,* if you see
me *when I am* taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall
not be *so.*" 11 Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that
suddenly a chariot of fire *appeared* with horses of fire, and separated
the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.
12 And Elisha saw *it,* and he cried out, "My father, my father, the
chariot of Israel and its horsemen!" So he saw him no more. And
he took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces. 13 He
also took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went
back and stood by the bank of the Jordan. 14 Then he took the mantle
of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, and said,
"Where *is* the Lord God of Elijah?" And when he also had struck the
water, it was divided this way and that; and Elisha crossed over.
15 Now when the sons of the prophets who *were* from Jericho saw
him, they said, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." And they came to
meet him, and bowed to the ground before him. 16 Then they said to
him, "Look now, there are fifty strong men with your servants. Please
let them go and search for your master, lest perhaps the Spirit of the
Lord has taken him up and cast him upon some mountain or into
some valley."
And he said, "You shall not send anyone."
17 But when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, "Send
them!" Therefore they sent fifty men, and they searched for three days
but did not find him. 18 And when they came back to him, for he had
stayed in Jericho, he said to them, "Did I not say to you, 'Do not go'?"

Elisha Performs Miracles

19 Then the men of the city said to Elisha, "Please notice, the situation of this city *is* pleasant, as my lord sees; but the water *is* bad, and
the ground barren."
20 And he said, "Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it." So they
brought *it* to him. 21 Then he went out to the source of the water, and
cast in the salt there, and said, "Thus says the Lord: 'I have healed
this water; from it there shall be no more death or barrenness.'" 22 So
the water remains healed to this day, according to the word of Elisha
which he spoke.
23 Then he went up from there to Bethel; and as he was going up
the road, some youths came from the city and mocked him, and said
to him, "Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!"
24 So he turned around and looked at them, and pronounced a
curse on them in the name of the Lord. And two female bears came
out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths.
25 Then he went from there to Mount Carmel, and from there he
returned to Samaria.

Moab Rebels Against Israel

3 Now Jehoram the son of Ahab became king over Israel at Samaria
in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned
twelve years. 2 And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, but not like his
father and mother; for he put away the *sacred* pillar of Baal that his
father had made. 3 Nevertheless he persisted in the sins of Jeroboam

Life LESSONS

2 Kings 2:1—3:27

SITUATION
As Elijah's ministry came to a close, Elisha requested a double portion of the Holy Spirit that rested upon Elijah. Elisha's request demonstrated his willingness to be God's prophet, no matter the cost.

OBSERVATION
The request was granted as Elijah's blessing fell on Elisha. From then on Elisha would wear Elijah's coat and serve with the authority and power it symbolized.

INSPIRATION
If I were to ask you to describe your heavenly Father, you'd give me a response. If I were to ask you to tell me what Jesus did for you, you'd likely give a cogent answer. But if I were to ask about the role of the Holy Spirit in your life . . . ? Eyes would duck. Throats would be cleared. And it would soon be obvious that of the three persons of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit is the one we understand the least.

Perhaps the most common mistake made regarding the Spirit is perceiving Him as a power but not a person, a force with no identity. Such is not true. The Holy Spirit is a person.

"The world cannot accept *him,* because it does not see *him* or know *him.* But you know *him,* because *he* lives with you and *he* will be in you" (John 14:17, NCV, emphasis mine).

The Holy Spirit is not an "it." He is a person. He has knowledge (1 Corinthians 2:11). He has a will (1 Corinthians 12:11). He

has a mind (Romans 8:27). He has affections (Romans 15:30). You can lie to Him (Acts 5:3, 4). You can insult Him (Hebrews 10:29). You can grieve Him (Ephesians 4:30).

The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force. He is not Popeye's spinach or the surfer's wave. He is God within you to help you. In fact John calls Him the Helper.

Envision a father helping his son learn to ride a bicycle, and you will have a partial picture of the Holy Spirit. The father stays at the son's side. He pushes the bike and steadies it if the boy starts to tumble. The Spirit does that for us; He stays our step and strengthens our stride. Unlike the father, however, He never leaves. He is with us to the end of the age.

What does the Spirit do?

He comforts the saved. "If I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you" (John 16:7).

He convicts the lost. "When He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8).

He conveys the truth. "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:12, 13).

Is John saying we don't need the book in order to dance? Of course not; he helped write it. Emotion without knowledge is as dangerous as knowledge without emotion. God seeks a balance. "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

What is essential is that you know the music is in you. "If Christ is in you,

the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin; he did not depart from them.

4 Now Mesha king of Moab was a sheepbreeder, and he regularly paid the king of Israel one hundred thousand lambs and the wool of one hundred thousand rams. 5 But it happened, when Ahab died, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel.

6 So King Jehoram went out of Samaria at that time and mustered all Israel. 7 Then he went and sent to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, saying, "The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go with me to fight against Moab?"

And he said, "I will go up; I *am* as you *are,* my people as your people, my horses as your horses." 8 Then he said, "Which way shall we go up?"

And he answered, "By way of the Wilderness of Edom."

9 So the king of Israel went with the king of Judah and the king of Edom, and they marched on that roundabout route seven days; and there was no water for the army, nor for the animals that followed them. 10 And the king of Israel said, "Alas! For the Lord has called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab."

11 But Jehoshaphat said, "*Is there* no prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of the Lord by him?"

So one of the servants of the king of Israel answered and said, "Elisha the son of Shaphat *is* here, who poured water on the hands of Elijah."

12 And Jehoshaphat said, "The word of the Lord is with him." So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him.

13 Then Elisha said to the king of Israel, "What have I to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother."

But the king of Israel said to him, "No, for the Lord has called these three kings *together* to deliver them into the hand of Moab."

14 And Elisha said, "*As* the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, I would not look at you, nor see you. 15 But now bring me a musician."

Then it happened, when the musician played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him. 16 And he said, "Thus says the Lord: 'Make this valley full of ditches.' 17 For thus says the Lord: 'You shall not see wind, nor shall you see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, so that you, your cattle, and your animals may drink.' 18 And this is a simple matter in the sight of the Lord; He will also deliver the Moabites into your hand. 19 Also you shall attack every fortified city and every choice city, and shall cut down every good tree, and stop up every spring of water, and ruin every good piece of land with stones."

20 Now it happened in the morning, when the grain offering was offered, that suddenly water came by way of Edom, and the land was filled with water.

21 And when all the Moabites heard that the kings had come up to fight against them, all who were able to bear arms and older were gathered; and they stood at the border. 22 Then they rose up early in the morning, and the sun was shining on the water; and the Moabites

saw the water on the other side *as* red as blood. 23 And they said, "This is blood; the kings have surely struck swords and have killed one another; now therefore, Moab, to the spoil!"

24 So when they came to the camp of Israel, Israel rose up and attacked the Moabites, so that they fled before them; and they entered *their* land, killing the Moabites. 25 Then they destroyed the cities, and each man threw a stone on every good piece of land and filled it; and they stopped up all the springs of water and cut down all the good trees. But they left the stones of Kir Haraseth *intact.* However the slingers surrounded and attacked it.

26 And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too fierce for him, he took with him seven hundred men who drew swords, to break through to the king of Edom, but they could not. 27 Then he took his eldest son who would have reigned in his place, and offered him *as* a burnt offering upon the wall; and there was great indignation against Israel. So they departed from him and returned to *their own* land.

Elisha and the Widow's Oil

4 A certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the Lord. And the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slaves."

2 So Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?" And she said, "Your maidservant has nothing in the house but a jar of oil."

3 Then he said, "Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors—empty vessels; do not gather just a few. 4 And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons; then pour it into all those vessels, and set aside the full ones."

5 So she went from him and shut the door behind her and her sons, who brought *the vessels* to her; and she poured *it* out. 6 Now it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel."

And he said to her, "*There is* not another vessel." So the oil ceased. 7 Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debt; and you *and* your sons live on the rest."

Elisha Raises the Shunammite's Son

8 Now it happened one day that Elisha went to Shunem, where there *was* a notable woman, and she persuaded him to eat some food. So it was, as often as he passed by, he would turn in there to eat some food. 9 And she said to her husband, "Look now, I know that this *is* a holy man of God, who passes by us regularly. 10 Please, let us make a small upper room on the wall; and let us put a bed for him there, and a table and a chair and a lampstand; so it will be, whenever he comes to us, he can turn in there."

11 And it happened one day that he came there, and he turned in to the upper room and lay down there. 12 Then he said to Gehazi his servant, "Call this Shunammite woman." When he had called her, she stood before him. 13 And he said to him, "Say now to her, 'Look, you have been concerned for us with all this care. What *can I* do for you?

the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness" (Romans 8:10). You don't need a formula to hear it. I don't have a four-step plan to help you know it. What I do have is His promise that the Helper would come to comfort, convict, and convey.

So think about it; have you ever been comforted? Has God ever brought you peace when the world brought you pain? Then you heard the music.

Have you ever been convicted? Have you ever sensed a stab of sorrow for your actions? Then you've been touched by the Holy Spirit.

Or have you ever understood a new truth? Or seen an old principle in a new way? The light comes on. Your eyes pop open. "Aha, now I understand." Ever happen to you? If so, that was the Holy Spirit conveying to you a new truth.

What do you know? He's been working in your life already. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Thank God for the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. Pray to be filled daily with His Spirit. Thank Him for giving you the discernment to choose between good and evil.

EXPLORATION

Holy Spirit—Isaiah 63:10; Luke 4:1; Romans 9:1, 2; Ephesians 5:18–20; 1 Thessalonians 4:7, 8.

Life LESSONS

2 Kings 4:1–44

SITUATION
God used Elisha to express divine power and concern by working wonders through this faithful servant. The miracles in this passage not only benefited the Israelites but also helped people whom the Israelites considered ungodly and unworthy of God's attention.

OBSERVATION
The Shunammite's son died. But the mother showed great faith by asking for "the man of God." The son was brought back to life. Elijah had performed a similar miracle (see 1 Kings 17:17–24).

INSPIRATION
The problem with this world is that it doesn't fit. Oh, it will do for now, but it isn't tailor-made. We were made to live with God, but on earth we live by faith. We were made to live forever, but on this earth we live but for a moment. We were made to live holy lives, but this world is stained by sin.

This world wears like a borrowed shirt. Heaven, however, will fit like one tailor-made.

By the way, I've often thought it curious how few people Jesus raised from the dead. He healed hundreds and fed thousands, but as far as we know He only raised three: the daughter of Jairus, the boy near Nain, and Lazarus. Why so few? Could it be because He knew He'd be doing them no favors? Could it be because He couldn't get any volunteers? Could it be that once someone is there,

Do you want me to speak on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army?' "

She answered, "I dwell among my own people."

14 So he said, "What then *is* to be done for her?"

And Gehazi answered, "Actually, she has no son, and her husband is old."

15 So he said, "Call her." When he had called her, she stood in the doorway. 16 Then he said, "About this time next year you shall embrace a son."

And she said, "No, my lord. Man of God, do not lie to your maidservant!"

17 But the woman conceived, and bore a son when the appointed time had come, of which Elisha had told her.

18 And the child grew. Now it happened one day that he went out to his father, to the reapers. 19 And he said to his father, "My head, my head!"

So he said to a servant, "Carry him to his mother." 20 When he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and *then* died. 21 And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, shut *the door* upon him, and went out. 22 Then she called to her husband, and said, "Please send me one of the young men and one of the donkeys, that I may run to the man of God and come back."

23 So he said, "Why are you going to him today? *It is* neither the New Moon nor the Sabbath."

And she said, "*It is* well." 24 Then she saddled a donkey, and said to her servant, "Drive, and go forward; do not slacken the pace for me unless I tell you." 25 And so she departed, and went to the man of God at Mount Carmel.

So it was, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to his servant Gehazi, "Look, the Shunammite woman! 26 Please run now to meet her, and say to her, '*Is it* well with you? *Is it* well with your husband? *Is it* well with the child?' "

And she answered, "*It is* well." 27 Now when she came to the man of God at the hill, she caught him by the feet, but Gehazi came near to push her away. But the man of God said, "Let her alone; for her soul *is* in deep distress, and the Lord has hidden *it* from me, and has not told me."

28 So she said, "Did I ask a son of my lord? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me'?"

29 Then he said to Gehazi, "Get yourself ready, and take my staff in your hand, and be on your way. If you meet anyone, do not greet him; and if anyone greets you, do not answer him; but lay my staff on the face of the child."

30 And the mother of the child said, "*As* the Lord lives, and *as* your soul lives, I will not leave you." So he arose and followed her. 31 Now Gehazi went on ahead of them, and laid the staff on the face of the child; but *there was* neither voice nor hearing. Therefore he went back to meet him, and told him, saying, "The child has not awakened."

32 When Elisha came into the house, there was the child, lying dead on his bed. 33 He went in therefore, shut the door behind the two of them, and prayed to the Lord. 34 And he went up and lay on the child,

and put his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands; and he stretched himself out on the child, and the flesh of the child became warm. 35 He returned and walked back and forth in the house, and again went up and stretched himself out on him; then the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. 36 And he called Gehazi and said, "Call this Shunammite woman." So he called her. And when she came in to him, he said, "Pick up your son." 37 So she went in, fell at his feet, and bowed to the ground; then she picked up her son and went out.

Elisha Purifies the Pot of Stew

38 And Elisha returned to Gilgal, and *there was* a famine in the land. Now the sons of the prophets *were* sitting before him; and he said to his servant, "Put on the large pot, and boil stew for the sons of the prophets." 39 So one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered from it a lapful of wild gourds, and came and sliced *them* into the pot of stew, though they did not know *what they were.* 40 Then they served it to the men to eat. Now it happened, as they were eating the stew, that they cried out and said, "Man of God, *there is* death in the pot!" And they could not eat *it.*

41 So he said, "Then bring some flour." And he put *it* into the pot, and said, "Serve *it* to the people, that they may eat." And there was nothing harmful in the pot.

Elisha Feeds One Hundred Men

42 Then a man came from Baal Shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley bread, and newly ripened grain in his knapsack. And he said, "Give *it* to the people, that they may eat."

43 But his servant said, "What? Shall I set this before one hundred men?"

He said again, "Give it to the people, that they may eat; for thus says the Lord: 'They shall eat and have *some* left over.'" 44 So he set *it* before them; and they ate and had *some* left over, according to the word of the Lord.

Naaman's Leprosy Healed

5 Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor, *but* a leper. 2 And the Syrians had gone out on raids, and had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman's wife. 3 Then she said to her mistress, "If only my master *were* with the prophet who *is* in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy." 4 And *Naaman* went in and told his master, saying, "Thus and thus said the girl who *is* from the land of Israel."

5 Then the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel."

So he departed and took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand *shekels* of gold, and ten changes of clothing. 6 Then he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which said,

the last place they want to return to is here?

My, what a thought. God is taking them away from the evil days ahead. Could death be God's grace? Could the funeral wreath be God's safety ring? Why does an eight-year-old die of cancer? Why is a young mother taken from her children? As horrible as the grave may be, could it be God's protection from the future?

Trust in God, Jesus urges, and trust in me.

Several years ago I heard then Vice President George Bush speak at a prayer breakfast. He told of his trip to Russia to represent the United States at the funeral of Leonid Brezhnev. The funeral was as precise and stoic as the communist regime. No tears were seen, and no emotion displayed. With one exception. Mr. Bush told how Brezhnev's widow was the last person to witness the body before the coffin was closed. For several seconds she stood at his side and then reached down and performed the sign of the Cross on her husband's chest.

In the hour of her husband's death, she went not to Lenin, not to Karl Marx, not to Khrushchev. In the hour of death she turned to a Nazarene carpenter who had lived two thousand years ago and who dared to claim: "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me" (John 14:1). (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

If we live on this earth only for a moment in light of eternity, how does that affect your life? Your work? Your family? Your ministry?

EXPLORATION

Resurrection Hope—John

Now be advised, when this letter comes to you, that I have sent
Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy.

7 And it happened, when the king of Israel read the letter, that he tore his clothes and said, "*Am* I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy? Therefore please consider, and see how he seeks a quarrel with me."

8 So it was, when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Please let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel."

9 Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha's house. 10 And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and *you shall* be clean." 11 But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, "Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out *to me,* and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.' 12 *Are* not the Abanah[a] and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. 13 And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, "My father, *if* the prophet had told you *to do* something great, would you not have done *it?* How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" 14 So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

15 And he returned to the man of God, he and all his aides, and came and stood before him; and he said, "Indeed, now I know that *there is* no God in all the earth, except in Israel; now therefore, please take a gift from your servant."

16 But he said, "*As* the Lord lives, before whom I stand, I will receive nothing." And he urged him to take *it,* but he refused.

17 So Naaman said, "Then, if not, please let your servant be given two mule-loads of earth; for your servant will no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to other gods, but to the Lord. 18 Yet in this thing may the Lord pardon your servant: when my master goes into the temple of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand, and I bow down in the temple of Rimmon—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the Lord please pardon your servant in this thing."

19 Then he said to him, "Go in peace." So he departed from him a short distance.

Gehazi's Greed

20 But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, "Look, my master has spared Naaman this Syrian, while not receiving from his hands what he brought; but *as* the Lord lives, I will run after him and take something from him." 21 So Gehazi pursued Naaman. When

5:12 [a] Following Kethib, Septuagint, and Vulgate; Qere, Syriac, and Targum read *Amanah*.

Life Lessons

5:24–29; 6:37–40; 11:25, 26; Revelation 1:17, 18.

2 Kings 5:1—6:7

SITUATION

A young Israelite slave girl showed courage and faith by speaking out and suggesting that her master seek healing and help from the prophet Elisha.

OBSERVATION

God intends every Christian to grow in faith and become a mature Christian. But God welcomes, honors, and rewards those who come with the faith of a child.

INSPIRATION

The heart of Jesus was pure. The Savior was adored by thousands, yet content to live a simple life. He was cared for by women (Luke 8:1–3), yet never accused of lustful thoughts; scorned by His own creation, but willing to forgive them before they even requested His mercy. Peter, who traveled with Jesus for three and a half years, described Him as "a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19). After spending the same amount of time with Jesus, John concluded, "In Him there is no sin" (1 John 3:5).

Jesus' heart was peaceful. The disciples fretted over the need to feed the thousands, but not Jesus. He thanked God for the problem. The disciples shouted for fear in the storm, but not Jesus. He slept through it. Peter drew his sword to fight the soldiers, but not Jesus. He lifted His hand to heal. His heart was at peace. When His disciples abandoned Him, did He pout and go home? When Peter denied Him, did Jesus lose His

Naaman saw *him* running after him, he got down from the chariot to meet him, and said, "*Is* all well?"

22 And he said, "All *is* well. My master has sent me, saying, 'Indeed, just now two young men of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the mountains of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of garments.' "

23 So Naaman said, "Please, take two talents." And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and handed *them* to two of his servants; and they carried *them* on ahead of him. 24 When he came to the citadel, he took *them* from their hand, and stored *them* away in the house; then he let the men go, and they departed. 25 Now he went in and stood before his master. Elisha said to him, "Where *did you go,* Gehazi?"

And he said, "Your servant did not go anywhere."

26 Then he said to him, "Did not my heart go *with you* when the man turned back from his chariot to meet you? *Is it* time to receive money and to receive clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants? 27 Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever." And he went out from his presence leprous, *as white* as snow.

The Floating Ax Head

6 And the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, "See now, the place where we dwell with you is too small for us. 2 Please, let us go to the Jordan, and let every man take a beam from there, and let us make there a place where we may dwell."

So he answered, "Go."

3 Then one said, "Please consent to go with your servants."

And he answered, "I will go." 4 So he went with them. And when they came to the Jordan, they cut down trees. 5 But as one was cutting down a tree, the iron *ax head* fell into the water; and he cried out and said, "Alas, master! For it was borrowed."

6 So the man of God said, "Where did it fall?" And he showed him the place. So he cut off a stick, and threw *it* in there; and he made the iron float. 7 Therefore he said, "Pick *it* up for yourself." So he reached out his hand and took it.

The Blinded Syrians Captured

8 Now the king of Syria was making war against Israel; and he consulted with his servants, saying, "My camp *will be* in such and such a place." 9 And the man of God sent to the king of Israel, saying, "Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are coming down there." 10 Then the king of Israel sent *someone* to the place of which the man of God had told him. Thus he warned him, and he was watchful there, not just once or twice.

11 Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was greatly troubled by this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, "Will you not show me which of us *is* for the king of Israel?"

12 And one of his servants said, "None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who *is* in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom."

13 So he said, "Go and see where he *is,* that I may send and get him."

temper? When the soldiers spit in His face, did He breathe fire in theirs? Far from it. He was at peace. He forgave them. He refused to be guided by vengeance.

He also refused to be guided by anything other than His high call. His heart was purposeful. Most lives aim at nothing in particular and achieve it. Jesus aimed at one goal—to save humanity from its sin. He could summarize His life with one sentence: "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

The same one who saved your soul longs to remake your heart. God is willing to change us into the likeness of the Savior. Shall we accept his offer? (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Grow in your faith: craving spiritual food, worshiping God, and resting in God's timing. Persevering in these areas will demonstrate that your spiritual life is alive!

EXPLORATION

Childlike Faith—Psalm 8:2; Matthew 18:2–6; Matthew 21:15, 16; Mark 9:36, 37; Mark 10:15; Luke 9:46–48.

Life Lessons

2 Kings 6:8—8:15

SITUATION
The kings of Syria and Israel frequently fought each other, with tenuous times of peace between the battles. During one raid, the Syrians arrived at night and surrounded the city. This caused Elisha's servant to be greatly afraid, but the prophet told him not to fear.

OBSERVATION
Elisha was not disturbed by what he saw; instead, he gave his servant the ability to see the invisible spirits that are constantly ready to do God's work. The Lord was in control, and there was no need to worry.

INSPIRATION
The same God that gave us commandments such as "Do not commit adultery, do not murder" said, "Do not worry." It's a violation of our relationship to God to question His authority by worrying.

Has any good ever come out of any worrying that you've ever done? Worry only compartmentalizes us and makes us unable to do what we set out to do. If you are worried about a problem, what you need to do is simply trust the Lord and do good.

The word "worry" comes from a word that means "to divide." When you worry, you divide your energy. Do you worry? I worry about you if you don't worry! All of us worry, but we shouldn't. Jesus commands us half a dozen times, "Do not worry." When we worry about a situation, the problem gets us instead of us getting it.

Jesus is not afraid of the

And it was told him, saying, "Surely *he is* in Dothan."
14 Therefore he sent horses and chariots and a great army there,
and they came by night and surrounded the city. 15 And when the ser-
vant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army,
surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to
him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?"
16 So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who *are* with us *are* more
than those who *are* with them." 17 And Elisha prayed, and said, "Lord,
I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the Lord opened the eyes
of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain *was* full of
horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. 18 So when *the Syrians*
came down to him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, and said, "Strike this
people, I pray, with blindness." And He struck them with blindness
according to the word of Elisha.
19 Now Elisha said to them, "This *is* not the way, nor *is* this the city.
Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." But he
led them to Samaria.
20 So it was, when they had come to Samaria, that Elisha said,
"Lord, open the eyes of these *men,* that they may see." And the Lord
opened their eyes, and they saw; and there *they were,* inside Samaria!
21 Now when the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, "My
father, shall I kill *them?* Shall I kill *them?*"
22 But he answered, "You shall not kill *them.* Would you kill those
whom you have taken captive with your sword and your bow? Set
food and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to
their master." 23 Then he prepared a great feast for them; and after
they ate and drank, he sent them away and they went to their master.
So the bands of Syrian *raiders* came no more into the land of Israel.

Syria Besieges Samaria in Famine

24 And it happened after this that Ben-Hadad king of Syria gathered
all his army, and went up and besieged Samaria. 25 And there was a
great famine in Samaria; and indeed they besieged it until a donkey's
head was *sold* for eighty *shekels* of silver, and one-fourth of a kab of
dove droppings for five *shekels* of silver.
26 Then, as the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman
cried out to him, saying, "Help, my lord, O king!"
27 And he said, "If the Lord does not help you, where can I find help
for you? From the threshing floor or from the winepress?" 28 Then the
king said to her, "What is troubling you?"
And she answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give your son, that we
may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.' 29 So we boiled
my son, and ate him. And I said to her on the next day, 'Give your son,
that we may eat him'; but she has hidden her son."
30 Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the woman,
that he tore his clothes; and as he passed by on the wall, the people
looked, and there underneath *he had* sackcloth on his body. 31 Then
he said, "God do so to me and more also, if the head of Elisha the son
of Shaphat remains on him today!"
32 But Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting
with him. And *the king* sent a man ahead of him, but before the mes-
senger came to him, he said to the elders, "Do you see how this son

of a murderer has sent someone to take away my head? Look, when the messenger comes, shut the door, and hold him fast at the door. *Is* not the sound of his master's feet behind him?" 33 And while he was still talking with them, there was the messenger, coming down to him; and then *the king* said, "Surely this calamity *is* from the Lord; why should I wait for the Lord any longer?"

7 Then Elisha said, "Hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord: 'Tomorrow about this time a seah of fine flour *shall be sold* for a shekel, and two seahs of barley for a shekel, at the gate of Samaria.' "

2 So an officer on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God and said, "Look, *if* the Lord would make windows in heaven, could this thing be?"

And he said, "In fact, you shall see *it* with your eyes, but you shall not eat of it."

The Syrians Flee

3 Now there were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate; and they said to one another, "Why are we sitting here until we die? 4 If we say, 'We will enter the city,' the famine *is* in the city, and we shall die there. And if we sit here, we die also. Now therefore, come, let us surrender to the army of the Syrians. If they keep us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall only die." 5 And they rose at twilight to go to the camp of the Syrians; and when they had come to the outskirts of the Syrian camp, to their surprise no one *was* there. 6 For the Lord had caused the army of the Syrians to hear the noise of chariots and the noise of horses—the noise of a great army; so they said to one another, "Look, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians to attack us!" 7 Therefore they arose and fled at twilight, and left the camp intact—their tents, their horses, and their donkeys—and they fled for their lives. 8 And when these lepers came to the outskirts of the camp, they went into one tent and ate and drank, and carried from it silver and gold and clothing, and went and hid *them;* then they came back and entered another tent, and carried *some* from there *also,* and went and hid *it.*

9 Then they said to one another, "We are not doing right. This day *is* a day of good news, and we remain silent. If we wait until morning light, some punishment will come upon us. Now therefore, come, let us go and tell the king's household." 10 So they went and called to the gatekeepers of the city, and told them, saying, "We went to the Syrian camp, and surprisingly no one *was* there, not a human sound—only horses and donkeys tied, and the tents intact." 11 And the gatekeepers called out, and they told *it* to the king's household inside.

12 So the king arose in the night and said to his servants, "Let me now tell you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we *are* hungry; therefore they have gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, 'When they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive, and get into the city.' "

13 And one of his servants answered and said, "Please, let several *men* take five of the remaining horses which are left in the city. Look, they *may either become* like all the multitude of Israel that are left in it; or indeed, *I say,* they *may become* like all the multitude of Israel left from those who are consumed; so let us send them and see." 14 There-

things that cause us fear. He never said, "Don't bring your fears to me; I'm too busy." Instead, He said, "I'm not afraid of the things that cause you fear. Bring your fears to me." (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "Worry")

APPLICATION

It has been noted that most of the things that we worry about don't even come to pass. It's proper to let God know about your concerns, for Jesus said He would provide rest for your soul.

EXPLORATION

Worry—Deuteronomy 31:6–8; Joshua 1:5–9; Matthew 6:25–34; Philippians 4:6–9; Revelation 1:17, 18.

fore they took two chariots with horses; and the king sent them in the direction of the Syrian army, saying, "Go and see." 15And they went after them to the Jordan; and indeed all the road *was* full of garments and weapons which the Syrians had thrown away in their haste. So the messengers returned and told the king. 16Then the people went out and plundered the tents of the Syrians. So a seah of fine flour was *sold* for a shekel, and two seahs of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord.

17Now the king had appointed the officer on whose hand he leaned to have charge of the gate. But the people trampled him in the gate, and he died, just as the man of God had said, who spoke when the king came down to him. 18So it happened just as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, "Two seahs of barley for a shekel, and a seah of fine flour for a shekel, shall be *sold* tomorrow about this time in the gate of Samaria."

19Then that officer had answered the man of God, and said, "Now look, *if* the Lord would make windows in heaven, could such a thing be?"

And he had said, "In fact, you shall see *it* with your eyes, but you shall not eat of it." 20And so it happened to him, for the people trampled him in the gate, and he died.

The King Restores the Shunammite's Land

8 Then Elisha spoke to the woman whose son he had restored to life, saying, "Arise and go, you and your household, and stay wherever you can; for the Lord has called for a famine, and furthermore, it will come upon the land for seven years." 2So the woman arose and did according to the saying of the man of God, and she went with her household and dwelt in the land of the Philistines seven years.

3It came to pass, at the end of seven years, that the woman returned from the land of the Philistines; and she went to make an appeal to the king for her house and for her land. 4Then the king talked with Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, saying, "Tell me, please, all the great things Elisha has done." 5Now it happened, as he was telling the king how he had restored the dead to life, that there was the woman whose son he had restored to life, appealing to the king for her house and for her land. And Gehazi said, "My lord, O king, this *is* the woman, and this *is* her son whom Elisha restored to life." 6And when the king asked the woman, she told him.

So the king appointed a certain officer for her, saying, "Restore all that *was* hers, and all the proceeds of the field from the day that she left the land until now."

Death of Ben-Hadad

7Then Elisha went to Damascus, and Ben-Hadad king of Syria was sick; and it was told him, saying, "The man of God has come here." 8And the king said to Hazael, "Take a present in your hand, and go to meet the man of God, and inquire of the Lord by him, saying, 'Shall I recover from this disease?' " 9So Hazael went to meet him and took a present with him, of every good thing of Damascus, forty camel-loads; and he came and stood before him, and said, "Your son Ben-Hadad king of Syria has sent me to you, saying, 'Shall I recover from this disease?' "

10And Elisha said to him, "Go, say to him, 'You shall certainly recover.' However the Lord has shown me that he will really die." 11Then he set his countenance in a stare until he was ashamed; and the man of God wept. 12And Hazael said, "Why is my lord weeping?"

He answered, "Because I know the evil that you will do to the children of Israel: Their strongholds you will set on fire, and their young men you will kill with the sword; and you will dash their children, and rip open their women with child."

13So Hazael said, "But what *is* your servant—a dog, that he should do this gross thing?"

And Elisha answered, "The Lord has shown me that you *will become* king over Syria."

14Then he departed from Elisha, and came to his master, who said to him, "What did Elisha say to you?" And he answered, "He told me you would surely recover." 15But it happened on the next day that he took a thick cloth and dipped *it* in water, and spread *it* over his face so that he died; and Hazael reigned in his place.

Jehoram Reigns in Judah

16Now in the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab, king of Israel, Jehoshaphat *having been*

king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat began to reign as king of Judah. 17 He was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. 18 And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of Ahab was his wife; and he did evil in the sight of the Lord. 19 Yet the Lord would not destroy Judah, for the sake of His servant David, as He promised him to give a lamp to him *and* his sons forever.

20 In his days Edom revolted against Judah's authority, and made a king over themselves. 21 So Joram[a] went to Zair, and all his chariots with him. Then he rose by night and attacked the Edomites who had surrounded him and the captains of the chariots; and the troops fled to their tents. 22 Thus Edom has been in revolt against Judah's authority to this day. And Libnah revolted at that time.

23 Now the rest of the acts of Joram, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 24 So Joram rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the City of David. Then Ahaziah his son reigned in his place.

Ahaziah Reigns in Judah

25 In the twelfth year of Joram the son of Ahab, king of Israel, Ahaziah the son of Jehoram, king of Judah, began to reign. 26 Ahaziah *was* twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name *was* Athaliah the granddaughter of Omri, king of Israel. 27 And he walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did evil in the sight of the Lord, like the house of Ahab, for he *was* the son-in-law of the house of Ahab.

28 Now he went with Joram the son of Ahab to war against Hazael king of Syria at Ramoth Gilead; and the Syrians wounded Joram. 29 Then King Joram went back to Jezreel to recover from the wounds which the Syrians had inflicted on him at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael king of Syria. And Ahaziah the son of Jehoram, king of Judah, went down to see Joram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was sick.

Jehu Anointed King of Israel

9 And Elisha the prophet called one of the sons of the prophets, and said to him, "Get yourself ready, take this flask of oil in your hand, and go to Ramoth Gilead. 2 Now when you arrive at that place, look there for Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi, and go in and make him rise up from among his associates, and take him to an inner room. 3 Then take the flask of oil, and pour *it* on his head, and say, 'Thus says the Lord: "I have anointed you king over Israel." ' Then open the door and flee, and do not delay."

4 So the young man, the servant of the prophet, went to Ramoth Gilead. 5 And when he arrived, there *were* the captains of the army sitting; and he said, "I have a message for you, Commander."

Jehu said, "For which *one* of us?"

And he said, "For you, Commander." 6 Then he arose and went into the house. And he poured the oil on his head, and said to him, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'I have anointed you king over the people

8:21 [a]Spelled *Jehoram* in verse 16

Life Lessons

2 Kings 8:16—9:37

SITUATION

With Jehoshaphat as a father, Jehoram had a good example to follow. When he became king, however, he foolishly chose to marry the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel (probably as a political alliance). This daughter, Athaliah, brought evil practices and the need for God's judgment to the southern kingdom.

OBSERVATION

If we purposely ignore God's desire for us, we will find ourselves candidates for His discipline.

INSPIRATION

Where we might think of sin as slip-ups or missteps, God views sin as a godless attitude that leads to godless actions. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6). The sinful mind dismisses God. His counsel goes unconsulted. His opinion, unsolicited. His plan, unconsidered. The sin-infected grant God the same respect middle-schoolers give a substitute teacher—acknowledged, but not taken seriously.

The lack of God-centeredness leads to self-centeredness. Sin celebrates its middle letter—sIn. It proclaims, "It's your life, right? Pump your body with drugs, your mind with greed, your nights with pleasure." The godless lead a me-dominated, childish life, a life of "doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it" (Ephesians 2:3 MSG).

God says to love. I choose to hate.

God instructs, "Forgive." I opt to get even.

God calls for self-control. I promote self-indulgence.

Sin, for a season, quenches thirst. But so does salt water. Given time, the thirst returns, more demanding and demanding more than ever. "Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a *continual lust for more*" (Ephesians 4:19 NIV, emphasis mine).

We pay a high price for such self-obsession. "God isn't pleased at being ignored" (Romans 8:8 MSG). (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you troubled by the evil that surrounds you? Leaders or managers who don't honor God? The suffering of the innocent? The influence of sin? All of these can weigh you down and make you doubt God's ability to intervene. Remember: God has perfect timing. He has a plan to judge and punish evil. Bring your discouragement to Him and rely on His victory.

EXPLORATION

Evil Defeated—Psalm 44:2–8; Romans 8:37–39; 1 Corinthians 15:55–57; Colossians 2:13–15; 2 Thessalonians 2:8; Hebrews 2:14, 15; 1 John 4:4; 5:4; Jude 6; Revelation 19:20.

of the Lord, over Israel. 7 You shall strike down the house of Ahab your master, that I may avenge the blood of My servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord, at the hand of Jezebel. 8 For the whole house of Ahab shall perish; and I will cut off from Ahab all the males in Israel, both bond and free. 9 So I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah. 10 The dogs shall eat Jezebel on the plot *of ground* at Jezreel, and *there shall be* none to bury *her.*' " And he opened the door and fled.

11 Then Jehu came out to the servants of his master, and *one* said to him, "*Is* all well? Why did this madman come to you?"

And he said to them, "You know the man and his babble."

12 And they said, "A lie! Tell us now."

So he said, "Thus and thus he spoke to me, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: "I have anointed you king over Israel." ' "

13 Then each man hastened to take his garment and put *it* under him on the top of the steps; and they blew trumpets, saying, "Jehu is king!"

Joram of Israel Killed

14 So Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi, conspired against Joram. (Now Joram had been defending Ramoth Gilead, he and all Israel, against Hazael king of Syria. 15 But King Joram had returned to Jezreel to recover from the wounds which the Syrians had inflicted on him when he fought with Hazael king of Syria.) And Jehu said, "If you are so minded, let no one leave *or* escape from the city to go and tell *it* in Jezreel." 16 So Jehu rode in a chariot and went to Jezreel, for Joram was laid up there; and Ahaziah king of Judah had come down to see Joram.

17 Now a watchman stood on the tower in Jezreel, and he saw the company of Jehu as he came, and said, "I see a company of men."

And Joram said, "Get a horseman and send him to meet them, and let him say, '*Is it* peace?' "

18 So the horseman went to meet him, and said, "Thus says the king: '*Is it* peace?' "

And Jehu said, "What have you to do with peace? Turn around and follow me."

So the watchman reported, saying, "The messenger went to them, but is not coming back."

19 Then he sent out a second horseman who came to them, and said, "Thus says the king: '*Is it* peace?' "

And Jehu answered, "What have you to do with peace? Turn around and follow me."

20 So the watchman reported, saying, "He went up to them and is not coming back; and the driving *is* like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi, for he drives furiously!"

21 Then Joram said, "Make ready." And his chariot was made ready. Then Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah went out, each in his chariot; and they went out to meet Jehu, and met him on the property of Naboth the Jezreelite. 22 Now it happened, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, "*Is it* peace, Jehu?"

So he answered, "What peace, as long as the harlotries of your mother Jezebel and her witchcraft *are so* many?"

23 Then Joram turned around and fled, and said to Ahaziah, "Treachery, Ahaziah!" 24 Now Jehu drew his bow with full strength and shot Jehoram between his arms; and the arrow came out at his heart, and he sank down in his chariot. 25 Then *Jehu* said to Bidkar his captain, "Pick *him* up, *and* throw him into the tract of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite; for remember, when you and I were riding together behind Ahab his father, that the Lord laid this burden upon him: 26 'Surely I saw yesterday the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons,' says the Lord, 'and I will repay you in this plot,' says the Lord. Now therefore, take *and* throw him on the plot *of ground,* according to the word of the Lord."

Ahaziah of Judah Killed

27 But when Ahaziah king of Judah saw *this,* he fled by the road to Beth Haggan.[a] So Jehu pursued him, and said, "Shoot him also in the chariot." *And they shot him* at the Ascent of Gur, which is by Ibleam. Then he fled to Megiddo, and died there. 28 And his servants carried him in the chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him in his tomb with his fathers in the City of David. 29 In the eleventh year of Joram the son of Ahab, Ahaziah had become king over Judah.

Jezebel's Violent Death

30 Now when Jehu had come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard *of it;* and she put paint on her eyes and adorned her head, and looked through a window. 31 Then, as Jehu entered at the gate, she said, "*Is it* peace, Zimri, murderer of your master?"

32 And he looked up at the window, and said, "Who *is* on my side? Who?" So two *or* three eunuchs looked out at him. 33 Then he said, "Throw her down." So they threw her down, and *some* of her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses; and he trampled her underfoot. 34 And when he had gone in, he ate and drank. Then he said, "Go now, see to this accursed *woman,* and bury her, for she was a king's daughter." 35 So they went to bury her, but they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of *her* hands. 36 Therefore they came back and told him. And he said, "This *is* the word of the Lord, which He spoke by His servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 'On the plot *of ground* at Jezreel dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel;[a] 37 and the corpse of Jezebel shall be as refuse on the surface of the field, in the plot at Jezreel, so that they shall not say, "Here *lies* Jezebel." ' "

Ahab's Seventy Sons Killed

10 Now Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria. And Jehu wrote and sent letters to Samaria, to the rulers of Jezreel,[a] to the elders, and to those who reared Ahab's *sons,* saying:

2 Now as soon as this letter comes to you, since your master's sons *are* with you, and you have chariots and horses, a fortified city

9:27 [a]Literally *The Garden House* **9:36** [a]1 Kings 21:23 **10:1** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Syriac, and Targum; Septuagint reads *Samaria;* Vulgate reads *city.*

Life Lessons

2 Kings 10:1–36

SITUATION

King Jehu drastically reformed society. He spoke out against practices that disregarded God's law and called the people back to God's standards. He killed wicked Ahab's household and the prophets of Baal. Although he led the way in these reforms, he failed to finish the job—he did not remove the idols set up in Dan and Bethel.

OBSERVATION

Jehu passionately opposed practices that were dishonoring to God, but some of his own efforts were sinful (Hosea 1:4, 5).

INSPIRATION

It seems a couple of prowlers broke into a department store in a large city. . . . They took nothing. Absolutely nothing. No merchandise was stolen. No items were removed. But what they did was ridiculous.

Instead of stealing anything, they changed the cost of everything. Price tags were swapped. Values were exchanged. These clever pranksters took the tag off a $395 camera and stuck it on a $5.00 box of stationery. The $5.95 sticker on a paperback book was removed and placed on an outboard motor. They repriced everything in the store!

Crazy? You bet. But the craziest part of this story took place the next morning. The store opened as usual. Employees went to work. Customers began to shop. The place functioned as normal for four hours

before anyone noticed what had happened.

Four hours! Some people got some great bargains. Others got fleeced. For four solid hours no one noticed that all the values had been swapped.

Hard to believe? It shouldn't be—we see the same thing happening every day. We are deluged by a distorted value system. We see the most valuable things in our lives peddled for pennies and we see the cheapest smut go for millions.

The salesman who defended his illegal practices by saying, "Let's not confuse business with ethics."

The military men who sold top-secret information (as well as their integrity) for $6,000.

The cabinet member of a large nation who was caught illegally dealing in semi-precious stones. His cabinet position? Minister of *Justice*.

The father who confessed to the murder of his twelve-year-old daughter. The reason he killed her? She refused to go to bed with him.

Why do we do what we do? Why do we take blatantly black-and-white and paint it gray? Why are priceless mores trashed while senseless standards are obeyed? What causes us to elevate the body and degrade the soul? What causes us to pamper the skin while we pollute the heart?

Our values are messed up. Someone broke into the store and exchanged all the price tags. Thrills are going for top dollar and the value of human beings is at an all-time low. . . .

And you've seen the results of this. Our system goes haywire. We feel useless and worthless. We

also, and weapons, [3] choose the best qualified of your master's sons, set *him* on his father's throne, and fight for your master's house.

[4] But they were exceedingly afraid, and said, "Look, two kings could not stand up to him; how then can we stand?" [5] And he who *was* in charge of the house, and he who *was* in charge of the city, the elders also, and those who reared *the sons,* sent to Jehu, saying, "We *are* your servants, we will do all you tell us; but we will not make anyone king. Do *what is* good in your sight." [6] Then he wrote a second letter to them, saying:

> If you *are* for me and will obey my voice, take the heads of the men, your master's sons, and come to me at Jezreel by this time tomorrow.

Now the king's sons, seventy persons, *were* with the great men of the city, *who* were rearing them. [7] So it was, when the letter came to them, that they took the king's sons and slaughtered seventy persons, put their heads in baskets and sent *them* to him at Jezreel.

[8] Then a messenger came and told him, saying, "They have brought the heads of the king's sons."

And he said, "Lay them in two heaps at the entrance of the gate until morning."

[9] So it was, in the morning, that he went out and stood, and said to all the people, "You *are* righteous. Indeed I conspired against my master and killed him; but who killed all these? [10] Know now that nothing shall fall to the earth of the word of the Lord which the Lord spoke concerning the house of Ahab; for the Lord has done what He spoke by His servant Elijah." [11] So Jehu killed all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men and his close acquaintances and his priests, until he left him none remaining.

Ahaziah's Forty-two Brothers Killed

[12] And he arose and departed and went to Samaria. On the way, at Beth Eked[a] of the Shepherds, [13] Jehu met with the brothers of Ahaziah king of Judah, and said, "Who *are* you?"

So they answered, "We *are* the brothers of Ahaziah; we have come down to greet the sons of the king and the sons of the queen mother."

[14] And he said, "Take them alive!" So they took them alive, and killed them at the well of Beth Eked, forty-two men; and he left none of them.

The Rest of Ahab's Family Killed

[15] Now when he departed from there, he met Jehonadab the son of Rechab, *coming* to meet him; and he greeted him and said to him, "Is your heart right, as my heart *is* toward your heart?"

And Jehonadab answered, "It is."

Jehu said, "If it is, give *me* your hand." So he gave *him* his hand, and he took him up to him into the chariot. [16] Then he said, "Come with

10:12 [a] Or *The Shearing House*

me, and see my zeal for the Lord." So they had him ride in his chariot. 17 And when he came to Samaria, he killed all who remained to Ahab in Samaria, till he had destroyed them, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke to Elijah.

Worshipers of Baal Killed

18 Then Jehu gathered all the people together, and said to them, "Ahab served Baal a little, Jehu will serve him much. 19 Now therefore, call to me all the prophets of Baal, all his servants, and all his priests. Let no one be missing, for I have a great sacrifice for Baal. Whoever is missing shall not live." But Jehu acted deceptively, with the intent of destroying the worshipers of Baal. 20 And Jehu said, "Proclaim a solemn assembly for Baal." So they proclaimed *it.* 21 Then Jehu sent throughout all Israel; and all the worshipers of Baal came, so that there was not a man left who did not come. So they came into the temple[a] of Baal, and the temple of Baal was full from one end to the other. 22 And he said to the one in charge of the wardrobe, "Bring out vestments for all the worshipers of Baal." So he brought out vestments for them. 23 Then Jehu and Jehonadab the son of Rechab went into the temple of Baal, and said to the worshipers of Baal, "Search and see that no servants of the Lord are here with you, but only the worshipers of Baal." 24 So they went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings. Now Jehu had appointed for himself eighty men on the outside, and had said, "*If* any of the men whom I have brought into your hands escapes, *whoever lets him escape, it shall be* his life for the life of the other."

25 Now it happened, as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, that Jehu said to the guard and to the captains, "Go in *and* kill them; let no one come out!" And they killed them with the edge of the sword; then the guards and the officers threw *them* out, and went into the inner room of the temple of Baal. 26 And they brought the *sacred* pillars out of the temple of Baal and burned them. 27 Then they broke down the *sacred* pillar of Baal, and tore down the temple of Baal and made it a refuse dump to this day. 28 Thus Jehu destroyed Baal from Israel.

29 However Jehu did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin, *that is,* from the golden calves that *were* at Bethel and Dan. 30 And the Lord said to Jehu, "Because you have done well in doing *what is* right in My sight, *and* have done to the house of Ahab all that *was* in My heart, your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth *generation.*" 31 But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart; for he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, who had made Israel sin.

Death of Jehu

32 In those days the Lord began to cut off *parts* of Israel; and Hazael conquered them in all the territory of Israel 33 from the Jordan eastward: all the land of Gilead—Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh—from Aroer, which *is* by the River Arnon, including Gilead and Bashan.

34 Now the rest of the acts of Jehu, all that he did, and all his might,

10:21 [a]Literally *house,* and so elsewhere in this chapter

freak out. We play games. We create false value systems. We say that you are valuable if you are pretty. We say that you are valuable if you can produce. . . .

Now please understand, this is man's value system. It is not God's. . . . In God's book man is heading somewhere. He has an amazing destiny. We are being prepared to walk down the church aisle and become the bride of Jesus. We are going to live with Him. Share the throne with Him. Reign with Him. We count. We are valuable. And what's more, our worth is built in! Our value is inborn. (From *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Make a list of things the world values (money, good looks, nice cars). When you've completed your list, ask yourself, "Which of these do I value? Which does God value? How can I spend my time and money better to reflect what God values?"

EXPLORATION

Distorted Values—Job 21:14; Psalm 82:5; Proverbs 14:12; 30:20; Isaiah 44:18–20; Jeremiah 9:3–6; Zephaniah 3:5; John 1:5; Romans 1:21–32; Ephesians 4:18; 2 Peter 2:19.

are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 35 So Jehu rested with his fathers, and they buried him in Samaria. Then Jehoahaz his son reigned in his place. 36 And the period that Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria *was* twenty-eight years.

Athaliah Reigns in Judah

11 When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal heirs. 2 But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him away from among the king's sons *who were* being murdered; and they hid him and his nurse in the bedroom, from Athaliah, so that he was not killed. 3 So he was hidden with her in the house of the Lord for six years, while Athaliah reigned over the land.

Joash Crowned King of Judah

4 In the seventh year Jehoiada sent and brought the captains of hundreds—of the bodyguards and the escorts—and brought them into the house of the Lord to him. And he made a covenant with them and took an oath from them in the house of the Lord, and showed them the king's son. 5 Then he commanded them, saying, "This *is* what you shall do: One-third of you who come on duty on the Sabbath shall be keeping watch over the king's house, 6 one-third *shall be* at the gate of Sur, and one-third at the gate behind the escorts. You shall keep the watch of the house, lest it be broken down. 7 The two contingents of you who go off duty on the Sabbath shall keep the watch of the house of the Lord for the king. 8 But you shall surround the king on all sides, every man with his weapons in his hand; and whoever comes within range, let him be put to death. You are to be with the king as he goes out and as he comes in."

9 So the captains of the hundreds did according to all that Jehoiada the priest commanded. Each of them took his men who were to be on duty on the Sabbath, with those who were going off duty on the Sabbath, and came to Jehoiada the priest. 10 And the priest gave the captains of hundreds the spears and shields which *had belonged* to King David, that were in the temple of the Lord. 11 Then the escorts stood, every man with his weapons in his hand, all around the king, from the right side of the temple to the left side of the temple, by the altar and the house. 12 And he brought out the king's son, put the crown on him, and *gave him* the Testimony;[a] they made him king and anointed him, and they clapped their hands and said, "Long live the king!"

Death of Athaliah

13 Now when Athaliah heard the noise of the escorts *and* the people, she came to the people *in* the temple of the Lord. 14 When she looked, there was the king standing by a pillar according to custom; and the leaders and the trumpeters were by the king. All the people of the land were rejoicing and blowing trumpets. So Athaliah tore her clothes and cried out, "Treason! Treason!"

11:12 [a] That is, the Law (compare Exodus 25:16, 21 and Deuteronomy 31:9)

Life Lessons

2 Kings 11:1—12:21

SITUATION
Joash, under the guidance of the priest Jehoiada, purged the land of idolatry. Joash collected money and ordered the priests to repair the temple. When they failed, he brought in other workmen to complete the task.

OBSERVATION
God uses people other than priests and pastors. Sometimes the most effective workers God uses are just ordinary people.

INSPIRATION
Does Jesus still do it?

Does He still use simple folks like us to change the world? We suffer from such ordinariness. The fellow to my right snoozes with his mouth open. The gray-haired woman next to him wears earphones and bobs her head from side to side. (I think I hear Frank Sinatra.) They don't wear halos or wings. And excluding the reflection off the man's bald spot, they don't emit any light.

Most of us don't. We are Joe Pot Roast. Common folk. We sit in the bleachers, eat at diners, change diapers, and wear our favorite team's ball cap. Fans don't wave when we pass. Servants don't scurry when we come home. Chauffeurs don't drive our cars; butlers don't open our doors or draw our baths. The doorman doesn't greet us, and security doesn't protect us. We, like the Jerusalem disciples, are regular folk.

Does God use the common Joe? . . .

God doesn't call the

15 And Jehoiada the priest commanded the captains of the hundreds, the officers of the army, and said to them, "Take her outside under guard, and slay with the sword whoever follows her." For the priest had said, "Do not let her be killed in the house of the Lord." 16 So they seized her; and she went by way of the horses' entrance *into* the king's house, and there she was killed.

17 Then Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord, the king, and the people, that they should be the Lord's people, and *also* between the king and the people. 18 And all the people of the land went to the temple of Baal, and tore it down. They thoroughly broke in pieces its altars and images, and killed Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars. And the priest appointed officers over the house of the Lord. 19 Then he took the captains of hundreds, the bodyguards, the escorts, and all the people of the land; and they brought the king down from the house of the Lord, and went by way of the gate of the escorts to the king's house. Then he sat on the throne of the kings. 20 So all the people of the land rejoiced; and the city was quiet, for they had slain Athaliah with the sword *in* the king's house. 21 Jehoash *was* seven years old when he became king.

Jehoash Repairs the Temple

12 In the seventh year of Jehu, Jehoash[a] became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name *was* Zibiah of Beersheba. 2 Jehoash did *what was* right in the sight of the Lord all the days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him. 3 But the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.

4 And Jehoash said to the priests, "All the money of the dedicated gifts that are brought into the house of the Lord—each man's census money, each man's assessment money[a]—*and* all the money that a man purposes in his heart to bring into the house of the Lord, 5 let the priests take *it* themselves, each from his constituency; and let them repair the damages of the temple, wherever any dilapidation is found."

6 Now it was so, by the twenty-third year of King Jehoash, *that* the priests had not repaired the damages of the temple. 7 So King Jehoash called Jehoiada the priest and the *other* priests, and said to them, "Why have you not repaired the damages of the temple? Now therefore, do not take *more* money from your constituency, but deliver it for repairing the damages of the temple." 8 And the priests agreed that they would neither receive *more* money from the people, nor repair the damages of the temple.

9 Then Jehoiada the priest took a chest, bored a hole in its lid, and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one comes into the house of the Lord; and the priests who kept the door put there all the money brought into the house of the Lord. 10 So it was, whenever they saw that *there was* much money in the chest, that the king's scribe and the high priest came up and put it in bags, and counted the money that was found in the house of the Lord. 11 Then they gave the money, which had been apportioned, into the hands of those who did the

12:1 [a]Spelled *Joash* in 11:2ff **12:4** [a]Compare Leviticus 27:2ff

qualified. He qualifies the called.

Don't let Satan convince you otherwise. He will try. He will tell you that God has an IQ requirement or an entry fee. That He employs only specialists and experts, governments and high-powered personalities. When Satan whispers such lies, dismiss him with this truth: God stampeded the first-century society with swaybacks, not thoroughbreds. Before Jesus came along, the disciples were loading trucks, coaching soccer, and selling Slurpees at the convenience store. Their collars were blue, and their hands were calloused, and there is no evidence that Jesus chose them because they were smarter or nicer than the guy next door. The one thing they had going for them was a willingness to take a step when Jesus said, "Follow me."

Are you more dinghy than cruise ship? More stand-in than movie star? More plumber than executive? More blue jeans than blue blood? Congratulations. God changes the world with folks like you. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Don't let your lack of theological training or position stop you from serving God in your work. Become an active participant in church. Talk about Christ with your neighbors, coworkers, family members, and friends. Be a witness right where you are.

EXPLORATION

Lay People—Exodus 39:42; Joshua 1:16; 2 Kings 10:30, 31; 2 Chronicles 30:15.

work, who had the oversight of the house of the Lord; and they paid it out to the carpenters and builders who worked on the house of the Lord, 12 and to masons and stonecutters, and for buying timber and hewn stone, to repair the damage of the house of the Lord, and for all that was paid out to repair the temple. 13 However there were not made for the house of the Lord basins of silver, trimmers, sprinkling-bowls, trumpets, any articles of gold or articles of silver, from the money brought into the house of the Lord. 14 But they gave that to the workmen, and they repaired the house of the Lord with it. 15 Moreover they did not require an account from the men into whose hand they delivered the money to be paid to workmen, for they dealt faithfully. 16 The money from the trespass offerings and the money from the sin offerings was not brought into the house of the Lord. It belonged to the priests.

Hazael Threatens Jerusalem

17 Hazael king of Syria went up and fought against Gath, and took it; then Hazael set his face to go up to Jerusalem. 18 And Jehoash king of Judah took all the sacred things that his fathers, Jehoshaphat and Jehoram and Ahaziah, kings of Judah, had dedicated, and his own sacred things, and all the gold found in the treasuries of the house of the Lord and in the king's house, and sent *them* to Hazael king of Syria. Then he went away from Jerusalem.

Death of Joash

19 Now the rest of the acts of Joash,[a] and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

20 And his servants arose and formed a conspiracy, and killed Joash in the house of the Millo,[a] which goes down to Silla. 21 For Jozachar[a] the son of Shimeath and Jehozabad the son of Shomer,[b] his servants, struck him. So he died, and they buried him with his fathers in the City of David. Then Amaziah his son reigned in his place.

Jehoahaz Reigns in Israel

13 In the twenty-third year of Joash[a] the son of Ahaziah, king of Judah, Jehoahaz the son of Jehu became king over Israel in Samaria, *and reigned* seventeen years. 2 And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and followed the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin. He did not depart from them.

3 Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel, and He delivered them into the hand of Hazael king of Syria, and into the hand of Ben-Hadad the son of Hazael, all *their* days. 4 So Jehoahaz pleaded with the Lord, and the Lord listened to him; for He saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Syria oppressed them. 5 Then the Lord gave Israel a deliverer, so that they escaped from under the hand of the Syrians; and the children of Israel dwelt in their tents as before. 6 Nevertheless they did not depart from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, who had made Israel sin, *but* walked in them; and the

12:19 [a]Spelled *Jehoash* in 12:1ff **12:20** [a]Literally *The Landfill* **12:21** [a]Called *Zabad* in 2 Chronicles 24:26 [b]Called *Shimrith* in 2 Chronicles 24:26 **13:1** [a]Spelled *Jehoash* in 12:1ff

Life Lessons

2 Kings 13:1—14:29

SITUATION
Under the domination of Syria, Israel became helpless. The Israelites lost the power to rule themselves and degraded their belief in God by corrupting their religion. Yet, when Jehoahaz prayed to God for the first time in seventeen years, God listened.

OBSERVATION
God always listens to a person who sincerely repents and returns to a life of obedience. God wants more than just an outward show of faith. He seeks true devotion.

INSPIRATION
The Spirit fills as prayers flow. Desire to be filled with strength? Of course you do. Then pray, "Lord, I receive your energy. Empowered by your Holy Spirit, I can do all things through Christ, who gives me strength." Welcome the Spirit into every room of your heart.

I did something similar with the air of my air conditioner. As I study in my dining room, cool air surrounds me. Outside the sidewalk sizzles in brick-oven heat. But inside I'm as cool as the other side of the pillow. Why? Two reasons. A compressor sits next to the house. I did not build nor install it. It came with the mortgage. Credit the cool house on a good compressor.

But equally credit the open vents. I did not install the "air makers," but I did open the "air blockers." Cool air fills the house because vents are open. I went from room to room, lowering the levers and

wooden image[a] also remained in Samaria. 7 For He left of the army of Jehoahaz only fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand foot soldiers; for the king of Syria had destroyed them and made them like the dust at threshing.

8 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoahaz, all that he did, and his might, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 9 So Jehoahaz rested with his fathers, and they buried him in Samaria. Then Joash his son reigned in his place.

Jehoash Reigns in Israel

10 In the thirty-seventh year of Joash king of Judah, Jehoash[a] the son of Jehoahaz became king over Israel in Samaria, *and reigned* sixteen years. 11 And he did evil in the sight of the Lord. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, *but* walked in them.

12 Now the rest of the acts of Joash, all that he did, and his might with which he fought against Amaziah king of Judah, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 13 So Joash rested with his fathers. Then Jeroboam sat on his throne. And Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel.

Death of Elisha

14 Elisha had become sick with the illness of which he would die. Then Joash the king of Israel came down to him, and wept over his face, and said, "O my father, my father, the chariots of Israel and their horsemen!"

15 And Elisha said to him, "Take a bow and some arrows." So he took himself a bow and some arrows. 16 Then he said to the king of Israel, "Put your hand on the bow." So he put his hand *on it,* and Elisha put his hands on the king's hands. 17 And he said, "Open the east window"; and he opened *it.* Then Elisha said, "Shoot"; and he shot. And he said, "The arrow of the Lord's deliverance and the arrow of deliverance from Syria; for you must strike the Syrians at Aphek till you have destroyed *them.*" 18 Then he said, "Take the arrows"; so he took *them.* And he said to the king of Israel, "Strike the ground"; so he struck three times, and stopped. 19 And the man of God was angry with him, and said, "You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck Syria till you had destroyed *it!* But now you will strike Syria *only* three times."

20 Then Elisha died, and they buried him. And the *raiding* bands from Moab invaded the land in the spring of the year. 21 So it was, as they were burying a man, that suddenly they spied a band *of raiders;* and they put the man in the tomb of Elisha; and when the man was let down and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet.

Israel Recaptures Cities from Syria

22 And Hazael king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. 23 But the Lord was gracious to them, had compassion on them, and regarded them, because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and

13:6 [a]Hebrew *Asherah,* a Canaanite goddess **13:10** [a]Spelled *Joash* in verse 9

releasing the air. The Holy Spirit will fill your life as you do the same: as you, room by room, invite Him to flow in.

Try this: before you climb out of bed, mentally escort the Spirit into every room of your house. Before your feet touch the floor, open each vent. Got anger in a bedroom? Unpayable bills on a desk? Conflicts in an office? Need some air in the cellar or a change of atmosphere in the hallways? Invite Him to fill each corridor of your life. (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do your actions represent your heart? Do you put on your best behavior on Sunday and then do wrong on Monday? Be honest with yourself and with others. Ask God to help you live a godly life all week.

EXPLORATION

Faith—2 Samuel 22; Psalm 136; Luke 24:46–48; Romans 1:17; 1 John 1:8–10.

Jacob, and would not yet destroy them or cast them from His presence.

24 Now Hazael king of Syria died. Then Ben-Hadad his son reigned in his place. 25 And Jehoash[a] the son of Jehoahaz recaptured from the hand of Ben-Hadad, the son of Hazael, the cities which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz his father by war. Three times Joash defeated him and recaptured the cities of Israel.

Amaziah Reigns in Judah

14 In the second year of Joash the son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel, Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, became king. 2 He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. 3 And he did *what was* right in the sight of the Lord, yet not like his father David; he did everything as his father Joash had done. 4 However the high places were not taken away, and the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.

5 Now it happened, as soon as the kingdom was established in his hand, that he executed his servants who had murdered his father the king. 6 But the children of the murderers he did not execute, according to what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, in which the Lord commanded, saying, "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their fathers; but a person shall be put to death for his own sin."[a]

7 He killed ten thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt, and took Sela by war, and called its name Joktheel to this day.

8 Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash[a] the son of Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, "Come, let us face one another *in battle.*" 9 And Jehoash king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, "The thistle that *was* in Lebanon sent to the cedar that *was* in Lebanon, saying, 'Give your daughter to my son as wife'; and a wild beast that *was* in Lebanon passed by and trampled the thistle. 10 You have indeed defeated Edom, and your heart has lifted you up. Glory *in that,* and stay at home; for why should you meddle with trouble so that you fall—you and Judah with you?"

11 But Amaziah would not heed. Therefore Jehoash king of Israel went out; so he and Amaziah king of Judah faced one another at Beth Shemesh, which *belongs* to Judah. 12 And Judah was defeated by Israel, and every man fled to his tent. 13 Then Jehoash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Jehoash, the son of Ahaziah, at Beth Shemesh; and he went to Jerusalem, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem from the Gate of Ephraim to the Corner Gate—four hundred cubits. 14 And he took all the gold and silver, all the articles that were found in the house of the Lord and in the treasuries of the king's house, and hostages, and returned to Samaria.

15 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoash which he did—his might, and how he fought with Amaziah king of Judah—*are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 16 So Jehoash rested with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel. Then Jeroboam his son reigned in his place.

17 Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, lived fifteen years after the death of Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel. 18 Now the rest of the acts of Amaziah, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 19 And they formed a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish; but they sent after him to Lachish and killed him there. 20 Then they brought him on horses, and he was buried at Jerusalem with his fathers in the City of David.

21 And all the people of Judah took Azariah,[a] who *was* sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah. 22 He built Elath and restored it to Judah, after the king rested with his fathers.

Jeroboam II Reigns in Israel

23 In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, became king in Samaria, *and reigned* forty-one years. 24 And he did evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who

13:25 [a]Spelled *Joash* in verses 12–14, 25 **14:6** [a]Deuteronomy 24:16 **14:8** [a]Spelled *Joash* in 13:12ff and 2 Chronicles 25:17ff **14:21** [a]Called *Uzziah* in 2 Chronicles 26:1ff, Isaiah 6:1, and elsewhere

had made Israel sin. 25 He restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who *was* from Gath Hepher. 26 For the Lord saw *that* the affliction of Israel *was* very bitter; and whether bond or free, there was no helper for Israel. 27 And the Lord did not say that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven; but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash.

28 Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did—his might, how he made war, and how he recaptured for Israel, from Damascus and Hamath, *what had belonged* to Judah—*are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 29 So Jeroboam rested with his fathers, the kings of Israel. Then Zechariah his son reigned in his place.

Azariah Reigns in Judah

15 In the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel, Azariah the son of Amaziah, king of Judah, became king. 2 He was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name *was* Jecholiah of Jerusalem. 3 And he did *what was* right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah had done, 4 except that the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. 5 Then the Lord struck the king, so that he was a leper until the day of his death; so he dwelt in an isolated house. And Jotham the king's son *was* over the *royal* house, judging the people of the land.

6 Now the rest of the acts of Azariah, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 7 So Azariah rested with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the City of David. Then Jotham his son reigned in his place.

Zechariah Reigns in Israel

8 In the thirty-eighth year of Azariah king of Judah, Zechariah the son of Jeroboam reigned over Israel in Samaria six months. 9 And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, as his fathers had done; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin. 10 Then Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him, and struck and killed him in front of the people; and he reigned in his place.

11 Now the rest of the acts of Zechariah, indeed they *are* written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.

12 This *was* the word of the Lord which He spoke to Jehu, saying, "Your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth *generation*."[a] And so it was.

Shallum Reigns in Israel

13 Shallum the son of Jabesh became king in the thirty-ninth year of Uzziah[a] king of Judah; and he reigned a full month in Samaria. 14 For Menahem the son of Gadi went up from Tirzah, came to Samaria, and

15:12 [a] 2 Kings 10:30 **15:13** [a] Called *Azariah* in 14:21ff and 15:1ff

Life Lessons

2 Kings 15:1—16:20

SITUATION

During this time, all the kings of Israel did what God said was wrong. On the other hand, the kings of Judah did what God said was right. The one exception was Ahaz, who even dedicated his son to false gods. God used many prophets to speak to these rebellious kings: Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah.

OBSERVATION

God loves His people even when they are unfaithful children. Israel and Judah remained God's chosen people despite their spiritual adultery.

INSPIRATION

God didn't give up. He never gives up.

When Joseph was dropped into a pit by his own brothers, God didn't give up.

When Moses said, "Here I am, send Aaron," God didn't give up.

When the delivered Israelites wanted Egyptian slavery instead of milk and honey, God didn't give up.

When Aaron was making a false god at the very moment Moses was with the true God, God didn't give up.

When only two of the ten spies thought the Creator was powerful enough to deliver the created, God didn't give up.

When Samson whispered to Delilah, when Saul roared after David, when David schemed against Uriah, God didn't give up.

When God's word lay forgotten and man's idols

stood glistening, God didn't give up.

When the children of Israel were taken into captivity, God didn't give up.

He could have given up. He could have turned His back. He could have walked away from the wretched mess, but He didn't.

He didn't give up.

When He became flesh and was the victim of an assassination attempt before He was two years old, He didn't give up.

When the people from His own hometown tried to push Him over a cliff, He didn't give up.

When His brothers ridiculed Him, He didn't give up.

When He was accused of blaspheming God by people who didn't fear God, He didn't give up.

When Peter worshiped Him at the supper and cursed Him at the fire, He didn't give up.

When people spat in His face, He didn't spit back. When the bystanders slapped Him, He didn't slap them. When a whip ripped His sides, He didn't turn and command the awaiting angels to stuff that whip down that soldier's throat.

And when human hands fastened the divine hands to a cross with spikes, it wasn't the soldiers who held the hands of Jesus steady. It was God who held them steady. For those wounded hands were the same invisible hands that had carried the firepot and the torch two thousand years earlier. They were the same hands that had brought light into Abram's thick and dreadful darkness. They had come to do it again.

The hand that carried the flame wrote the promise, "God would give up His only Son before He'd give

struck Shallum the son of Jabesh in Samaria and killed him; and he reigned in his place.

15 Now the rest of the acts of Shallum, and the conspiracy which
he led, indeed they *are* written in the book of the chronicles of the
kings of Israel. 16 Then from Tirzah, Menahem attacked Tiphsah, all
who *were* there, and its territory. Because they did not surrender,
therefore he attacked *it.* All the women there who were with child he
ripped open.

Menahem Reigns in Israel

17 In the thirty-ninth year of Azariah king of Judah, Menahem the
son of Gadi became king over Israel, *and reigned* ten years in Samaria.
18 And he did evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart all his days
from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel
sin. 19 Pul[a] king of Assyria came against the land; and Menahem gave
Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to
strengthen the kingdom under his control. 20 And Menahem exacted
the money from Israel, from all the very wealthy, from each man fifty
shekels of silver, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria
turned back, and did not stay there in the land.

21 Now the rest of the acts of Menahem, and all that he did, *are* they
not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 22 So
Menahem rested with his fathers. Then Pekahiah his son reigned in
his place.

Pekahiah Reigns in Israel

23 In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekahiah the son of
Menahem became king over Israel in Samaria, *and reigned* two years.
24 And he did evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from the
sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin. 25 Then
Pekah the son of Remaliah, an officer of his, conspired against him
and killed him in Samaria, in the citadel of the king's house, along
with Argob and Arieh; and with him were fifty men of Gilead. He killed
him and reigned in his place.

26 Now the rest of the acts of Pekahiah, and all that he did, indeed
they *are* written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.

Pekah Reigns in Israel

27 In the fifty-second year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekah the son
of Remaliah became king over Israel in Samaria, *and reigned* twenty
years. 28 And he did evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from
the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin. 29 In
the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came
and took Ijon, Abel Beth Maachah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead,
and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried them captive to
Assyria. 30 Then Hoshea the son of Elah led a conspiracy against Pekah
the son of Remaliah, and struck and killed him; so he reigned in his
place in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah.

31 Now the rest of the acts of Pekah, and all that he did, indeed they
are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.

15:19 [a] That is, Tiglath-Pileser III (compare verse 29)

Jotham Reigns in Judah

32 In the second year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel,
Jotham the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, began to reign. 33 He was
twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen
years in Jerusalem. His mother's name *was* Jerusha[a] the daughter
of Zadok. 34 And he did *what was* right in the sight of the Lord; he
did according to all that his father Uzziah had done. 35 However the
high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and burned
incense on the high places. He built the Upper Gate of the house of
the Lord.

36 Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all that he did, *are* they
not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 37 In
those days the Lord began to send Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the
son of Remaliah against Judah. 38 So Jotham rested with his fathers,
and was buried with his fathers in the City of David his father. Then
Ahaz his son reigned in his place.

Ahaz Reigns in Judah

16 In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the
son of Jotham, king of Judah, began to reign. 2 Ahaz *was* twenty
years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jeru-
salem; and he did not do *what was* right in the sight of the Lord his
God, as his father David *had done.* 3 But he walked in the way of the
kings of Israel; indeed he made his son pass through the fire, accord-
ing to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out
from before the children of Israel. 4 And he sacrificed and burned
incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.

5 Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of
Israel, came up to Jerusalem to *make* war; and they besieged Ahaz
but could not overcome *him.* 6 At that time Rezin king of Syria cap-
tured Elath for Syria, and drove the men of Judah from Elath. Then the
Edomites[a] went to Elath, and dwell there to this day.

7 So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, saying,
"I *am* your servant and your son. Come up and save me from the hand
of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who rise up
against me." 8 And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the
house of the Lord, and in the treasuries of the king's house, and sent *it*
as a present to the king of Assyria. 9 So the king of Assyria heeded him;
for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus and took it, carried
its people captive to Kir, and killed Rezin.

10 Now King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser king of
Assyria, and saw an altar that *was* at Damascus; and King Ahaz sent to
Urijah the priest the design of the altar and its pattern, according to
all its workmanship. 11 Then Urijah the priest built an altar according
to all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus. So Urijah the priest
made *it* before King Ahaz came back from Damascus. 12 And when
the king came back from Damascus, the king saw the altar; and the
king approached the altar and made offerings on it. 13 So he burned
his burnt offering and his grain offering; and he poured his drink

15:33 [a]Spelled *Jerushah* in 2 Chronicles 27:1 **16:6** [a]Some ancient authorities read *Syrians.*

up on you." (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Thank God for never giving up on you. Make that faithfulness the model for all your relationships: Concerning family members, how can you serve them? Concerning coworkers, how can you help them perform better? Concerning friends, how can you show your loyalty? All without regard for anything in return.

EXPLORATION
Spiritual Adultery—Isaiah 1:21, 22; 57:3–13; Hosea 1—3; Mark 8:38.

offering and sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings on the altar. 14 He also brought the bronze altar which *was* before the Lord, from the front of the temple—from between the *new* altar and the house of the Lord—and put it on the north side of the *new* altar. 15 Then King Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest, saying, "On the great *new* altar burn the morning burnt offering, the evening grain offering, the king's burnt sacrifice, and his grain offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, their grain offering, and their drink offerings; and sprinkle on it all the blood of the burnt offering and all the blood of the sacrifice. And the bronze altar shall be for me to inquire *by*." 16 Thus did Urijah the priest, according to all that King Ahaz commanded.

17 And King Ahaz cut off the panels of the carts, and removed the lavers from them; and he took down the Sea from the bronze oxen that *were* under it, and put it on a pavement of stones. 18 Also he removed the Sabbath pavilion which they had built in the temple, and he removed the king's outer entrance from the house of the Lord, on account of the king of Assyria.

19 Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz which he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 20 So Ahaz rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the City of David. Then Hezekiah his son reigned in his place.

Hoshea Reigns in Israel

17 In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea the son of Elah became king of Israel in Samaria, *and he reigned* nine years. 2 And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, but not as the kings of Israel who were before him. 3 Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against him; and Hoshea became his vassal, and paid him tribute money. 4 And the king of Assyria uncovered a conspiracy by Hoshea; for he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and brought no tribute to the king of Assyria, as *he had done* year by year. Therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison.

Israel Carried Captive to Assyria

5 Now the king of Assyria went throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it for three years. 6 In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

7 For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and they had feared other gods, 8 and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the Lord had cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made. 9 Also the children of Israel secretly did against the Lord their God things that *were* not right, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city. 10 They set up for themselves *sacred* pillars and wooden images[a] on every high hill and under every green tree. 11 There they

17:10 [a] Hebrew *Asherim,* Canaanite deities

Life Lessons

2 Kings 17:1—18:37

SITUATION
Because of its long history of sin and rebellion, the northern kingdom was invaded, beaten, and exiled. Foreigners settled the vacant land and practiced idolatry.

OBSERVATION
God consciously disciplines His people. He knows that it is the only way they can learn certain lessons.

INSPIRATION
It's our duty to pull back the curtains, to expose our fears, each and every one. Like vampires, they can't stand the sunlight. Financial fears, relationship fears, professional fears, safety fears—call them out in prayer. Drag them out by the hand of your mind, and make them stand before God and take their comeuppance!

Jesus made His fears public. He "offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear" (Hebrews 5:7). He prayed loudly enough to be heard and recorded, and He begged His community of friends to pray with Him.

His prayer in the garden becomes, for Christians, a picture of the church in action—a place where fears can be verbalized, pronounced, stripped down, and denounced; an escape from the "wordless darkness" of suppressed frights. A healthy church is where our fears go to die. We pierce them through with Scripture, psalms of celebration and lament. We melt them in the sunlight of

burned incense on all the high places, like the nations whom the Lord had carried away before them; and they did wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger, 12 for they served idols, of which the Lord had said to them, "You shall not do this thing."

13 Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments *and* My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets." 14 Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the Lord their God. 15 And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He had made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He had testified against them; they followed idols, became idolaters, and *went* after the nations who *were* all around them, *concerning* whom the Lord had charged them that they should not do like them. 16 So they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, made for themselves a molded image *and* two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. 17 And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. 18 Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone.

19 Also Judah did not keep the commandments of the Lord their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made. 20 And the Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel, afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of plunderers, until He had cast them from His sight. 21 For He tore Israel from the house of David, and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. Then Jeroboam drove Israel from following the Lord, and made them commit a great sin. 22 For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them, 23 until the Lord removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria, *as it is* to this day.

Assyria Resettles Samaria

24 Then the king of Assyria brought *people* from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed *them* in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria and dwelt in its cities. 25 And it was so, at the beginning of their dwelling there, *that* they did not fear the Lord; therefore the Lord sent lions among them, which killed *some* of them. 26 So they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, "The nations whom you have removed and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the rituals of the God of the land; therefore He has sent lions among them, and indeed, they are killing them because they do not know the rituals of the God of the land." 27 Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, "Send there one of the priests whom you brought from there; let him go and dwell there, and let him teach them the rituals of the God of the land." 28 Then one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the Lord.

confession. We extinguish them with the waterfall of worship, choosing to gaze at God, not our dreads.

The next time you find yourself facing a worst-case moment, do this. Verbalize your angst to a trusted circle of God-seekers. This is an essential step. Find your version of Peter, James, and John. (One hopes yours will stay awake longer.) The big deal (and good news) is this: you needn't live alone with your fear. . . .

As followers of God, you and I have a huge asset. We know everything is going to turn out all right. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God permits some hard times into our lives to teach us. When hardship comes, thank God for this demonstration of love. Then ask Him to help you learn from the situation.

EXPLORATION

Discipline—Deuteronomy 8:5; 2 Samuel 7:14, 15; Hebrews 12:3–11; Revelation 3:19.

29 However every nation continued to make
gods of its own, and put *them* in the shrines
on the high places which the Samaritans had
made, *every* nation in the cities where they
dwelt. 30 The men of Babylon made Succoth
Benoth, the men of Cuth made Nergal, the
men of Hamath made Ashima, 31 and the Avites
made Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Sepharvites
burned their children in fire to Adrammelech
and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim.
32 So they feared the Lord, and from every
class they appointed for themselves priests of
the high places, who sacrificed for them in the
shrines of the high places. 33 They feared the
Lord, yet served their own gods—according to
the rituals of the nations from among whom
they were carried away.

34 To this day they continue practicing the
former rituals; they do not fear the Lord, nor
do they follow their statutes or their ordi-
nances, or the law and commandment which
the Lord had commanded the children of
Jacob, whom He named Israel, 35 with whom
the Lord had made a covenant and charged
them, saying: "You shall not fear other gods,
nor bow down to them nor serve them nor

New Life In Christ

"You shall not forget, nor shall you fear other gods. But the Lord your God you shall fear; and He will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies." —2 Kings 17:38, 39

The One Who Can Save You from Your Enemies

When Jesus says He will keep you safe, He means it. Hell will have to get through Him to get to you. Jesus is able to protect you. When He says he will get you home, He will get you home.

Let me conclude this chapter with an important question. Has Satan invaded a garden of your life? Has he profaned a holy part of your world? Your marriage? Your purity? Your honesty? Has he taken away from you a rose God gave? If so, let Jesus claim it back. Today. Now. Before you turn the page.

Forgive me for sounding urgent, but I am. Satan has no authority over you. If he has invaded a garden of your life, then invite Jesus to reclaim it. Open the gate to God. He will enter and do what He did at Gethsemane. He will pray, and He will protect.

Why don't you do that?

Don't know how? It's easy. I'll help you. Let's pray. You and me. I'll show you the way; you fill in the blanks.

Precious Father, I praise your name. You have reclaimed so much in my life. I was lost, and You found me. I was confused, and You guided me. I had nothing to offer, but still You loved me.

I confess that I still need help. I have a part of my life that needs Your touch. Satan is battling for a garden in my heart. Don't let him win. Drive him out. He is a liar and has been since the beginning. Please defeat him. I'll give You the glory.

Father, here is the area where I need Your strength: _____. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

For more on "New Life in Christ," see page 582.

sacrifice to them; 36 but the Lord, who brought you up from the land of Egypt with great power and an outstretched arm, Him you shall fear, Him you shall worship, and to Him you shall offer sacrifice. 37 And the statutes, the ordinances, the law, and the commandment which He wrote for you, you shall be careful to observe forever; you shall not fear other gods. 38 And the covenant that I have made with you, you shall not forget, nor shall you fear other gods. 39 But the Lord your God you shall fear; and He will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies." 40 However they did not obey, but they followed their former rituals. 41 So these nations feared the Lord, yet served their carved images; also their children and their children's children have continued doing as their fathers did, even to this day.

Hezekiah Reigns in Judah

18 Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea the son of Elah, king of Israel, *that* Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign. 2 He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name *was* Abi[a] the daughter of Zechariah. 3 And he did *what was* right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done.

4 He removed the high places and broke the *sacred* pillars, cut down the wooden image[a] and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan.[b] 5 He trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him. 6 For he held fast to the Lord; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the Lord had commanded Moses. 7 The Lord was with him; he prospered wherever he went. And he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. 8 He subdued the Philistines, as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city.

9 Now it came to pass in the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which *was* the seventh year of Hoshea the son of Elah, king of Israel, *that* Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria and besieged it. 10 And at the end of three years they took it. In the sixth year of Hezekiah, that *is,* the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was taken. 11 Then the king of Assyria carried Israel away captive to Assyria, and put them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes, 12 because they did not obey the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed His covenant *and* all that Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded; and they would neither hear nor do *them.*

13 And in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. 14 Then Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, "I have done wrong; turn away from me; whatever you impose on me I will pay." And the king of Assyria assessed Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. 15 So Hezekiah gave *him* all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasuries of the king's house. 16 At that time Hezekiah stripped *the gold from* the doors of the temple of the Lord, and *from* the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria.

Sennacherib Boasts Against the Lord

17 Then the king of Assyria sent *the* Tartan,[a] *the* Rabsaris,[b] *and the* Rabshakeh[c] from Lachish, with a great army against Jerusalem, to King Hezekiah. And they went up and came to Jerusalem. When they had come up, they went and stood by the aqueduct from the upper pool, which *was* on the highway to the Fuller's Field. 18 And when they had called to the king, Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who *was* over the household, Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came out to them. 19 Then *the* Rabshakeh said to them, "Say now to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: "What confidence *is*

18:2 [a]Called *Abijah* in 2 Chronicles 29:1ff **18:4** [a]Hebrew *Asherah,* a Canaanite goddess [b]Literally *Bronze Thing*
18:17 [a]A title, probably *Commander in Chief* [b]A title, probably *Chief Officer* [c]A title, probably *Chief of Staff* or *Governor*

this in which you trust? 20 You speak of *having* plans and power for war; but *they are* mere words. And in whom do you trust, that you rebel against me? 21 Now look! You are trusting in the staff of this broken reed, Egypt, on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So *is* Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him. 22 But if you say to me, 'We trust in the Lord our God,' *is* it not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and said to Judah and Jerusalem, 'You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem'?" ' 23 Now therefore, I urge you, give a pledge to my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses—if you are able on your part to put riders on them! 24 How then will you repel one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put your trust in Egypt for chariots and horsemen? 25 Have I now come up without the Lord against this place to destroy it? The Lord said to me, 'Go up against this land, and destroy it.' "

26 Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, Shebna, and Joah said to *the* Rabshakeh, "Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand *it;* and do not speak to us in Hebrew[a] in the hearing of the people who *are* on the wall."

27 But *the* Rabshakeh said to them, "Has my master sent me to your master and to you to speak these words, and not to the men who sit on the wall, who will eat and drink their own waste with you?"

28 Then *the* Rabshakeh stood and called out with a loud voice in Hebrew, and spoke, saying, "Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria! 29 Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he shall not be able to deliver you from his hand; 30 nor let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord, saying, "The Lord will surely deliver us; this city shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria." ' 31 Do not listen to Hezekiah; for thus says the king of Assyria: 'Make *peace* with me by a present and come out to me; and every one of you eat from his own vine and every one from his own fig tree, and every one of you drink the waters of his own cistern; 32 until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive groves and honey, that you may live and not die. But do not listen to Hezekiah, lest he persuade you, saying, "The Lord will deliver us." 33 Has any of the gods of the nations at all delivered its land from the hand of the king of Assyria? 34 Where *are* the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where *are* the gods of Sepharvaim and Hena and Ivah? Indeed, have they delivered Samaria from my hand? 35 Who among all the gods of the lands have delivered their countries from my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?' "

36 But the people held their peace and answered him not a word; for the king's commandment was, "Do not answer him." 37 Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who *was* over the household, Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with *their* clothes torn, and told him the words of *the* Rabshakeh.

Isaiah Assures Deliverance

19 And so it was, when King Hezekiah heard *it,* that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord. 2 Then he sent Eliakim, who *was* over the household, Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz. 3 And they said to him, "Thus says Hezekiah: 'This day *is* a day of trouble, and rebuke, and blasphemy; for the children have come to birth, but *there is* no strength to bring them forth. 4 It may be that the Lord your God will hear all the words of *the* Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to reproach the living God, and will rebuke the words which the Lord your God has heard. Therefore lift up *your* prayer for the remnant that is left.' "

5 So the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah. 6 And Isaiah said to them, "Thus you shall say to your master, 'Thus says the Lord: "Do not be afraid of the words which you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. 7 Surely I will send a spirit upon him, and he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land." ' "

18:26 [a] Literally *Judean*

Sennacherib's Threat and Hezekiah's Prayer

8 Then *the* Rabshakeh returned and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah, for he heard that he had departed from Lachish.
9 And the king heard concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, "Look, he has come out to make war with you." So he again sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, 10 "Thus you shall speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying: 'Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, "Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria." 11 Look! You have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by utterly destroying them; and shall you be delivered?
12 Have the gods of the nations delivered those whom my fathers have destroyed, Gozan and Haran and Rezeph, and the people of Eden who *were* in Telassar? 13 Where *is* the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah?' "

14 And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord. 15 Then Hezekiah prayed before the Lord, and said: "O Lord God of Israel, *the One* who dwells *between* the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. 16 Incline Your ear, O Lord, and hear; open Your eyes, O Lord, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. 17 Truly, Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands,
18 and have cast their gods into the fire; for they *were* not gods, but the work of men's hands—wood and stone. Therefore they destroyed them. 19 Now therefore, O Lord our God, I pray, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You *are* the Lord God, You alone."

The Word of the Lord Concerning Sennacherib

20 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Because you have prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Assyria, I have heard.' 21 This *is* the word which the Lord has spoken concerning him:

'The virgin, the daughter of Zion,
Has despised you, laughed you to scorn;
The daughter of Jerusalem
Has shaken *her* head behind your back!

22 'Whom have you reproached and blasphemed?
Against whom have you raised *your* voice,
And lifted up your eyes on high?
Against the Holy *One* of Israel.
23 By your messengers you have reproached the Lord,
And said: "By the multitude of my chariots
I have come up to the height of the mountains,
To the limits of Lebanon;
I will cut down its tall cedars
And its choice cypress trees;
I will enter the extremity of its borders,
To its fruitful forest.

Life Lessons

2 Kings 19:1—21:26

SITUATION
Because God loved Hezekiah, He healed him. Hezekiah prayed, God healed, and the king lived.

OBSERVATION
When the prophet told Hezekiah he was going to die, Hezekiah wept. He was afraid of dying, just as many people are.

INSPIRATION
We'd appreciate some say-so regarding our death. Couldn't God let us sign up for a departure date? Most would request the one-hundred-year package of good health followed by a long nap from which we wake up in heaven.

God, however, didn't delegate death's datebook. For reasons undisclosed, He runs it without our advice. But while the date of your death isn't revealed, its inevitability is. "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). . . .

"What man can live and not see death?" (Psalm 89:48). You won't find one in your mirror. You, as all God's children, live one final breath from your own funeral.

Which, from God's perspective, is nothing to grieve. He responds to these grave facts with this great news: "The day of death is better than the day of one's birth" (Ecclesiastes 7:1). Now there is a twist. Heaven enjoys a maternity-ward reaction to funerals. Angels watch body burials the same way grandparents monitor delivery-room doors. "He'll be coming

through any minute!" They can't wait to see the new arrival. While we're driving hearses and wearing black, they're hanging pink and blue streamers and passing out cigars. We don't grieve when babies enter the world. The hosts of heaven don't weep when we leave it. (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How might these words of Scripture change your view of death? Are you afraid of dying? Ask God to help you trust that He will appoint for you exactly the right number of days on earth—and then, if you're a believer, an eternity with Him.

EXPLORATION

Christ's Victory Over Death—1 Corinthians 15:24–26, 54–57; 2 Timothy 1:10; Hebrews 2:14; Revelation 1:18.

24 I have dug and drunk strange water,
And with the soles of my feet I have dried up
All the brooks of defense."

25 'Did you not hear long ago
How I made it,
From ancient times that I formed it?
Now I have brought it to pass,
That you should be
For crushing fortified cities *into* heaps of ruins.
26 Therefore their inhabitants had little power;
They were dismayed and confounded;
They were *as* the grass of the field
And the green herb,
As the grass on the housetops
And *grain* blighted before it is grown.

27 'But I know your dwelling place,
Your going out and your coming in,
And your rage against Me.
28 Because your rage against Me and your tumult
Have come up to My ears,
Therefore I will put My hook in your nose
And My bridle in your lips,
And I will turn you back
By the way which you came.

29 'This *shall be* a sign to you:

You shall eat this year such as grows of itself,
And in the second year what springs from the same;
Also in the third year sow and reap,
Plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them.
30 And the remnant who have escaped of the house of Judah
Shall again take root downward,
And bear fruit upward.
31 For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant,
And those who escape from Mount Zion.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts[a] will do this.'

32 "Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria:

'He shall not come into this city,
Nor shoot an arrow there,
Nor come before it with shield,
Nor build a siege mound against it.
33 By the way that he came,
By the same shall he return;
And he shall not come into this city,'
Says the Lord.

19:31 [a]Following many Hebrew manuscripts and ancient versions (compare Isaiah 37:32); Masoretic Text omits *of hosts*.

34 ‘For I will defend this city, to save it
For My own sake and for My servant
David’s sake.’ ”

Sennacherib’s Defeat and Death

35 And it came to pass on a certain night that the angel[a] of the Lord went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when *people* arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead. 36 So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned *home,* and remained at Nineveh. 37 Now it came to pass, as he was worshiping in the temple of Nisroch his god, that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Then Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.

Hezekiah’s Life Extended

20 In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, “Thus says the Lord: ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live.’ ”

2 Then he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the Lord, saying, 3 “Remember now, O Lord, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done *what was* good in Your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

4 And it happened, before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 5 “Return and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, ‘Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: “I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the Lord. 6 And I will add to your days fifteen years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake, and for the sake of My servant David.” ’ ”

7 Then Isaiah said, “Take a lump of figs.” So they took and laid *it* on the boil, and he recovered.

8 And Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “What *is* the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the Lord the third day?”

9 Then Isaiah said, “This is the sign to you from the Lord, that the Lord will do the thing which He has spoken: *shall* the shadow go forward ten degrees or go backward ten degrees?”

10 And Hezekiah answered, “It is an easy thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees; no, but let the shadow go backward ten degrees.”

11 So Isaiah the prophet cried out to the Lord, and He brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down on the sundial of Ahaz.

The Babylonian Envoys

12 At that time Berodach-Baladan[a] the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick. 13 And Hezekiah was attentive to them, and showed them all the house of his treasures—the silver and gold, the spices and precious ointment, and all[a] his armory—all that was found among his treasures. There was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them.

14 Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah, and said to him, “What did these men say, and from where did they come to you?”

So Hezekiah said, “They came from a far country, from Babylon.”

15 And he said, “What have they seen in your house?”

So Hezekiah answered, “They have seen all that *is* in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them.”

16 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the Lord: 17 ‘Behold, the days are coming when all that *is* in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,’ says the Lord. 18 ‘And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.’ ”

19 So Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the Lord which you have spoken *is* good!” For he said, “Will there not be peace and truth at least in my days?”

19:35 [a]Or *Angel* **20:12** [a]Spelled *Merodach-Baladan* in Isaiah 39:1 **20:13** [a]Following many Hebrew manuscripts, Syriac, and Targum; Masoretic Text omits *all.*

Death of Hezekiah

20 Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah—all
his might, and how he made a pool and a tun-
nel and brought water into the city—*are* they
not written in the book of the chronicles of
the kings of Judah? 21 So Hezekiah rested with
his fathers. Then Manasseh his son reigned in
his place.

Manasseh Reigns in Judah

21 Manasseh *was* twelve years old when
he became king, and he reigned fifty-
five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name
was Hephzibah. 2 And he did evil in the sight
of the Lord, according to the abominations
of the nations whom the Lord had cast out
before the children of Israel. 3 For he rebuilt
the high places which Hezekiah his father had
destroyed; he raised up altars for Baal, and
made a wooden image,[a] as Ahab king of Israel
had done; and he worshiped all the host of
heaven[b] and served them. 4 He also built altars
in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had
said, "In Jerusalem I will put My name." 5 And
he built altars for all the host of heaven in the
two courts of the house of the Lord. 6 Also he
made his son pass through the fire, practiced
soothsaying, used witchcraft, and consulted
spiritists and mediums. He did much evil in
the sight of the Lord, to provoke *Him* to anger.
7 He even set a carved image of Asherah[a] that
he had made, in the house of which the Lord
had said to David and to Solomon his son,
"In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have
chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put
My name forever; 8 and I will not make the feet
of Israel wander anymore from the land which
I gave their fathers—only if they are careful to
do according to all that I have commanded
them, and according to all the law that My
servant Moses commanded them." 9 But they
paid no attention, and Manasseh seduced
them to do more evil than the nations whom
the Lord had destroyed before the children of
Israel.

10 And the Lord spoke by His servants the
prophets, saying, 11 "Because Manasseh king
of Judah has done these abominations (he
has acted more wickedly than all the Amorites
who *were* before him, and has also made
Judah sin with his idols), 12 therefore thus says
the Lord God of Israel: 'Behold, *I* am bringing
such calamity upon Jerusalem and Judah, that
whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle.
13 And I will stretch over Jerusalem the mea-
suring line of Samaria and the plummet of the
house of Ahab; I will wipe Jerusalem as *one*
wipes a dish, wiping *it* and turning *it* upside
down. 14 So I will forsake the remnant of My
inheritance and deliver them into the hand of
their enemies; and they shall become victims
of plunder to all their enemies, 15 because they
have done evil in My sight, and have provoked
Me to anger since the day their fathers came
out of Egypt, even to this day.' "

16 Moreover Manasseh shed very much
innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem
from one end to another, besides his sin by
which he made Judah sin, in doing evil in the
sight of the Lord.

17 Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh—all
that he did, and the sin that he committed—
are they not written in the book of the chron-
icles of the kings of Judah? 18 So Manasseh
rested with his fathers, and was buried in the
garden of his own house, in the garden of
Uzza. Then his son Amon reigned in his place.

Amon's Reign and Death

19 Amon *was* twenty-two years old when he
became king, and he reigned two years in Jeru-
salem. His mother's name *was* Meshullemeth
the daughter of Haruz of Jotbah. 20 And he
did evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father
Manasseh had done. 21 So he walked in all
the ways that his father had walked; and he
served the idols that his father had served,
and worshiped them. 22 He forsook the Lord
God of his fathers, and did not walk in the way
of the Lord.

23 Then the servants of Amon conspired
against him, and killed the king in his own
house. 24 But the people of the land executed
all those who had conspired against King
Amon. Then the people of the land made his
son Josiah king in his place.

25 Now the rest of the acts of Amon which
he did, *are* they not written in the book of the
chronicles of the kings of Judah? 26 And he was

21:3 [a]Hebrew *Asherah,* a Canaanite goddess [b]The gods of the Assryians **21:7** [a]A Canaanite goddess

buried in his tomb in the garden of Uzza. Then Josiah his son reigned in his place.

Josiah Reigns in Judah

22 Josiah *was* eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name *was* Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath. 2And he did *what was* right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.

Hilkiah Finds the Book of the Law

3Now it came to pass, in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, *that* the king sent Shaphan the scribe, the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, to the house of the Lord, saying: 4"Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may count the money which has been brought into the house of the Lord, which the doorkeepers have gathered from the people. 5And let them deliver it into the hand of those doing the work, who are the overseers in the house of the Lord; let them give it to those who *are* in the house of the Lord doing the work, to repair the damages of the house— 6to carpenters and builders and masons— and to buy timber and hewn stone to repair the house. 7However there need be no accounting made with them of the money delivered into their hand, because they deal faithfully."

8Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord." And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. 9So Shaphan the scribe went to the king, bringing the king word, saying, "Your servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of those who do the work, who oversee the house of the Lord." 10Then Shaphan the scribe showed the king, saying, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read it before the king.

11Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, that he tore his clothes. 12Then the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Achbor[a] the son of Michaiah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king, saying, 13"Go, inquire of the Lord for me, for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great *is* the wrath of the Lord that is aroused against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us."

14So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. (She dwelt in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter.) And they spoke with her. 15Then she said to them, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel, 'Tell the man who sent you to Me, 16"Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will bring calamity on this place and on its inhabitants—all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read— 17because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands. Therefore My wrath shall be aroused against this place

22:12 [a]*Abdon the son of Micah* in 2 Chronicles 34:20

Life Lessons

2 Kings 22:1—23:35

SITUATION
Josiah obeyed God with undivided devotion and initiated thorough reforms. While repairing the formerly neglected temple, God's Word was found. Josiah used God's Word to bring drastic changes to the nation's lifestyle.

OBSERVATION
God used one man to bring a revival to an entire nation.

INSPIRATION
Maybe your past isn't much to brag about. Maybe you've seen raw evil. And now you, like Josiah, have to make a choice. Do you rise above the past and make a difference? Or do you remain controlled by the past and make excuses?

Many choose the latter.

Many choose the convalescent homes of the heart. Healthy bodies. Sharp minds. But retired dreams. Back and forth they rock in the chair of regret, repeating the terms of surrender. Lean closely and you will hear them: "If only." The white flag of the heart.

"If only . . ."

"If only I'd been born somewhere else . . ."

"If only I'd been treated fairly . . ."

"If only I'd had kinder parents, more money, greater opportunities . . ."

"If only I'd been potty-trained sooner, spanked less, or taught to eat without slurping."

Maybe you've used those words. Maybe you have every right to use them. Perhaps you, like Josiah, were hearing the ten count before you even got into

the ring. For you to find an ancestor worth imitating, you, like Josiah, have to flip way back in your family album.

If such is the case, let me show you where to turn. Put down the scrapbook and pick up your Bible. Go to John's Gospel and read Jesus' words: "Human life comes from human parents, but spiritual life comes from the Spirit" (John 3:6 NCV).

Think about that. Spiritual life comes from the Spirit! Your parents may have given you genes, but God gives you grace. Your parents may be responsible for your body, but God has taken charge of your soul. You may get your looks from your mother, but you get eternity from your Father, your heavenly Father. . . .

God has not left you adrift on a sea of heredity. Just like Josiah, you cannot control the way your forefathers responded to God. But you can control the way you respond to Him. The past does not have to be your prison. You have a voice in your destiny. You have a say in your life. You have a choice in the path you take.

Choose well and someday—generations from now—your grandchildren and great-grandchildren will thank God for the seeds you sowed. (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How many times during the last week did you read your Bible? Develop an action plan for making God's message all-important in your life. Equip yourself to pass on a righteous legacy.

and shall not be quenched.'"' 18 But as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, in this manner you shall speak to him, 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "*Concerning* the words which you have heard— 19 because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard *you,*" says the Lord. 20 "Surely, therefore, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place."'" So they brought back word to the king.

Josiah Restores True Worship

23 Now the king sent them to gather all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem to him. 2 The king went up to the house of the Lord with all the men of Judah, and with him all the inhabitants of Jerusalem—the priests and the prophets and all the people, both small and great. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the house of the Lord.

3 Then the king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all *his* heart and all *his* soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people took a stand for the covenant. 4 And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, the priests of the second order, and the doorkeepers, to bring out of the temple of the Lord all the articles that were made for Baal, for Asherah,[a] and for all the host of heaven;[b] and he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel. 5 Then he removed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense on the high places in the cities of Judah and in the places all around Jerusalem, and those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, to the moon, to the constellations, and to all the host of heaven. 6 And he brought out the wooden image[a] from the house of the Lord, to the Brook Kidron outside Jerusalem, burned it at the Brook Kidron and ground *it* to ashes, and threw its ashes on the graves of the common people. 7 Then he tore down the *ritual* booths of the perverted persons[a] that *were* in the house of the Lord, where the women wove hangings for the wooden image. 8 And he brought all the priests from the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beersheba; also he broke down the high places at the gates which *were* at the entrance of the Gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which *were* to the left of the city gate. 9 Nevertheless the priests of the high places did not come up to the altar of the Lord in Jerusalem, but they ate unleavened bread among their brethren.

10 And he defiled Topheth, which *is* in the Valley of the Son[a] of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire to Molech. 11 Then he removed the horses that the

23:4 [a]A Canaanite goddess [b]The gods of the Assyrians **23:6** [a]Hebrew *Asherah,* a Canaanite goddess **23:7** [a]Hebrew *qedeshim,* that is, those practicing sodomy and prostitution in religious rituals **23:10** [a]Kethib reads *Sons.*

kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the Lord, by the chamber of Nathan-Melech, the officer who *was* in the court; and he burned the chariots of the sun with fire. 12 The altars that *were* on the roof, the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the Lord, the king broke down and pulverized there, and threw their dust into the Brook Kidron. 13 Then the king defiled the high places that *were* east of Jerusalem, which *were* on the south of the Mount of Corruption, which Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the people of Ammon. 14 And he broke in pieces the *sacred* pillars and cut down the wooden images, and filled their places with the bones of men.

15 Moreover the altar that *was* at Bethel, *and* the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made, both that altar and the high place he broke down; and he burned the high place *and* crushed *it* to powder, and burned the wooden image. 16 As Josiah turned, he saw the tombs that *were* there on the mountain. And he sent and took the bones out of the tombs and burned *them* on the altar, and defiled it according to the word of the Lord which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words. 17 Then he said, "What gravestone *is* this that I see?"

So the men of the city told him, "*It is* the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and proclaimed these things which you have done against the altar of Bethel."

18 And he said, "Let him alone; let no one move his bones." So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet who came from Samaria.

19 Now Josiah also took away all the shrines of the high places that *were* in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the Lord[a] to anger; and he did to them according to all the deeds he had done in Bethel. 20 He executed all the priests of the high places who *were* there, on the altars, and burned men's bones on them; and he returned to Jerusalem.

21 Then the king commanded all the people, saying, "Keep the Passover to the Lord your God, as *it is* written in this Book of the Covenant." 22 Such a Passover surely had never been held since the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah. 23 But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this Passover was held before the Lord in Jerusalem. 24 Moreover Josiah put away those who consulted mediums and spiritists, the household gods and idols, all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord. 25 Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did *any* arise like him.

23:19 [a] Following Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text and Targum omit *the Lord*.

EXPLORATION
Scripture—Deuteronomy 17:18–20; 2 Kings 22:11; Psalm 119:19, 105; 2 Timothy 3:15–17.

Life Lessons

2 Kings 23:36—25:30

SITUATION
Each of the last three kings of Judah rebelled against the Babylonians. Each time, Babylon brought quick and severe retribution. They displaced people, looted the temple, and destroyed Jerusalem. Even though Israel's captivity had been foretold for over a century by various prophets, the people and their leaders refused to listen and stop sinning.

OBSERVATION
God warned the people for over one hundred years that continued disobedience would lead to disaster. We get into trouble when we forget what God has done for us.

INSPIRATION
Abraham Lincoln once listened to the pleas of the mother of a soldier who'd been sentenced to hang for treason. She begged the President to grant a pardon. Lincoln agreed. Yet, he's reported to have left the lady with the following words: "Still, I wish we could teach him a lesson. I wish we could give him just a little bit of hangin'."

I think I know what the old railsplitter had in mind. Yesterday, I got a little bit of hangin'.

We were having Sunday lunch at the home of a fellow missionary family. It was after the meal. . . . Their three-year-old daughter Beth Ann was playing with our two-year-old Jenna in the front yard. All of a sudden Beth Ann rushed in with a look of panic on her face. "Jenna is in the pool!"

Impending Judgment on Judah

26 Nevertheless the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of His
great wrath, with which His anger was aroused against Judah, because
of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him.
27 And the Lord said, "I will also remove Judah from My sight, as I have
removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have cho-
sen, and the house of which I said, 'My name shall be there.' "[a]

Josiah Dies in Battle

28 Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, *are* they
not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 29 In
his days Pharaoh Necho king of Egypt went to the aid of the king of
Assyria, to the River Euphrates; and King Josiah went against him.
And *Pharaoh Necho* killed him at Megiddo when he confronted
him. 30 Then his servants moved his body in a chariot from Megiddo,
brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own tomb. And the
people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, anointed him, and
made him king in his father's place.

The Reign and Captivity of Jehoahaz

31 Jehoahaz *was* twenty-three years old when he became king,
and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. His mother's name *was*
Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. 32 And he did evil in the
sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done. 33 Now
Pharaoh Necho put him in prison at Riblah in the land of Hamath,
that he might not reign in Jerusalem; and he imposed on the land a
tribute of one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. 34 Then
Pharaoh Necho made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in place of his
father Josiah, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. And *Pharaoh* took
Jehoahaz and went to Egypt, and he[a] died there.

Jehoiakim Reigns in Judah

35 So Jehoiakim gave the silver and gold to Pharaoh; but he taxed
the land to give money according to the command of Pharaoh;
he exacted the silver and gold from the people of the land, from
every one according to his assessment, to give *it* to Pharaoh Necho.
36 Jehoiakim *was* twenty-five years old when he became king, and he
reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name *was* Zebudah
the daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah. 37 And he did evil in the sight of
the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done.

Judah Overrun by Enemies

24 In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and
Jehoiakim became his vassal *for* three years. Then he turned
and rebelled against him. 2 And the Lord sent against him *raiding*
bands of Chaldeans, bands of Syrians, bands of Moabites, and bands
of the people of Ammon; He sent them against Judah to destroy it,
according to the word of the Lord which He had spoken by His ser-
vants the prophets. 3 Surely at the commandment of the Lord *this*
came upon Judah, to remove *them* from His sight because of the sins

23:27 [a]1 Kings 8:29 **23:34** [a]That is, Jehoahaz

of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, 4 and also because of the innocent blood that he had shed; for he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which the Lord would not pardon.

5 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 6 So Jehoiakim rested with his fathers. Then Jehoiachin his son reigned in his place.

7 And the king of Egypt did not come out of his land anymore, for the king of Babylon had taken all that belonged to the king of Egypt from the Brook of Egypt to the River Euphrates.

The Reign and Captivity of Jehoiachin

8 Jehoiachin *was* eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. His mother's name *was* Nehushta the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. 9 And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done.

10 At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. 11 And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, as his servants were besieging it. 12 Then Jehoiachin king of Judah, his mother, his servants, his princes, and his officers went out to the king of Babylon; and the king of Babylon, in the eighth year of his reign, took him prisoner.

The Captivity of Jerusalem

13 And he carried out from there all the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house, and he cut in pieces all the articles of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the Lord, as the Lord had said. 14 Also he carried into captivity all Jerusalem: all the captains and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths. None remained except the poorest people of the land. 15 And he carried Jehoiachin captive to Babylon. The king's mother, the king's wives, his officers, and the mighty of the land he carried into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. 16 All the valiant men, seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths, one thousand, all *who were* strong *and* fit for war, these the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon.

Zedekiah Reigns in Judah

17 Then the king of Babylon made Mattaniah, *Jehoiachin's*[a] uncle, king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah.

18 Zedekiah *was* twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name *was* Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. 19 He also did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. 20 For because of the anger of the Lord *this* happened in Jerusalem and Judah, that He finally cast them out from His presence. Then Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

24:17 [a] Literally *his*

Paul was the first to arrive at the poolside . . . [and] lifted her up out of the water to the extended hands of her mother. Jenna was simultaneously choking, crying, and coughing. She vomited a bellyful of water. I held her as she cried. Denalyn began to weep. I began to sweat.

For the rest of the day I couldn't hold her enough, nor could we thank Beth Ann enough. . . . I still can't thank God enough.

It was a little bit of hangin'. . . . Because of it, I came face to face with one of the underground's slyest agents—the agent of familiarity. . . .

To say that this agent of familiarity breeds contempt is to let him off easy. Contempt is just one of his offspring. He also sires broken hearts, wasted hours, and an insatiable desire for more. . . . He won't take your children, he'll just make you too busy to notice them. His whispers to procrastinate are seductive. There is always next summer to coach the team, next month to go to the lake, and next week to teach Johnny how to pray. He'll make you forget that the faces around your table will soon be at tables of their own. Hence, books will go unread, games will go unplayed, hearts will go unnurtured, and opportunities will go ignored. All because the poison of the ordinary has deadened your senses to the magic of the moment. . . .

On a shelf above my desk is a picture of two little girls. They're holding hands and standing in front of a swimming pool, the same pool from which the younger of the two had been pulled only minutes before. I put the picture

where I would see it daily so I would remember what God doesn't want me to forget.

And you can bet this time I'm going to remember. I don't want any more hangin'. Not even a little bit. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What has God done for you? What can you do to help yourself remember His blessings and protection on your life?

EXPLORATION

Disobedience—Genesis 3:13–19; Exodus 8:15; Numbers 20:1–13; 1 Chronicles 10:13, 14; Isaiah 3:1–9.

The Fall and Captivity of Judah

25 Now it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth *day* of the month, *that* Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came against Jerusalem and encamped against it; and they built a siege wall against it all around. 2 So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. 3 By the ninth *day* of the *fourth* month the famine had become so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land.

4 Then the city wall was broken through, and all the men of war *fled* at night by way of the gate between two walls, which was by the king's garden, even though the Chaldeans *were* still encamped all around against the city. And *the king*[a] went by way of the plain.[b] 5 But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and they overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his army was scattered from him. 6 So they took the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they pronounced judgment on him. 7 Then they killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, put out the eyes of Zedekiah, bound him with bronze fetters, and took him to Babylon.

8 And in the fifth month, on the seventh *day* of the month (which *was* the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. 9 He burned the house of the Lord and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire. 10 And all the army of the Chaldeans who *were with* the captain of the guard broke down the walls of Jerusalem all around.

11 Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive the rest of the people *who* remained in the city and the defectors who had deserted to the king of Babylon, with the rest of the multitude. 12 But the captain of the guard left *some* of the poor of the land as vinedressers and farmers. 13 The bronze pillars that *were* in the house of the Lord, and the carts and the bronze Sea that *were* in the house of the Lord, the Chaldeans broke in pieces, and carried their bronze to Babylon. 14 They also took away the pots, the shovels, the trimmers, the spoons, and all the bronze utensils with which the priests ministered. 15 The firepans and the basins, the things of solid gold and solid silver, the captain of the guard took away. 16 The two pillars, one Sea, and the carts, which Solomon had made for the house of the Lord, the bronze of all these articles was beyond measure. 17 The height of one pillar *was* eighteen cubits, and the capital on it *was* of bronze. The height of the capital was three cubits, and the network and pomegranates all around the capital were all of bronze. The second pillar was the same, with a network.

18 And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, Zephaniah the second priest, and the three doorkeepers. 19 He also took out of the city an officer who had charge of the men of war, five men of the king's close associates who were found in the city, the chief recruiting officer of the army, who mustered the people of the land, and sixty men of the people of the land *who were* found in the city. 20 So Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, took these and brought them to

25:4 [a] Literally *he* [b] Or *Arabah*, that is, the Jordan Valley

the king of Babylon at Riblah. 21 Then the king of Babylon struck them and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. Thus Judah was carried away captive from its own land.

Gedaliah Made Governor of Judah

22 Then he made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, governor over the people who remained in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left. 23 Now when all the captains of the armies, they and *their* men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah governor, they came to Gedaliah at Mizpah—Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, Johanan the son of Careah, Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah[a] the son of a Maachathite, they and their men. 24 And Gedaliah took an oath before them and their men, and said to them, "Do not be afraid of the servants of the Chaldeans. Dwell in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you."

25 But it happened in the seventh month that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the royal family, came with ten men and struck and killed Gedaliah, the Jews, as well as the Chaldeans who were with him at Mizpah. 26 And all the people, small and great, and the captains of the armies, arose and went to Egypt; for they were afraid of the Chaldeans.

Jehoiachin Released from Prison

27 Now it came to pass in the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh *day* of the month, *that* Evil-Merodach[a] king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, released Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison. 28 He spoke kindly to him, and gave him a more prominent seat than those of the kings who *were* with him in Babylon. 29 So Jehoiachin changed from his prison garments, and he ate bread regularly before the king all the days of his life. 30 And as for his provisions, *there was* a regular ration given him by the king, a portion for each day, all the days of his life.

25:23 [a]Spelled *Jezaniah* in Jeremiah 40:8 **25:27** [a]Literally *Man of Marduk*

THE BOOK OF

1 CHRONICLES

INTRODUCTION

Ever been held up by a grandparent?

You naively ask how the grandkids are, and before you know it the purse opens and out pops a billfold thick with pictures.

"This is Joey in the third grade holding his puppy named Snapper. And this is Joey in the fourth grade on his little league team where he played second base. And this is Joey in the fifth grade. The kid behind him is his cousin Terry who is living in Seattle with his dad. I've got some pictures of them I'll show you in just a minute. But first let me show you Joey in the seventh grade wearing his football uniform . . ."

Yawn.

Hard to stay interested hearing names of people you'll never see who live in places you'll never know.

Such is the case with the Book of 1 Chronicles. Full of names, many hard to pronounce. Full of places, most of which you'll never see. The book won't keep you on the edge of your seat. It wasn't intended to. It will, however, provide you with a catalog of facts and names of people who matter to God.

Which reminds us of an encouraging truth: God keeps up with His children. He knows their names and keeps them in a book. What may be dry to us matters to Him, because they are His kids. By the way, He's working on a new volume. This one is titled the Book of Life.

Is your name in it?

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Probably Ezra

Date Written: 500–400 B.C.

Key Themes:

- While David was not allowed to build the temple, it was still his heart's desire that God be honored by a permanent place of worship.
- The people of David's kingdom honored God by contributing to the temple construction.
- David was not a perfect king, but he was still a king who acknowledged God with his life.

Key Verse:

"For You have made Your people Israel Your very own people forever; and You, Lord, have become their God" (1 Chronicles 17:22).

Contents:

I. Genealogies 1:1—9:44

II. David's Reign 10:1—20:8

III. Preparations for the Temple 21:1—29:20

IV. From David to Solomon 29:21–30

The Family of Adam—Seth to Abraham

Adam, Seth, Enosh, 2 Cainan,[a] Mahalalel, Jared, 3 Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, 4 Noah,[a] Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

5 The sons of Japheth *were* Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. 6 The sons of Gomer *were* Ashkenaz, Diphath,[a] and Togarmah. 7 The sons of Javan *were* Elishah, Tarshishah,[a] Kittim, and Rodanim.[b]

8 The sons of Ham *were* Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. 9 The sons of Cush *were* Seba, Havilah, Sabta,[a] Raama,[b] and Sabtecha. The sons of Raama *were* Sheba and Dedan. 10 Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. 11 Mizraim begot Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, 12 Pathrusim, Casluhim (from whom came the Philistines and the Caphtorim). 13 Canaan begot Sidon, his firstborn, and Heth; 14 the Jebusite, the Amorite, and the Girgashite; 15 the Hivite, the Arkite, and the Sinite; 16 the Arvadite, the Zemarite, and the Hamathite.

17 The sons of Shem *were* Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, Aram, Uz, Hul, Gether, and Meshech.[a] 18 Arphaxad begot Shelah, and Shelah begot Eber. 19 To Eber were born two sons: the name of one *was* Peleg,[a] for in his days the earth was divided; and his brother's name *was* Joktan. 20 Joktan begot Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, 21 Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, 22 Ebal,[a] Abimael, Sheba, 23 Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. All these *were* the sons of Joktan.

24 Shem, Arphaxad, Shelah, 25 Eber, Peleg, Reu, 26 Serug, Nahor, Terah, 27 and Abram, who *is* Abraham. 28 The sons of Abraham *were* Isaac and Ishmael.

The Family of Ishmael

29 These *are* their genealogies: The firstborn of Ishmael *was* Nebajoth; then Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, 30 Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad,[a] Tema, 31 Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. These *were* the sons of Ishmael.

The Family of Keturah

32 Now the sons born to Keturah, Abraham's concubine, *were* Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. The sons of Jokshan *were* Sheba and Dedan. 33 The sons of Midian *were* Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah.

The Family of Isaac

34 And Abraham begot Isaac. The sons of Isaac *were* Esau and Israel. 35 The sons of Esau *were* Eliphaz, Reuel, Jeush, Jaalam, and Korah. 36 And the sons of Eliphaz *were* Teman, Omar, Zephi,[a] Gatam, *and* Kenaz; and *by* Timna,[b] Amalek. 37 The sons of Reuel *were* Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah.

1:2 [a]Hebrew *Qenan* **1:4** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Septuagint adds *the sons of Noah*. **1:6** [a]Spelled *Riphath* in Genesis 10:3 **1:7** [a]Spelled *Tarshish* in Genesis 10:4 [b]Spelled *Dodanim* in Genesis 10:4 **1:9** [a]Spelled *Sabtah* in Genesis 10:7 [b]Spelled *Raamah* in Genesis 10:7 **1:17** [a]Spelled *Mash* in Genesis 10:23 **1:19** [a]Literally *Division* **1:22** [a]Spelled *Obal* in Genesis 10:28 **1:30** [a]Spelled *Hadar* in Genesis 25:15 **1:36** [a]Spelled *Zepho* in Genesis 36:11 [b]Compare Genesis 36:12

Life Lessons

1 Chronicles 1:1—3:24

SITUATION

Chronicles was written after the exile to help those returning to Israel understand how to worship God. The history focused on the southern kingdom—the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi. These tribes tended to be more faithful to God.

OBSERVATION

God knows every person who has ever lived. We are not just faceless numbers among the thousands of years of humanity. God concerns Himself with every person and detail. We should never feel insignificant.

INSPIRATION

Seated at the great desk, the Author opens the large book. It has no words. It has no words because no words exist. No words exist because no words are needed. There are no ears to hear them, no eyes to read them. The Author is alone.

And so He takes the great pen and begins to write. Like an artist gathers his colors and a woodcarver his tools, the Author assembles His words.

There are three. Three single words. Out of these three will pour a million thoughts. But on these three words, the story will suspend.

He takes His quill and spells the first. *T-i-m-e.*

Time did not exist until He wrote it. He, Himself, is timeless, but His story would be encased in time. The story would have a first rising of the sun, a first shifting of the sand. A

beginning . . . and an end. A final chapter. He knows it before He writes it.

Time. A footspan on eternity's trail.

Slowly, tenderly, the Author writes the second word. A name. *A-d-a-m.*

As He writes, He sees him, the first Adam. Then He sees all the others. In a thousand eras in a thousand lands, the Author sees them. Each Adam. Each child. Instantly loved. Permanently loved. To each He assigns a time. To each He appoints a place. No accidents. No coincidences. Just design.

The Author makes a promise to these unborn: In My image, I will make you. You will be like Me. You will laugh. You will create. You will never die. And you will write.

They must. For each life is a book, not to be read, but rather a story to be written. The Author starts each life story, but each life will write his or her own ending.

What a dangerous liberty. How much safer it would have been to finish the story for each Adam. To script every option. It would have been simpler. It would have been safer. But it would not have been love. Love is only love if chosen.

So the Author decides to give each child a pen. "Write carefully," He whispers.

Lovingly, deliberately, He writes the third word, already feeling the pain. *E-m-m-a-n-u-e-l.*

The greatest mind in the universe imagined time. The truest judge granted Adam a choice. But it was love that gave Emmanuel, God with us.

The Author would enter His own story.

The Word would become flesh. He, too, would be born. He, too, would human. He, too, would

The Family of Seir

38 The sons of Seir *were* Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer,
and Dishan. 39 And the sons of Lotan *were* Hori and Homam; Lotan's
sister *was* Timna. 40 The sons of Shobal *were* Alian,[a] Manahath, Ebal,
Shephi,[b] and Onam. The sons of Zibeon *were* Ajah and Anah. 41 The
son of Anah *was* Dishon. The sons of Dishon *were* Hamran,[a] Eshban,
Ithran, and Cheran. 42 The sons of Ezer *were* Bilhan, Zaavan, *and*
Jaakan.[a] The sons of Dishan *were* Uz and Aran.

The Kings of Edom

43 Now these *were* the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before
a king reigned over the children of Israel: Bela the son of Beor, and
the name of his city was Dinhabah. 44 And when Bela died, Jobab
the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his place. 45 When Jobab died,
Husham of the land of the Temanites reigned in his place. 46 And
when Husham died, Hadad the son of Bedad, who attacked Midian
in the field of Moab, reigned in his place. The name of his city *was*
Avith. 47 When Hadad died, Samlah of Masrekah reigned in his place.
48 And when Samlah died, Saul of Rehoboth-by-the-River reigned in
his place. 49 When Saul died, Baal-Hanan the son of Achbor reigned in
his place. 50 And when Baal-Hanan died, Hadad[a] reigned in his place;
and the name of his city was Pai.[b] His wife's name was Mehetabel the
daughter of Matred, the daughter of Mezahab. 51 Hadad died also. And
the chiefs of Edom were Chief Timnah, Chief Aliah,[a] Chief Jetheth,
52 Chief Aholibamah, Chief Elah, Chief Pinon, 53 Chief Kenaz, Chief
Teman, Chief Mibzar, 54 Chief Magdiel, and Chief Iram. These *were*
the chiefs of Edom.

The Family of Israel

2 These *were* the sons of Israel: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah,
Issachar, Zebulun, 2 Dan, Joseph, Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad, and
Asher.

From Judah to David

3 The sons of Judah *were* Er, Onan, and Shelah. *These* three were
born to him by the daughter of Shua, the Canaanitess. Er, the firstborn
of Judah, was wicked in the sight of the Lord; so He killed him. 4 And
Tamar, his daughter-in-law, bore him Perez and Zerah. All the sons of
Judah *were* five.

5 The sons of Perez *were* Hezron and Hamul. 6 The sons of Zerah
were Zimri, Ethan, Heman, Calcol, and Dara—five of them in all.

7 The son of Carmi *was* Achar,[a] the troubler of Israel, who trans-
gressed in the accursed thing.

8 The son of Ethan *was* Azariah.

9 Also the sons of Hezron who were born to him *were* Jerahmeel,
Ram, and Chelubai.[a] 10 Ram begot Amminadab, and Amminadab

1:40 [a]Spelled *Alvan* in Genesis 36:23 [b]Spelled *Shepho* in Genesis 36:23
1:41 [a]Spelled *Hemdan* in Genesis 36:26 **1:42** [a]Spelled *Akan* in Genesis 36:27
1:50 [a]Spelled *Hadar* in Genesis 36:39 [b]Spelled *Pau* in Genesis 36:39 **1:51** [a]Spelled *Alvah* in Genesis 36:40 **2:7** [a]Spelled *Achan* in Joshua 7:1 and elsewhere
2:9 [a]Spelled *Caleb* in 2:18, 42

begot Nahshon, leader of the children of Judah; 11 Nahshon begot Salma,[a] and Salma begot Boaz; 12 Boaz begot Obed, and Obed begot Jesse; 13 Jesse begot Eliab his firstborn, Abinadab the second, Shimea[a] the third, 14 Nethanel the fourth, Raddai the fifth, 15 Ozem the sixth, *and* David the seventh.

16 Now their sisters *were* Zeruiah and Abigail. And the sons of Zeruiah *were* Abishai, Joab, and Asahel—three. 17 Abigail bore Amasa; and the father of Amasa *was* Jether the Ishmaelite.[a]

The Family of Hezron

18 Caleb the son of Hezron had children by Azubah, *his* wife, and by Jerioth. Now these were her sons: Jesher, Shobab, and Ardon. 19 When Azubah died, Caleb took Ephrath[a] as his wife, who bore him Hur. 20 And Hur begot Uri, and Uri begot Bezalel.

21 Now afterward Hezron went in to the daughter of Machir the father of Gilead, whom he married when he *was* sixty years old; and she bore him Segub. 22 Segub begot Jair, who had twenty-three cities in the land of Gilead. 23 (Geshur and Syria took from them the towns of Jair, with Kenath and its towns—sixty towns.) All these *belonged to* the sons of Machir the father of Gilead. 24 After Hezron died in Caleb Ephrathah, Hezron's wife Abijah bore him Ashhur the father of Tekoa.

The Family of Jerahmeel

25 The sons of Jerahmeel, the firstborn of Hezron, *were* Ram, the firstborn, and Bunah, Oren, Ozem, *and* Ahijah. 26 Jerahmeel had another wife, whose name was Atarah; she was the mother of Onam. 27 The sons of Ram, the firstborn of Jerahmeel, were Maaz, Jamin, and Eker. 28 The sons of Onam were Shammai and Jada. The sons of Shammai *were* Nadab and Abishur.

29 And the name of the wife of Abishur *was* Abihail, and she bore him Ahban and Molid. 30 The sons of Nadab *were* Seled and Appaim; Seled died without children. 31 The son of Appaim *was* Ishi, the son of Ishi *was* Sheshan, and Sheshan's son *was* Ahlai. 32 The sons of Jada, the brother of Shammai, *were* Jether and Jonathan; Jether died without children. 33 The sons of Jonathan *were* Peleth and Zaza. These were the sons of Jerahmeel.

34 Now Sheshan had no sons, only daughters. And Sheshan had an Egyptian servant whose name *was* Jarha. 35 Sheshan gave his daughter to Jarha his servant as wife, and she bore him Attai. 36 Attai begot Nathan, and Nathan begot Zabad; 37 Zabad begot Ephlal, and Ephlal begot Obed; 38 Obed begot Jehu, and Jehu begot Azariah; 39 Azariah begot Helez, and Helez begot Eleasah; 40 Eleasah begot Sismai, and Sismai begot Shallum; 41 Shallum begot Jekamiah, and Jekamiah begot Elishama.

The Family of Caleb

42 The descendants of Caleb the brother of Jerahmeel *were* Mesha, his firstborn, who was the father of Ziph, and the sons of Mareshah

2:11 [a]Spelled *Salmon* in Ruth 4:21 and Luke 3:32 **2:13** [a]Spelled *Shammah* in 1 Samuel 16:9 and elsewhere **2:17** [a]Compare 2 Samuel 17:25 **2:19** [a]Spelled *Ephrathah* elsewhere

have feet and hands. He, too, would have tears and trials.

And most importantly, He, too, would have a choice. Emmanuel would stand at the crossroads of life and death and make a choice.

The Author knows well the weight of that decision. He pauses as He writes the page of His own pain. He could stop. Even the Author has a choice. But how can a Creator not create? How can a Writer not write? And how can Love not love? So He chooses life, though it means death, with hope that His children will do the same.

And so the Author of Life completes the story. He drives the spike in the flesh and rolls the stone over the grave. Knowing the choice he will make, knowing the choice all Adams will make, He pens, "The End," then closes the book and proclaims the beginning.

"Let there be light!"

(From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God knows your name, your history, your dreams, your future, your thoughts, and every detail of your life. Are you tempted to feel insignificant? Remember that He loves you intensely.

EXPLORATION

Important to God—Isaiah 43:1; 49:16; Jeremiah 31:3; Luke 12:6, 7; John 10:3; Romans 8:27; 1 John 3:1.

the father of Hebron. 43 The sons of Hebron *were* Korah, Tappuah, Rekem, and Shema. 44 Shema begot Raham the father of Jorkoam, and Rekem begot Shammai. 45 And the son of Shammai *was* Maon, and Maon *was* the father of Beth Zur.

46 Ephah, Caleb's concubine, bore Haran, Moza, and Gazez; and Haran begot Gazez. 47 And the sons of Jahdai *were* Regem, Jotham, Geshan, Pelet, Ephah, and Shaaph.

48 Maachah, Caleb's concubine, bore Sheber and Tirhanah. 49 She also bore Shaaph the father of Madmannah, Sheva the father of Machbenah and the father of Gibea. And the daughter of Caleb *was* Achsah.

50 These were the descendants of Caleb: The sons of Hur, the firstborn of Ephrathah, *were* Shobal the father of Kirjath Jearim, 51 Salma the father of Bethlehem, *and* Hareph the father of Beth Gader.

52 And Shobal the father of Kirjath Jearim had descendants: Haroeh, *and* half of the *families of* Manuhoth.[a] 53 The families of Kirjath Jearim *were* the Ithrites, the Puthites, the Shumathites, and the Mishraites. From these came the Zorathites and the Eshtaolites.

54 The sons of Salma *were* Bethlehem, the Netophathites, Atroth Beth Joab, half of the Manahethites, and the Zorites.

55 And the families of the scribes who dwelt at Jabez *were* the Tirathites, the Shimeathites, *and* the Suchathites. These *were* the Kenites who came from Hammath, the father of the house of Rechab.

The Family of David

3 Now these were the sons of David who were born to him in Hebron: The firstborn *was* Amnon, by Ahinoam the Jezreelitess; the second, Daniel,[a] by Abigail the Carmelitess; 2 the third, Absalom the son of Maacah, the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur; the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; 3 the fifth, Shephatiah, by Abital; the sixth, Ithream, by his wife Eglah.

4 *These* six were born to him in Hebron. There he reigned seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years. 5 And these were born to him in Jerusalem: Shimea,[a] Shobab, Nathan, and Solomon—four by Bathshua[b] the daughter of Ammiel.[c] 6 Also *there* were Ibhar, Elishama,[a] Eliphelet,[b] 7 Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia, 8 Elishama, Eliada,[a] and Eliphelet—nine *in all.* 9 *These were* all the sons of David, besides the sons of the concubines, and Tamar their sister.

The Family of Solomon

10 Solomon's son *was* Rehoboam; Abijah[a] *was* his son, Asa his son, Jehoshaphat his son, 11 Joram[a] his son, Ahaziah his son, Joash[b] his son, 12 Amaziah his son, Azariah[a] his son, Jotham his son, 13 Ahaz his son, Hezekiah his son, Manasseh his son, 14 Amon his son, *and* Josiah his son. 15 The sons of Josiah *were* Johanan the firstborn, the second Jehoiakim, the third Zedekiah, and the fourth Shallum.[a] 16 The sons of Jehoiakim *were* Jeconiah his son *and* Zedekiah[a] his son.

The Family of Jeconiah

17 And the sons of Jeconiah[a] *were* Assir,[b] Shealtiel his son, 18 *and* Malchiram, Pedaiah, Shenazzar, Jecamiah, Hoshama, and Nedabiah. 19 The sons of Pedaiah *were* Zerubbabel and Shimei. The sons of Zerubbabel *were* Meshullam, Hananiah, Shelomith their sister, 20 and Hashubah, Ohel, Berechiah, Hasadiah, and Jushab-Hesed—five *in all.*

21 The sons of Hananiah *were* Pelatiah and Jeshaiah, the sons of Rephaiah, the sons of Arnan, the sons of Obadiah, and the sons of Shechaniah. 22 The son of Shechaniah was Shemaiah. The sons of Shemaiah *were* Hattush, Igal, Bariah, Neariah, and Shaphat—six *in all.* 23 The sons of Neariah *were* Elioenai, Hezekiah, and Azrikam—three *in all.* 24 The sons of Elioenai *were* Hodaviah, Eliashib, Pelaiah, Akkub, Johanan, Delaiah, and Anani—seven *in all.*

2:52 [a]Same as *the Manahethites,* verse 54 **3:1** [a]Called *Chileab* in 2 Samuel 3:3 **3:5** [a]Spelled *Shammua* in 14:4 and 2 Samuel 5:14 [b]Spelled *Bathsheba* in 2 Samuel 11:3 [c]Called *Eliam* in 2 Samuel 11:3 **3:6** [a]Spelled *Elishua* in 14:5 and 2 Samuel 5:15 [b]Spelled *Elpelet* in 14:5 **3:8** [a]Spelled *Beeliada* in 14:7 **3:10** [a]Spelled *Abijam* in 1 Kings 15:1 **3:11** [a]Spelled *Jehoram* in 2 Kings 1:17 and 8:16 [b]Spelled *Jehoash* in 2 Kings 12:1 **3:12** [a]Called *Uzziah* in Isaiah 6:1 **3:15** [a]Called *Jehoahaz* in 2 Kings 23:31 **3:16** [a]Compare 2 Kings 24:17 **3:17** [a]Also called *Coniah* in Jeremiah 22:24 and *Jehoiachin* in 2 Kings 24:8 [b]Or *Jeconiah the captive were*

The Family of Judah

4 The sons of Judah *were* Perez, Hezron, Carmi, Hur, and Shobal.
2 And Reaiah the son of Shobal begot Jahath, and Jahath begot
Ahumai and Lahad. These *were* the families of the Zorathites. 3 These
were the sons of the father of Etam: Jezreel, Ishma, and Idbash; and
the name of their sister *was* Hazelelponi; 4 and Penuel *was* the father
of Gedor, and Ezer *was the* father of Hushah.

These *were* the sons of Hur, the firstborn of Ephrathah the father
of Bethlehem.

5 And Ashhur the father of Tekoa had two wives, Helah and Naarah.
6 Naarah bore him Ahuzzam, Hepher, Temeni, and Haahashtari. These
were the sons of Naarah. 7 The sons of Helah *were* Zereth, Zohar, and
Ethnan; 8 and Koz begot Anub, Zobebah, and the families of Aharhel
the son of Harum.

9 Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother
called his name Jabez,[a] saying, "Because I bore *him* in pain." 10 And
Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, "Oh, that You would bless me
indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me,
and that You would keep *me* from evil, that I may not cause pain!" So
God granted him what he requested.

11 Chelub the brother of Shuhah begot Mehir, who *was* the father
of Eshton. 12 And Eshton begot Beth-Rapha, Paseah, and Tehinnah the
father of Ir-Nahash. These *were* the men of Rechah.

13 The sons of Kenaz *were* Othniel and Seraiah. The sons of Othniel
were Hathath,[a] 14 and Meonothai *who* begot Ophrah. Seraiah begot
Joab the father of Ge Harashim,[a] for they were craftsmen. 15 The sons
of Caleb the son of Jephunneh *were* Iru, Elah, and Naam. The son
of Elah *was* Kenaz. 16 The sons of Jehallelel *were* Ziph, Ziphah, Tiria,
and Asarel. 17 The sons of Ezrah *were* Jether, Mered, Epher, and Jalon.
And *Mered's wife*[a] bore Miriam, Shammai, and Ishbah the father of
Eshtemoa. 18 (His wife Jehudijah[a] bore Jered the father of Gedor, Heber
the father of Sochoh, and Jekuthiel the father of Zanoah.) And these
were the sons of Bithiah the daughter of Pharaoh, whom Mered took.

19 The sons of Hodiah's wife, the sister of Naham, *were* the fathers of
Keilah the Garmite and of Eshtemoa the Maachathite. 20 And the sons
of Shimon *were* Amnon, Rinnah, Ben-Hanan, and Tilon. And the sons
of Ishi *were* Zoheth and Ben-Zoheth.

21 The sons of Shelah the son of Judah *were* Er the father of Lecah,
Laadah the father of Mareshah, and the families of the house of the
linen workers of the house of Ashbea; 22 also Jokim, the men of Chozeba,
and Joash; Saraph, who ruled in Moab, and Jashubi-Lehem. Now the
records are ancient. 23 These *were* the potters and those who dwell at
Netaim[a] and Gederah;[b] there they dwelt with the king for his work.

The Family of Simeon

24 The sons of Simeon *were* Nemuel, Jamin, Jarib,[a] Zerah,[b] *and*
Shaul, 25 Shallum his son, Mibsam his son, and Mishma his son.

4:9 [a]Literally *He Will Cause Pain* **4:13** [a]Septuagint and Vulgate add *and Meonothai.*
4:14 [a]Literally *Valley of Craftsmen* **4:17** [a]Literally *she* **4:18** [a]Or *His Judean wife*
4:23 [a]Literally *Plants* [b]Literally *Hedges* **4:24** [a]Called *Jachin* in Genesis 46:10 [b]Called *Zohar* in Genesis 46:10

Life Lessons

1 Chronicles 4:1—9:1

SITUATION

An individual's lineage was very important in Bible times. A person's tribe determined where that person would live or what occupation he or she would pursue (for example, Levites served in the temple). Prophecies stated that the Messiah would come from the line of David. Though careful records were kept, the genealogical listings in Chronicles were considered a condensed version, with certain names, lines, and generations omitted.

OBSERVATION

Rather than merely listing names, several times the genealogy reveals glimpses into individuals' lives. It mentions small acts of faith, small deeds of kindness, and even "small" sins. Many of these people used their years on earth to serve God.

INSPIRATION

A hospital is a microcosm of the world.

Why? Let me explain.

On the surface, a hospital appears to be a great place. The sheets are clean and the staff is friendly. Nurses come and go with warm smiles. Doctors periodically appear wearing nice loafers, a tie, and a kind face. Friends and family visit bringing pretty plants and friendly words.

There's a curiously large number of smiles here. I've walked the halls and been greeted by the smiling Candy Stripers pushing the coffee cart. The gift shop downstairs is full of magazines with smiling people on the covers. The lady selling

them smiled broadly at me when I bought one. The receptionist at the front desk smiles when you pass by. . . .

Smiles, efficiency, distraction. I've seen some resorts that don't offer this kind of treatment. My, you almost forget where you are. . . .

But just when you relax—just when you begin to smile to yourself . . . a siren reminds you. The scream of the patient next door reminds you. Paramedics rushing a stretcher toward the emergency room remind you.

And the reminder is sobering. This is a hospital. The sole function of this building is to bargain with death. The walls can't be white enough nor the staff polite enough to hide the stark reality of the bottom line: People come here to give all they have to postpone the inevitable.

We give it our best shot. We put up the best we have—the best technology, the best minds, the best equipment; and yet, at best we walk away with an extension, never a solution. And though we may walk or be wheeled out with smiles and waves of victory, down deep we know it is just a matter of time until the best we have won't be enough and the enemy will conquer. . . .

Our world is identical to a hospital. Have you ever noticed the endless extremes to which a person will go to hide the realities of life?

Take age for example. Do you know anyone who has not aged? Do you know anyone who is younger today than when you met him? Aging is a universal condition. But the way we try to hide it, you would think it was a plague! . . .

26 And the sons of Mishma *were* Hamuel his son, Zacchur his son, and
Shimei his son. 27 Shimei had sixteen sons and six daughters; but his
brothers did not have many children, nor did any of their families
multiply as much as the children of Judah.
28 They dwelt at Beersheba, Moladah, Hazar Shual, 29 Bilhah, Ezem,
Tolad, 30 Bethuel, Hormah, Ziklag, 31 Beth Marcaboth, Hazar Susim,
Beth Biri, and at Shaaraim. These *were* their cities until the reign of
David. 32 And their villages *were* Etam, Ain, Rimmon, Tochen, and
Ashan—five cities— 33 and all the villages that *were* around these
cities as far as Baal.[a] These *were* their dwelling places, and they main-
tained their genealogy: 34 Meshobab, Jamlech, and Joshah the son of
Amaziah; 35 Joel, and Jehu the son of Joshibiah, the son of Seraiah, the
son of Asiel; 36 Elioenai, Jaakobah, Jeshohaiah, Asaiah, Adiel, Jesimiel,
and Benaiah; 37 Ziza the son of Shiphi, the son of Allon, the son of
Jedaiah, the son of Shimri, the son of Shemaiah— 38 these mentioned
by name *were* leaders in their families, and their father's house
increased greatly.
39 So they went to the entrance of Gedor, as far as the east side
of the valley, to seek pasture for their flocks. 40 And they found rich,
good pasture, and the land *was* broad, quiet, and peaceful; for some
Hamites formerly lived there.
41 These recorded by name came in the days of Hezekiah king
of Judah; and they attacked their tents and the Meunites who were
found there, and utterly destroyed them, as it is to this day. So they
dwelt in their place, because *there was* pasture for their flocks there.
42 Now *some* of them, five hundred men of the sons of Simeon, went to
Mount Seir, having as their captains Pelatiah, Neariah, Rephaiah, and
Uzziel, the sons of Ishi. 43 And they defeated the rest of the Amalekites
who had escaped. They have dwelt there to this day.

The Family of Reuben

5 Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel—he *was* indeed the
firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright
was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel, so that the geneal-
ogy is not listed according to the birthright; 2 yet Judah prevailed over
his brothers, and from him *came* a ruler, although the birthright was
Joseph's— 3 the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel were Hanoch,
Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi.
4 The sons of Joel *were* Shemaiah his son, Gog his son, Shimei his
son, 5 Micah his son, Reaiah his son, Baal his son, 6 and Beerah his son,
whom Tiglath-Pileser[a] king of Assyria carried into captivity. He *was*
leader of the Reubenites. 7 And his brethren by their families, when
the genealogy of their generations was registered: the chief, Jeiel, and
Zechariah, 8 and Bela the son of Azaz, the son of Shema, the son of
Joel, who dwelt in Aroer, as far as Nebo and Baal Meon. 9 Eastward
they settled as far as the entrance of the wilderness this side of the
River Euphrates, because their cattle had multiplied in the land of
Gilead.
10 Now in the days of Saul they made war with the Hagrites, who

4:33 [a]Or *Baalath Beer* (compare Joshua 19:8) **5:6** [a]Hebrew *Tilgath-Pilneser*

fell by their hand; and they dwelt in their tents throughout the entire *area* east of Gilead.

The Family of Gad

11 And the children of Gad dwelt next to them in the land of Bashan as far as Salcah: 12 Joel *was* the chief, Shapham the next, then Jaanai and Shaphat in Bashan, 13 and their brethren of their father's house: Michael, Meshullam, Sheba, Jorai, Jachan, Zia, and Eber—seven *in all*. 14 These *were* the children of Abihail the son of Huri, the son of Jaroah, the son of Gilead, the son of Michael, the son of Jeshishai, the son of Jahdo, the son of Buz; 15 Ahi the son of Abdiel, the son of Guni, *was* chief of their father's house. 16 And *the Gadites* dwelt in Gilead, in Bashan and in its villages, and in all the common-lands of Sharon within their borders. 17 All these were registered by genealogies in the days of Jotham king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam king of Israel.

18 The sons of Reuben, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh *had* forty-four thousand seven hundred and sixty valiant men, men able to bear shield and sword, to shoot with the bow, and skillful in war, who went to war. 19 They made war with the Hagrites, Jetur, Naphish, and Nodab. 20 And they were helped against them, and the Hagrites were delivered into their hand, and all who *were* with them, for they cried out to God in the battle. He heeded their prayer, because they put their trust in Him. 21 Then they took away their livestock—fifty thousand of their camels, two hundred and fifty thousand of their sheep, and two thousand of their donkeys—also one hundred thousand of their men; 22 for many fell dead, because the war *was* God's. And they dwelt in their place until the captivity.

The Family of Manasseh (East)

23 So the children of the half-tribe of Manasseh dwelt in the land. Their *numbers* increased from Bashan to Baal Hermon, that is, to Senir, or Mount Hermon. 24 These *were* the heads of their fathers' houses: Epher, Ishi, Eliel, Azriel, Jeremiah, Hodaviah, and Jahdiel. They were mighty men of valor, famous men, *and* heads of their fathers' houses.

25 And they were unfaithful to the God of their fathers, and played the harlot after the gods of the peoples of the land, whom God had destroyed before them. 26 So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, that is, Tiglath-Pileser[a] king of Assyria. He carried the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh into captivity. He took them to Halah, Habor, Hara, and the river of Gozan to this day.

The Family of Levi

6 The sons of Levi *were* Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. 2 The sons of Kohath *were* Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. 3 The children of Amram *were* Aaron, Moses, and Miriam. And the sons of Aaron *were* Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. 4 Eleazar begot Phinehas, *and* Phinehas begot Abishua; 5 Abishua begot Bukki, and Bukki begot

5:26 [a] Hebrew *Tilgath-Pilneser*

Dentures bring youth to the mouth, wrinkle cream brings youth to the face, and color in a bottle brings youth to the hair.

All to hide what everyone already knows—we're getting older.

Death is another lump in the carpet. We don't like it. (If you ever want to stall a conversation at a party just say, "How are you feeling about your approaching death?" It won't put much life into the conversation.)

I have a friend who has cancer. At present the cancer is in remission. Recently he had to go to the doctor for a physical. A nurse, apparently unaware of his condition, was asking him questions for his medical record. "Are you presently ill?"

"Well, yes. I have cancer."

She dropped her pencil and looked up at him. "Are you terminal?" she asked.

"Yes, aren't we all?"

You'd think we weren't, the way the subject is kept hush-hush. . . .

But this obsession with fleeing the facts is as maddening as it is futile. For, as in the case of the hospital, the truth always surfaces. A siren sounds causing reality to shock us out of our sleep.

An old college roomie retires and you have to admit that if he is in the autumn of his life, you must be too.

You walk your daughter down the aisle. "When did she grow up?". . .

Be the event pleasant or painful, the result is the same. Reality breaks through the papier-maché mask and screams at you like a Marine drill sergeant. "You *are* getting old! You *are* going to die! You *can't* be someone you are not!". . .

The best thing for you

to do now is pause and think. Take a good look at the facts. And while you're looking at them, it would be wise to take a good look at him. To those perched on the peak of Mount Perspective, His Majesty takes on special significance.

Jesus does His best work at such moments. Just when the truth about life sinks in, His truth starts to surface. He takes us by the hand and dares us not to sweep the facts under the rug but to confront them with Him at our side.

Aging? A necessary process to pass on to a better world.

Death? Merely a brief passage, a tunnel.

Self? Designed and created for a purpose, purchased by God Himself.

There, was that so bad?

Funerals, divorces, illnesses, and stays in the hospital—you can't lie about life at such times. Maybe that's why He's always present at such moments.

The next time you find yourself alone in a dark alley facing the undeniables of life, don't cover them with a blanket, or ignore them with a nervous grin. Don't turn up the TV and pretend they aren't there. Instead, stand still, whisper His name, and listen. He is nearer than you think. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What could you do for God this week? What are some ways you could serve that hardly seem worth mentioning (but could meet a real need)? Take the time to do even small deeds. They could be more important than the larger tasks you plan.

Uzzi; 6 Uzzi begot Zerahiah, and Zerahiah begot Meraioth; 7 Meraioth
begot Amariah, and Amariah begot Ahitub; 8 Ahitub begot Zadok,
and Zadok begot Ahimaaz; 9 Ahimaaz begot Azariah, and Azariah
begot Johanan; 10 Johanan begot Azariah (it was he who ministered
as priest in the temple that Solomon built in Jerusalem); 11 Azariah
begot Amariah, and Amariah begot Ahitub; 12 Ahitub begot Zadok,
and Zadok begot Shallum; 13 Shallum begot Hilkiah, and Hilkiah
begot Azariah; 14 Azariah begot Seraiah, and Seraiah begot Jehozadak.
15 Jehozadak went *into captivity* when the Lord carried Judah and
Jerusalem into captivity by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar.

16 The sons of Levi *were* Gershon,[a] Kohath, and Merari. 17 These are
the names of the sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimei. 18 The sons of
Kohath *were* Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. 19 The sons of Merari
were Mahli and Mushi. Now these *are* the families of the Levites
according to their fathers: 20 Of Gershon *were* Libni his son, Jahath
his son, Zimmah his son, 21 Joah his son, Iddo his son, Zerah his son,
and Jeatherai his son. 22 The sons of Kohath *were* Amminadab his son,
Korah his son, Assir his son, 23 Elkanah his son, Ebiasaph his son, Assir
his son, 24 Tahath his son, Uriel his son, Uzziah his son, and Shaul
his son. 25 The sons of Elkanah *were* Amasai and Ahimoth. 26 *As for*
Elkanah,[a] the sons of Elkanah *were* Zophai[b] his son, Nahath[c] his son,
27 Eliab[a] his son, Jeroham his son, *and* Elkanah his son. 28 The sons of
Samuel *were Joel*[a] the firstborn, and Abijah the second.[b] 29 The sons
of Merari *were* Mahli, Libni his son, Shimei his son, Uzzah his son,
30 Shimea his son, Haggiah his son, *and* Asaiah his son.

Musicians in the House of the Lord

31 Now these are the men whom David appointed over the service
of song in the house of the Lord, after the ark came to rest. 32 They
were ministering with music before the dwelling place of the taber-
nacle of meeting, until Solomon had built the house of the Lord in
Jerusalem, and they served in their office according to their order.

33 And these *are* the ones who ministered with their sons: Of the
sons of the Kohathites *were* Heman the singer, the son of Joel, the
son of Samuel, 34 the son of Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of
Eliel,[a] the son of Toah,[b] 35 the son of Zuph, the son of Elkanah, the son
of Mahath, the son of Amasai, 36 the son of Elkanah, the son of Joel,
the son of Azariah, the son of Zephaniah, 37 the son of Tahath, the son
of Assir, the son of Ebiasaph, the son of Korah, 38 the son of Izhar, the
son of Kohath, the son of Levi, the son of Israel. 39 And his brother
Asaph, who stood at his right hand, *was* Asaph the son of Berachiah,
the son of Shimea, 40 the son of Michael, the son of Baaseiah, the son
of Malchijah, 41 the son of Ethni, the son of Zerah, the son of Adaiah,
42 the son of Ethan, the son of Zimmah, the son of Shimei, 43 the son
of Jahath, the son of Gershon, the son of Levi.

44 Their brethren, the sons of Merari, on the left hand, *were* Ethan
the son of Kishi, the son of Abdi, the son of Malluch, 45 the son of

6:16 [a]Hebrew *Gershom* (alternate spelling of *Gershon,* as in verses 1, 17, 20, 43, 62, and 71) **6:26** [a]Compare verse 35 [b]Spelled *Zuph* in verse 35 and 1 Samuel 1:1 [c]Compare verse 34 **6:27** [a]Compare verse 34 **6:28** [a]Following Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic (compare verse 33 and 1 Samuel 8:2) [b]Hebrew *Vasheni* **6:34** [a]Spelled *Elihu* in 1 Samuel 1:1 [b]Spelled *Tohu* in 1 Samuel 1:1

Hashabiah, the son of Amaziah, the son of Hilkiah, 46 the son of Amzi, the son of Bani, the son of Shamer, 47 the son of Mahli, the son of Mushi, the son of Merari, the son of Levi.

48 And their brethren, the Levites, *were* appointed to every kind of service of the tabernacle of the house of God.

The Family of Aaron

49 But Aaron and his sons offered sacrifices on the altar of burnt offering and on the altar of incense, for all the work of the Most Holy *Place,* and to make atonement for Israel, according to all that Moses the servant of God had commanded. 50 Now these *are* the sons of Aaron: Eleazar his son, Phinehas his son, Abishua his son, 51 Bukki his son, Uzzi his son, Zerahiah his son, 52 Meraioth his son, Amariah his son, Ahitub his son, 53 Zadok his son, *and* Ahimaaz his son.

Dwelling Places of the Levites

54 Now these *are* their dwelling places throughout their settlements in their territory, for they were *given* by lot to the sons of Aaron, of the family of the Kohathites: 55 They gave them Hebron in the land of Judah, with its surrounding common-lands. 56 But the fields of the city and its villages they gave to Caleb the son of Jephunneh. 57 And to the sons of Aaron they gave *one of* the cities of refuge, Hebron; also Libnah with its common-lands, Jattir, Eshtemoa with its common-lands, 58 Hilen[a] with its common-lands, Debir with its common-lands, 59 Ashan[a] with its common-lands, and Beth Shemesh with its common-lands. 60 And from the tribe of Benjamin: Geba with its common-lands, Alemeth[a] with its common-lands, and Anathoth with its common-lands. All their cities among their families *were* thirteen.

61 To the rest of the family of the tribe of the Kohathites *they gave* by lot ten cities from half the tribe of Manasseh. 62 And to the sons of Gershon, throughout their families, *they gave* thirteen cities from the tribe of Issachar, from the tribe of Asher, from the tribe of Naphtali, and from the tribe of Manasseh in Bashan. 63 To the sons of Merari, throughout their families, *they gave* twelve cities from the tribe of Reuben, from the tribe of Gad, and from the tribe of Zebulun. 64 So the children of Israel gave *these* cities with their common-lands to the Levites. 65 And they gave by lot from the tribe of the children of Judah, from the tribe of the children of Simeon, and from the tribe of the children of Benjamin these cities which are called by *their* names.

66 Now some of the families of the sons of Kohath *were given* cities as their territory from the tribe of Ephraim. 67 And they gave them *one of* the cities of refuge, Shechem with its common-lands, in the mountains of Ephraim, also Gezer with its common-lands, 68 Jokmeam with its common-lands, Beth Horon with its common-lands, 69 Aijalon with its common-lands, and Gath Rimmon with its common-lands. 70 And from the half-tribe of Manasseh: Aner with its common-lands and Bileam with its common-lands, for the rest of the family of the sons of Kohath.

71 From the family of the half-tribe of Manasseh the sons of

6:58 [a]Spelled *Holon* in Joshua 21:15 **6:59** [a]Spelled *Ain* in Joshua 21:16
6:60 [a]Spelled *Almon* in Joshua 21:18

EXPLORATION
Small Acts of Faith—Matthew 10:42; 25:34–40; Mark 14:8, 9; Luke 10:33–35; Acts 28:2; Hebrews 11:20–24, 30–34.

Two types of thoughts continually vie for your attention. One proclaims God's strengths; the other lists your failures.

—Max Lucado (Facing Your Giants)

Gershon *were given* Golan in Bashan with its common-lands and Ashtaroth with its common-lands. 72 And from the tribe of Issachar: Kedesh with its common-lands, Daberath with its common-lands, 73 Ramoth with its common-lands, and Anem with its common-lands. 74 And from the tribe of Asher: Mashal with its common-lands, Abdon with its common-lands, 75 Hukok with its common-lands, and Rehob with its common-lands. 76 And from the tribe of Naphtali: Kedesh in Galilee with its common-lands, Hammon with its common-lands, and Kirjathaim with its common-lands.

77 From the tribe of Zebulun the rest of the children of Merari *were given* Rimmon[a] with its common-lands and Tabor with its common-lands. 78 And on the other side of the Jordan, across from Jericho, on the east side of the Jordan, *they were given* from the tribe of Reuben: Bezer in the wilderness with its common-lands, Jahzah with its common-lands, 79 Kedemoth with its common-lands, and Mephaath with its common-lands. 80 And from the tribe of Gad: Ramoth in Gilead with its common-lands, Mahanaim with its common-lands, 81 Heshbon with its common-lands, and Jazer with its common-lands.

The Family of Issachar

7 The sons of Issachar *were* Tola, Puah,[a] Jashub, and Shimron—four *in all.* 2 The sons of Tola *were* Uzzi, Rephaiah, Jeriel, Jahmai, Jibsam, and Shemuel, heads of their father's house. *The sons* of Tola *were* mighty men of valor in their generations; their number in the days of David *was* twenty-two thousand six hundred. 3 The son of Uzzi *was* Izrahiah, and the sons of Izrahiah *were* Michael, Obadiah, Joel, and Ishiah. All five of them *were* chief men. 4 And with them, by their generations, according to their fathers' houses, *were* thirty-six thousand troops ready for war; for they had many wives and sons.

5 Now their brethren among all the families of Issachar *were* mighty men of valor, listed by their genealogies, eighty-seven thousand in all.

The Family of Benjamin

6 *The sons* of Benjamin *were* Bela, Becher, and Jediael—three *in all.* 7 The sons of Bela were Ezbon, Uzzi, Uzziel, Jerimoth, and Iri—five *in all.* They *were* heads of *their* fathers' houses, and they were listed by their genealogies, twenty-two thousand and thirty-four mighty men of valor.

8 The sons of Becher *were* Zemirah, Joash, Eliezer, Elioenai, Omri, Jerimoth, Abijah, Anathoth, and Alemeth. All these *are* the sons of Becher. 9 And they were recorded by genealogy according to their generations, heads of their fathers' houses, twenty thousand two hundred mighty men of valor. 10 The son of Jediael *was* Bilhan, and the sons of Bilhan *were* Jeush, Benjamin, Ehud, Chenaanah, Zethan, Tharshish, and Ahishahar.

11 All these sons of Jediael *were* heads of their fathers' houses; *there were* seventeen thousand two hundred mighty men of valor fit to go out for war *and* battle. 12 Shuppim and Huppim[a] *were* the sons of Ir, *and* Hushim *was* the son of Aher.

The Family of Naphtali

13 The sons of Naphtali *were* Jahziel,[a] Guni, Jezer, and Shallum,[b] the sons of Bilhah.

The Family of Manasseh (West)

14 The descendants of Manasseh: his Syrian concubine bore him Machir the father of Gilead, the father of Asriel.[a] 15 Machir took as his wife *the sister* of Huppim and Shuppim,[a] whose name *was* Maachah. The name of *Gilead's* grandson[b] *was* Zelophehad,[c] but Zelophehad begot only daughters. 16 (Maachah the wife of Machir bore a son, and she called his name Peresh. The name of his brother *was* Sheresh, and his sons *were* Ulam and Rakem. 17 The son of Ulam *was* Bedan.) These *were* the descendants of Gilead the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh.

18 His sister Hammoleketh bore Ishhod, Abiezer, and Mahlah.

19 And the sons of Shemida were Ahian, Shechem, Likhi, and Aniam.

6:77 [a]Hebrew *Rimmono,* alternate spelling of *Rimmon;* see 4:32 **7:1** [a]Spelled *Puvah* in Genesis 46:13 **7:12** [a]Called *Hupham* in Numbers 26:39 **7:13** [a]Spelled *Jahzeel* in Genesis 46:24 [b]Spelled *Shillem* in Genesis 46:24 **7:14** [a]The son of Gilead (compare Numbers 26:30, 31) **7:15** [a]Compare verse 12 [b]Literally *the second* [c]Compare Numbers 26:30–33

The Family of Ephraim

20 The sons of Ephraim *were* Shuthelah,
Bered his son, Tahath his son, Eladah his son,
Tahath his son, 21 Zabad his son, Shuthelah his
son, and Ezer and Elead. The men of Gath who
were born in *that* land killed *them* because
they came down to take away their cattle.
22 Then Ephraim their father mourned many
days, and his brethren came to comfort him.
23 And when he went in to his wife, she con-
ceived and bore a son; and he called his name
Beriah,[a] because tragedy had come upon his
house. 24 Now his daughter *was* Sheerah, who
built Lower and Upper Beth Horon and Uzzen
Sheerah; 25 and Rephah *was* his son, *as well*
as Resheph, and Telah his son, Tahan his son,
26 Laadan his son, Ammihud his son, Elishama
his son, 27 Nun[a] his son, and Joshua his son.
28 Now their possessions and dwelling
places *were* Bethel and its towns: to the east
Naaran, to the west Gezer and its towns, and
Shechem and its towns, as far as Ayyah[a] and
its towns; 29 and by the borders of the children
of Manasseh *were* Beth Shean and its towns,
Taanach and its towns, Megiddo and its towns,
Dor and its towns. In these dwelt the children
of Joseph, the son of Israel.

The Family of Asher

30 The sons of Asher *were* Imnah, Ishvah,
Ishvi, Beriah, and their sister Serah. 31 The
sons of Beriah *were* Heber and Malchiel, who
was the father of Birzaith.[a] 32 And Heber begot
Japhlet, Shomer,[a] Hotham,[b] and their sister
Shua. 33 The sons of Japhlet *were* Pasach,
Bimhal, and Ashvath. These *were* the children
of Japhlet. 34 The sons of Shemer *were* Ahi,
Rohgah, Jehubbah, and Aram. 35 And the sons
of his brother Helem *were* Zophah, Imna,
Shelesh, and Amal. 36 The sons of Zophah *were*
Suah, Harnepher, Shual, Beri, Imrah, 37 Bezer,
Hod, Shamma, Shilshah, Jithran,[a] and Beera.
38 The sons of Jether *were* Jephunneh, Pispah,
and Ara. 39 The sons of Ulla *were* Arah, Haniel,
and Rizia.
40 All these *were* the children of Asher,
heads of *their* fathers' houses, choice men,
mighty men of valor, chief leaders. And they
were recorded by genealogies among the army
fit for battle; their number *was* twenty-six
thousand.

The Family Tree of King Saul of Benjamin

8 Now Benjamin begot Bela his first-
born, Ashbel the second, Aharah[a] the
third, 2 Nohah the fourth, and Rapha the
fifth. 3 The sons of Bela *were* Addar,[a] Gera,
Abihud, 4 Abishua, Naaman, Ahoah, 5 Gera,
Shephuphan, and Huram.
6 These *are* the sons of Ehud, who were the
heads of the fathers' *houses* of the inhabit-
ants of Geba, and who forced them to move
to Manahath: 7 Naaman, Ahijah, and Gera
who forced them to move. He begot Uzza and
Ahihud.
8 Also Shaharaim had children in the coun-
try of Moab, after he had sent away Hushim
and Baara his wives. 9 By Hodesh his wife he
begot Jobab, Zibia, Mesha, Malcam, 10 Jeuz,
Sachiah, and Mirmah. These *were* his sons,
heads of their fathers' *houses*.
11 And by Hushim he begot Abitub and
Elpaal. 12 The sons of Elpaal *were* Eber, Misham,
and Shemed, who built Ono and Lod with its
towns; 13 and Beriah and Shema, who *were*
heads of their fathers' *houses* of the inhabit-
ants of Aijalon, who drove out the inhab-
itants of Gath. 14 Ahio, Shashak, Jeremoth,
15 Zebadiah, Arad, Eder, 16 Michael, Ispah, and
Joha *were* the sons of Beriah. 17 Zebadiah,
Meshullam, Hizki, Heber, 18 Ishmerai, Jizliah,
and Jobab *were* the sons of Elpaal. 19 Jakim,
Zichri, Zabdi, 20 Elienai, Zillethai, Eliel,
21 Adaiah, Beraiah, and Shimrath *were* the
sons of Shimei. 22 Ishpan, Eber, Eliel, 23 Abdon,
Zichri, Hanan, 24 Hananiah, Elam, Antothijah,
25 Iphdeiah, and Penuel *were* the sons of
Shashak. 26 Shamsherai, Shehariah, Athaliah,
27 Jaareshiah, Elijah, and Zichri *were* the sons
of Jeroham.
28 These *were* heads of the fathers' *houses*
by their generations, chief men. These dwelt
in Jerusalem.
29 Now the father of Gibeon, whose wife's
name *was* Maacah, dwelt at Gibeon. 30 And

7:23 [a]Literally *In Tragedy* **7:27** [a]Hebrew *Non* **7:28** [a]Many Hebrew manuscripts, Bomberg, Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate read *Gazza.* **7:31** [a]Or *Birzavith* or *Birzoth* **7:32** [a]Spelled *Shemer* in verse 34 [b]Spelled *Helem* in verse 35 **7:37** [a]Spelled *Jether* in verse 38 **8:1** [a]Spelled *Ahiram* in Numbers 26:38 **8:3** [a]Called *Ard* in Numbers 26:40

his firstborn son *was* Abdon, then Zur, Kish, Baal, Nadab, [31] Gedor, Ahio, Zecher, [32] and Mikloth, *who* begot Shimeah.[a] They also dwelt alongside their relatives in Jerusalem, with their brethren. [33] Ner[a] begot Kish, Kish begot Saul, and Saul begot Jonathan, Malchishua, Abinadab,[b] and Esh-Baal.[c] [34] The son of Jonathan *was* Merib-Baal,[a] and Merib-Baal begot Micah. [35] The sons of Micah *were* Pithon, Melech, Tarea, and Ahaz. [36] And Ahaz begot Jehoaddah;[a] Jehoaddah begot Alemeth, Azmaveth, and Zimri; and Zimri begot Moza. [37] Moza begot Binea, Raphah[a] his son, Eleasah his son, *and* Azel his son.

[38] Azel had six sons whose names *were* these: Azrikam, Bocheru, Ishmael, Sheariah, Obadiah, and Hanan. All these *were* the sons of Azel. [39] And the sons of Eshek his brother *were* Ulam his firstborn, Jeush the second, and Eliphelet the third.

[40] The sons of Ulam were mighty men of valor—archers. *They* had many sons and grandsons, one hundred and fifty *in all.* These *were* all sons of Benjamin.

9 So all Israel was recorded by genealogies, and indeed, they *were* inscribed in the book of the kings of Israel. But Judah was carried away captive to Babylon because of their unfaithfulness. [2] And the first inhabitants who *dwelt* in their possessions in their cities *were* Israelites, priests, Levites, and the Nethinim.

Dwellers in Jerusalem

[3] Now in Jerusalem the children of Judah dwelt, and some of the children of Benjamin, and of the children of Ephraim and Manasseh: [4] Uthai the son of Ammihud, the son of Omri, the son of Imri, the son of Bani, of the descendants of Perez, the son of Judah. [5] Of the Shilonites: Asaiah the firstborn and his sons. [6] Of the sons of Zerah: Jeuel, and their brethren—six hundred and ninety. [7] Of the sons of Benjamin: Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Hodaviah, the son of Hassenuah; [8] Ibneiah the son of Jeroham; Elah the son of Uzzi, the son of Michri; Meshullam the son of Shephatiah, the son of Reuel, the son of Ibnijah; [9] and their brethren, according to their generations—nine hundred and fifty-six. All these men *were* heads of a father's *house* in their fathers' houses.

The Priests at Jerusalem

[10] Of the priests: Jedaiah, Jehoiarib, and Jachin; [11] Azariah the son of Hilkiah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, the officer over the house of God; [12] Adaiah the son of Jeroham, the son of Pashur, the son of Malchijah; Maasai the son of Adiel, the son of Jahzerah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Meshillemith, the son of Immer; [13] and their brethren, heads of their fathers' houses—one thousand seven hundred and sixty. *They were* very able men for the work of the service of the house of God.

8:32 [a]Spelled *Shimeam* in 9:38 **8:33** [a]Also the son of Gibeon (compare 9:36, 39) [b]Called *Jishui* in 1 Samuel 14:49 [c]Called *Ishbosheth* in 2 Samuel 2:8 and elsewhere
8:34 [a]Called *Mephibosheth* in 2 Samuel 4:4 **8:36** [a]Spelled *Jarah* in 9:42
8:37 [a]Spelled *Rephaiah* in 9:43

Life Lessons

1 Chronicles 9:2–44

SITUATION
The families of Israel who lived in Jerusalem after the captivity were recorded.

OBSERVATION
God holds His people accountable for the stewardship of their belongings. Each person must contribute to God's work and to the upkeep of His house.

INSPIRATION
The world needs servants. People like Jesus, who "did not come to be served, but to serve." He chose remote Nazareth over center-stage Jerusalem, His dad's carpentry shop over a marble-columned palace, and three decades of anonymity over a life of popularity.

Jesus came to serve. He selected prayer over sleep, the wilderness over the Jordan, irascible apostles over obedient angels. I'd have gone with the angels. Given the choice, I would have built my apostle team out of cherubim and seraphim or Gabriel and Michael, eyewitnesses of Red Sea rescues and Mount Carmel falling fires. I'd choose the angels.

Not Jesus. He picked the people. Peter, Andrew, John, and Matthew. When they feared the storm, He stilled it. When they had no coin for taxes,He supplied it. And when they had no wine for the wedding or food for the multitude, He made both.

He came to serve.

He let a woman in Samaria interrupt His rest, a woman in adultery interrupt His sermon, a woman with

The Levites at Jerusalem

14 Of the Levites: Shemaiah the son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam,
the son of Hashabiah, of the sons of Merari; 15 Bakbakkar, Heresh,
Galal, and Mattaniah the son of Micah, the son of Zichri, the son of
Asaph; 16 Obadiah the son of Shemaiah, the son of Galal, the son of
Jeduthun; and Berechiah the son of Asa, the son of Elkanah, who lived
in the villages of the Netophathites.

The Levite Gatekeepers

17 And the gatekeepers *were* Shallum, Akkub, Talmon, Ahiman,
and their brethren. Shallum *was* the chief. 18 Until then *they had been*
gatekeepers for the camps of the children of Levi at the King's Gate
on the east.

19 Shallum the son of Kore, the son of Ebiasaph, the son of Korah,
and his brethren, from his father's house, the Korahites, *were* in charge
of the work of the service, gatekeepers of the tabernacle. Their fathers
had been keepers of the entrance to the camp of the Lord. 20 And
Phinehas the son of Eleazar had been the officer over them in time
past; the Lord *was* with him. 21 Zechariah the son of Meshelemiah *was*
keeper of the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

22 All those chosen as gatekeepers *were* two hundred and twelve.
They were recorded by their genealogy, in their villages. David and
Samuel the seer had appointed them to their trusted office. 23 So they
and their children *were* in charge of the gates of the house of the Lord,
the house of the tabernacle, by assignment. 24 The gatekeepers were
assigned to the four directions: the east, west, north, and south. 25 And
their brethren in their villages *had* to come with them from time to
time for seven days. 26 For in this trusted office *were* four chief gate-
keepers; they were Levites. And they had charge over the chambers
and treasuries of the house of God. 27 And they lodged *all* around the
house of God because they *had* the responsibility, and they *were* in
charge of opening *it* every morning.

Other Levite Responsibilities

28 Now *some* of them were in charge of the serving vessels, for they
brought them in and took them out by count. 29 *Some* of them *were*
appointed over the furnishings and over all the implements of the
sanctuary, and over the fine flour and the wine and the oil and the
incense and the spices. 30 And *some* of the sons of the priests made
the ointment of the spices.

31 Mattithiah of the Levites, the firstborn of Shallum the Korahite,
had the trusted office over the things that were baked in the pans.
32 And some of their brethren of the sons of the Kohathites *were* in
charge of preparing the showbread for every Sabbath.

33 These are the singers, heads of the fathers' *houses* of the Levites,
who lodged in the chambers, *and were* free *from other duties;* for
they were employed in *that* work day and night. 34 These heads of the
fathers' *houses* of the Levites *were* heads throughout their genera-
tions. They dwelt at Jerusalem.

The Family of King Saul

35 Jeiel the father of Gibeon, whose wife's name *was* Maacah, dwelt
at Gibeon. 36 His firstborn son *was* Abdon, then Zur, Kish, Baal, Ner,

a disease interrupt His plans, and one with remorse interrupt His meal.

Though none of the apostles washed His feet, He washed theirs. Though none of the soldiers at the Cross begged for mercy, he extended it. And though His followers skedaddled like scared rabbits on Thursday, He came searching for them on Easter Sunday. The resurrected King ascended to heaven only after He'd spent forty days with His friends—teaching them, encouraging them . . . serving them.

Why? It's what He came to do. He came to serve. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you participate in church? Use your God-given gifts and your temperament to help build the church. Help out in the nursery, with Sunday school, in a fellowship group . . .

EXPLORATION

The Spiritual House of God—Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:21–23; Hebrews 3:6; 1 Peter 2:5.

Life LESSONS

1 Chronicles 10:1–12:40

SITUATION
After Saul's death, David was anointed king of Judah. Even so, it was more than seven years later before he ruled over all of Israel. That seven-year period was marked by civil war and Philistine domination.

OBSERVATION
Failure results when people forsake God. We must choose to follow and fight for the kingdom that follows God rather than the one that forsakes Him.

INSPIRATION
Make God your refuge. Not your job, your spouse, your reputation, or your retirement account. Make God your refuge. Let Him, not Saul, encircle you. Let Him be the ceiling that breaks the sunshine, the walls that stop the wind, the foundation on which you stand.

A cave-dweller addressed our church recently. He bore the smell of Adullam. He'd just buried his wife, and his daughter was growing sicker by the day. Yet, in the dry land he found God. I wrote his discovery on the flyleaf of my Bible: "You'll never know that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have."

Wilderness survivors find refuge in God's presence.

They also discover community among God's people. . . .

Strong congregations are populated with current and former cave dwellers, people who know the terrain of Adullam. They told a few lies in Nob. They went loopy in Gath. And

Nadab, 37 Gedor, Ahio, Zechariah,[a] and Mikloth. 38 And Mikloth begot Shimeam.[a] They also dwelt alongside their relatives in Jerusalem, with their brethren. 39 Ner begot Kish, Kish begot Saul, and Saul begot Jonathan, Malchishua, Abinadab, and Esh-Baal. 40 The son of Jonathan *was* Merib-Baal, and Merib-Baal begot Micah. 41 The sons of Micah *were* Pithon, Melech, Tahrea,[a] and Ahaz.[b] 42 And Ahaz begot Jarah;[a] Jarah begot Alemeth, Azmaveth, and Zimri; and Zimri begot Moza; 43 Moza begot Binea, Rephaiah[a] his son, Eleasah his son, and Azel his son.

44 And Azel had six sons whose names *were* these: Azrikam, Bocheru, Ishmael, Sheariah, Obadiah, and Hanan; these *were* the sons of Azel.

Tragic End of Saul and His Sons

10 Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. 2 Then the Philistines followed hard after Saul and his sons. And the Philistines killed Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul's sons. 3 The battle became fierce against Saul. The archers hit him, and he was wounded by the archers. 4 Then Saul said to his armorbearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and abuse me." But his armorbearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it. 5 And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword and died. 6 So Saul and his three sons died, and all his house died together. 7 And when all the men of Israel who *were* in the valley saw that they had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook their cities and fled; then the Philistines came and dwelt in them.

8 So it happened the next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. 9 And they stripped him and took his head and his armor, and sent word throughout the land of the Philistines to proclaim the news *in the temple* of their idols and among the people. 10 Then they put his armor in the temple of their gods, and fastened his head in the temple of Dagon.

11 And when all Jabesh Gilead heard all that the Philistines had done to Saul, 12 all the valiant men arose and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons; and they brought them to Jabesh, and buried their bones under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

13 So Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the Lord, because he did not keep the word of the Lord, and also because he consulted a medium for guidance. 14 But *he* did not inquire of the Lord; therefore He killed him, and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse.

David Made King over All Israel

11 Then all Israel came together to David at Hebron, saying, "Indeed we *are* your bone and your flesh. 2 Also, in time past,

9:37 [a]Called *Zecher* in 8:31 **9:38** [a]Spelled *Shimeah* in 8:32 **9:41** [a]Spelled *Tarea* in 8:35 [b]Following Arabic, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate (compare 8:35); Masoretic Text and Septuagint omit *and Ahaz*. **9:42** [a]Spelled *Jehoaddah* in 8:36 **9:43** [a]Spelled *Raphah* in 8:37

even when Saul was king, you *were* the one who led Israel out and brought them in; and the Lord your God said to you, 'You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over My people Israel.'" 3Therefore all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord. And they anointed David king over Israel, according to the word of the Lord by Samuel.

The City of David

4And David and all Israel went to Jerusalem, which is Jebus, where the Jebusites *were,* the inhabitants of the land. 5But the inhabitants of Jebus said to David, "You shall not come in here!" Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion (that is, the City of David). 6Now David said, "Whoever attacks the Jebusites first shall be chief and captain." And Joab the son of Zeruiah went up first, and became chief. 7Then David dwelt in the stronghold; therefore they called it the City of David. 8And he built the city around it, from the Millo[a] to the surrounding area. Joab repaired the rest of the city. 9So David went on and became great, and the Lord of hosts *was* with him.

The Mighty Men of David

10Now these *were* the heads of the mighty men whom David had, who strengthened themselves with him in his kingdom, with all Israel, to make him king, according to the word of the Lord concerning Israel.

11And this *is* the number of the mighty men whom David had: Jashobeam the son of a Hachmonite, chief of the captains;[a] he had lifted up his spear against three hundred, killed *by him* at one time.

12After him *was* Eleazar the son of Dodo, the Ahohite, who *was one* of the three mighty men. 13He was with David at Pasdammim. Now there the Philistines were gathered for battle, and there was a piece of ground full of barley. So the people fled from the Philistines. 14But they stationed themselves in the middle of *that* field, defended it, and killed the Philistines. So the Lord brought about a great victory.

15Now three of the thirty chief men went down to the rock to David, into the cave of Adullam; and the army of the Philistines encamped in the Valley of Rephaim. 16David *was* then in the stronghold, and the garrison of the Philistines *was* then in Bethlehem. 17And David said with longing, "Oh, that someone would give me a drink of water from the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!" 18So the three broke through the camp of the Philistines, drew water from the well of Bethlehem that *was* by the gate, and took *it* and brought *it* to David. Nevertheless David would not drink it, but poured it out to the Lord. 19And he said, "Far be it from me, O my God, that I should do this! Shall I drink the blood of these men *who have put* their lives *in jeopardy?* For at the risk of their lives they brought it." Therefore he would not drink it. These things were done by the three mighty men.

20Abishai the brother of Joab was chief of *another* three.[a] He had

11:8 [a]Literally *The Landfill* **11:11** [a]Following Qere; Kethib, Septuagint, and Vulgate read *the thirty* (compare 2 Samuel 23:8). **11:20** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Septuagint, and Vulgate; Syriac reads *thirty*.

they haven't forgotten it. And because they haven't, they imitate David: they make room for you. . . .

Are you in the wilderness? Crawl into God the way a fugitive would a cave. Find refuge in God's presence.

Find comfort in His people. Cast your hat in a congregation of folks who are one gift of grace removed from tragedy, addiction, and disaster. Seek community in the church of Adullam.

Refuge in God's presence. Comfort in God's people. Your keys for wilderness survival. Do this, and, who knows, in the midst of this desert you may write your sweetest psalms. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Which side are you on? Which kingdom do you fight for? Speak for? Pray for? Pray for the fortitude to stand for God's kingdom, even if it brings personal loss to you.

EXPLORATION

Serve God—Exodus 23:22; Joshua 24:15; Galatians 6:7–10.

lifted up his spear against three hundred *men,* killed *them,* and won a name among *these* three. 21 Of the three he was more honored than the other two men. Therefore he became their captain. However he did not attain to the *first* three.

22 Benaiah was the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man from Kabzeel, who had done many deeds. He had killed two lion-like heroes of Moab. He also had gone down and killed a lion in the midst of a pit on a snowy day. 23 And he killed an Egyptian, a man of *great* height, five cubits tall. In the Egyptian's hand *there was* a spear like a weaver's beam; and he went down to him with a staff, wrested the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and killed him with his own spear. 24 These *things* Benaiah the son of Jehoiada did, and won a name among three mighty men. 25 Indeed he was more honored than the thirty, but he did not attain to the *first* three. And David appointed him over his guard.

26 Also the mighty warriors *were* Asahel the brother of Joab, Elhanan the son of Dodo of Bethlehem, 27 Shammoth the Harorite,[a] Helez the Pelonite,[b] 28 Ira the son of Ikkesh the Tekoite, Abiezer the Anathothite, 29 Sibbechai the Hushathite, Ilai the Ahohite, 30 Maharai the Netophathite, Heled[a] the son of Baanah the Netophathite, 31 Ithai[a] the son of Ribai of Gibeah, of the sons of Benjamin, Benaiah the Pirathonite, 32 Hurai[a] of the brooks of Gaash, Abiel[b] the Arbathite, 33 Azmaveth the Baharumite,[a] Eliahba the Shaalbonite, 34 the sons of Hashem the Gizonite, Jonathan the son of Shageh the Hararite, 35 Ahiam the son of Sacar the Hararite, Eliphal the son of Ur, 36 Hepher the Mecherathite, Ahijah the Pelonite, 37 Hezro the Carmelite, Naarai the son of Ezbai, 38 Joel the brother of Nathan, Mibhar the son of Hagri, 39 Zelek the Ammonite, Naharai the Berothite[a] (the armorbearer of Joab the son of Zeruiah), 40 Ira the Ithrite, Gareb the Ithrite, 41 Uriah the Hittite, Zabad the son of Ahlai, 42 Adina the son of Shiza the Reubenite (a chief of the Reubenites) and thirty with him, 43 Hanan the son of Maachah, Joshaphat the Mithnite, 44 Uzzia the Ashterathite, Shama and Jeiel the sons of Hotham the Aroerite, 45 Jediael the son of Shimri, and Joha his brother, the Tizite, 46 Eliel the Mahavite, Jeribai and Joshaviah the sons of Elnaam, Ithmah the Moabite, 47 Eliel, Obed, and Jaasiel the Mezobaite.

The Growth of David's Army

12 Now these *were* the men who came to David at Ziklag while he was still a fugitive from Saul the son of Kish; and they *were* among the mighty men, helpers in the war, 2 armed with bows, using both the right hand and the left in *hurling* stones and *shooting* arrows with the bow. *They were* of Benjamin, Saul's brethren.

3 The chief *was* Ahiezer, then Joash, the sons of Shemaah the Gibeathite; Jeziel and Pelet the sons of Azmaveth; Berachah, and Jehu the Anathothite; 4 Ishmaiah the Gibeonite, a mighty man among the thirty, and over the thirty; Jeremiah, Jahaziel, Johanan, and Jozabad the Gederathite; 5 Eluzai, Jerimoth, Bealiah, Shemariah, and Shephatiah the Haruphite; 6 Elkanah, Jisshiah, Azarel, Joezer, and Jashobeam, the Korahites; 7 and Joelah and Zebadiah the sons of Jeroham of Gedor.

8 *Some* Gadites joined David at the stronghold in the wilderness, mighty men of valor, men trained for battle, who could handle shield and spear, whose faces *were like* the faces of lions, and *were* as swift as gazelles on the mountains: 9 Ezer the first, Obadiah the second, Eliab the third, 10 Mishmannah the fourth, Jeremiah the fifth, 11 Attai the sixth, Eliel the seventh, 12 Johanan the eighth, Elzabad the ninth, 13 Jeremiah the tenth, and Machbanai the eleventh. 14 These *were* from the sons of Gad, captains of the army; the least was over a hundred, and the greatest was over a thousand. 15 These *are* the ones who crossed the Jordan in the first month, when it had overflowed all its banks; and they put to flight all *those* in the valleys, to the east and to the west.

16 Then some of the sons of Benjamin and Judah came to David at the stronghold. 17 And David went out to meet them, and answered

11:27 [a]Spelled *Harodite* in 2 Samuel 23:25 [b]Called *Paltite* in 2 Samuel 23:26 **11:30** [a]Spelled *Heleb* in 2 Samuel 23:29 and *Heldai* in 1 Chronicles 27:15 **11:31** [a]Spelled *Ittai* in 2 Samuel 23:29 **11:32** [a]Spelled *Hiddai* in 2 Samuel 23:30 [b]Spelled *Abi-Albon* in 2 Samuel 23:31 **11:33** [a]Spelled *Barhumite* in 2 Samuel 23:31 **11:39** [a]Spelled *Beerothite* in 2 Samuel 23:37

and said to them, "If you have come peaceably to me to help me, my heart will be united with you; but if to betray me to my enemies, since *there is* no wrong in my hands, may the God of our fathers look and bring judgment."
18 Then the Spirit came upon Amasai, chief of the captains, *and he said:*

"*We are* yours, O David;
We *are* on your side, O son of Jesse!
Peace, peace to you,
And peace to your helpers!
For your God helps you."

So David received them, and made them captains of the troop.

19 And *some* from Manasseh defected to David when he was going with the Philistines to battle against Saul; but they did not help them, for the lords of the Philistines sent him away by agreement, saying, "He may defect to his master Saul *and endanger* our heads."
20 When he went to Ziklag, those of Manasseh who defected to him were Adnah, Jozabad, Jediael, Michael, Jozabad, Elihu, and Zillethai, captains of the thousands who *were* from Manasseh. 21 And they helped David against the bands *of raiders,* for they *were* all mighty men of valor, and they were captains in the army. 22 For at *that* time they came to David day by day to help him, until *it was* a great army, like the army of God.

David's Army at Hebron

23 Now these *were* the numbers of the divisions *that were* equipped for war, *and* came to David at Hebron to turn *over* the kingdom of Saul to him, according to the word of the Lord: 24 of the sons of Judah bearing shield and spear, six thousand eight hundred armed for war; 25 of the sons of Simeon, mighty men of valor fit for war, seven thousand one hundred;
26 of the sons of Levi four thousand six hundred; 27 Jehoiada, the leader of the Aaronites, and with him three thousand seven hundred;
28 Zadok, a young man, a valiant warrior, and from his father's house twenty-two captains;
29 of the sons of Benjamin, relatives of Saul, three thousand (until then the greatest part of them had remained loyal to the house of Saul);
30 of the sons of Ephraim twenty thousand eight hundred, mighty men of valor, famous men throughout their father's house; 31 of the half-tribe of Manasseh eighteen thousand, who were designated by name to come and make David king; 32 of the sons of Issachar who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, their chiefs were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their command; 33 of Zebulun there were fifty thousand who went out to battle, expert in war with all weapons of war, stouthearted men who could keep ranks; 34 of Naphtali one thousand captains, and with them thirty-seven thousand with shield and spear; 35 of the Danites who could keep battle formation, twenty-eight thousand six hundred; 36 of Asher, those who could go out to war, able to keep battle formation, forty thousand; 37 of the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, from the other side of the Jordan, one hundred and twenty thousand armed for battle with every *kind* of weapon of war.

38 All these men of war, who could keep ranks, came to Hebron with a loyal heart, to make David king over all Israel; and all the rest of Israel *were* of one mind to make David king. 39 And they were there with David three days, eating and drinking, for their brethren had prepared for them. 40 Moreover those who were near to them, from as far away as Issachar and Zebulun and Naphtali, were bringing food on donkeys and camels, on mules and oxen—provisions of flour and cakes of figs and cakes of raisins, wine and oil and oxen and sheep abundantly, for *there was* joy in Israel.

The Ark Brought from Kirjath Jearim

13 Then David consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds, *and* with every leader. 2 And David said to all the assembly of Israel, "If *it seems* good to you, and if it is of the Lord our God, let us send out to our brethren everywhere *who are* left in all the land of Israel, and with them to the priests and Levites *who are* in their cities *and* their common-lands, that they may gather together to us; 3 and let us bring the ark of our God back to us, for we have not inquired at it since the days of Saul." 4 Then all the assembly said that they would do so, for the thing was right in the eyes of all the people.

Life Lessons

1 Chronicles 13:1—14:17

SITUATION
God had given specific instructions concerning the sacred objects (Numbers 4:15). God said He would put to death anyone who touched the ark.

OBSERVATION
David became angry at God. Yet, it was David's own neglect that brought God's severe action.

INSPIRATION
Some time ago, I took my family to the bicycle store to purchase a bike for five-year-old Jenna. She picked out a shiny "Starlett" with a banana seat and training wheels. And Andrea, age three, decided she wanted one as well.

. . . I told her she was still having trouble with a tricycle and was too small for a two-wheeler. No luck; she still wanted a bike. . . .

Finally I sighed and said this time her daddy knew best. Her response? . . .

"Then I want a *new* daddy!"

Though the words were from a child's mouth, they carried an adult's sentiments.

. . . When we don't agree with the One who calls the shots, our reaction is often the same as Andrea's—the same as John's. . . . "Are you the One? Should we look for another?"

. . . John couldn't believe that anything less than his release would be for the best interest of all involved. . . . But the One who had the power was "sitting on His hands."

. . . You may learn, as John did, that the problem

5 So David gathered all Israel together, from Shihor in Egypt to as
far as the entrance of Hamath, to bring the ark of God from Kirjath
Jearim. 6 And David and all Israel went up to Baalah,[a] to Kirjath
Jearim, which belonged to Judah, to bring up from there the ark of
God the Lord, who dwells *between* the cherubim, where *His* name is
proclaimed. 7 So they carried the ark of God on a new cart from the
house of Abinadab, and Uzza and Ahio drove the cart. 8 Then David
and all Israel played *music* before God with all *their* might, with sing-
ing, on harps, on stringed instruments, on tambourines, on cymbals,
and with trumpets.

9 And when they came to Chidon's[a] threshing floor, Uzza put out
his hand to hold the ark, for the oxen stumbled. 10 Then the anger of
the Lord was aroused against Uzza, and He struck him because he
put his hand to the ark; and he died there before God. 11 And David
became angry because of the Lord's outbreak against Uzza; therefore
that place is called Perez Uzza[a] to this day. 12 David was afraid of God
that day, saying, "How can I bring the ark of God to me?"

13 So David would not move the ark with him into the City of David,
but took it aside into the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. 14 The ark
of God remained with the family of Obed-Edom in his house three
months. And the Lord blessed the house of Obed-Edom and all that
he had.

David Established at Jerusalem

14 Now Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar
trees, with masons and carpenters, to build him a house. 2 So
David knew that the Lord had established him as king over Israel, for
his kingdom was highly exalted for the sake of His people Israel.

3 Then David took more wives in Jerusalem, and David begot more
sons and daughters. 4 And these are the names of his children whom
he had in Jerusalem: Shammua,[a] Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, 5 Ibhar,
Elishua,[a] Elpelet,[b] 6 Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia, 7 Elishama, Beeliada,[a] and
Eliphelet.

The Philistines Defeated

8 Now when the Philistines heard that David had been anointed
king over all Israel, all the Philistines went up to search for David. And
David heard *of it* and went out against them. 9 Then the Philistines
went and made a raid on the Valley of Rephaim. 10 And David inquired
of God, saying, "Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will You deliver
them into my hand?"

The Lord said to him, "Go up, for I will deliver them into your
hand."

11 So they went up to Baal Perazim, and David defeated them there.
Then David said, "God has broken through my enemies by my hand
like a breakthrough of water." Therefore they called the name of that
place Baal Perazim.[a] 12 And when they left their gods there, David gave
a commandment, and they were burned with fire.

13:6 [a]Called *Baale Judah* in 2 Samuel 6:2 **13:9** [a]Called *Nachon* in 2 Samuel 6:6 **13:11** [a]Literally *Outburst Against Uzza* **14:4** [a]Spelled *Shimea* in 3:5 **14:5** [a]Spelled *Elishama* in 3:6 [b]Spelled *Eliphelet* in 3:6 **14:7** [a]Spelled *Eliada* in 3:8 **14:11** [a]Literally *Master of Breakthroughs*

13 Then the Philistines once again made a raid on the valley.
14 Therefore David inquired again of God, and God said to him, "You
shall not go up after them; circle around them, and come upon them
in front of the mulberry trees. 15 And it shall be, when you hear a
sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry trees, then you shall go
out to battle, for God has gone out before you to strike the camp of the
Philistines." 16 So David did as God commanded him, and they drove
back the army of the Philistines from Gibeon as far as Gezer. 17 Then
the fame of David went out into all lands, and the Lord brought the
fear of him upon all nations.

The Ark Brought to Jerusalem

15 *David* built houses for himself in the City of David; and he
prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched a tent for it.
2 Then David said, "No one may carry the ark of God but the Levites,
for the Lord has chosen them to carry the ark of God and to minis-
ter before Him forever." 3 And David gathered all Israel together at
Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the Lord to its place, which he had
prepared for it. 4 Then David assembled the children of Aaron and the
Levites: 5 of the sons of Kohath, Uriel the chief, and one hundred and
twenty of his brethren; 6 of the sons of Merari, Asaiah the chief, and
two hundred and twenty of his brethren; 7 of the sons of Gershom, Joel
the chief, and one hundred and thirty of his brethren; 8 of the sons of
Elizaphan, Shemaiah the chief, and two hundred of his brethren; 9 of
the sons of Hebron, Eliel the chief, and eighty of his brethren; 10 of the
sons of Uzziel, Amminadab the chief, and one hundred and twelve of
his brethren.

11 And David called for Zadok and Abiathar the priests, and for the
Levites: for Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel, and Amminadab. 12 He
said to them, "You *are* the heads of the fathers' *houses* of the Levites;
sanctify yourselves, you and your brethren, that you may bring up the
ark of the Lord God of Israel to *the place* I have prepared for it. 13 For
because you *did* not *do it* the first *time,* the Lord our God broke out
against us, because we did not consult Him about the proper order."

14 So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up
the ark of the Lord God of Israel. 15 And the children of the Levites bore
the ark of God on their shoulders, by its poles, as Moses had com-
manded according to the word of the Lord.

16 Then David spoke to the leaders of the Levites to appoint their
brethren *to be* the singers accompanied by instruments of music,
stringed instruments, harps, and cymbals, by raising the voice with
resounding joy. 17 So the Levites appointed Heman the son of Joel;
and of his brethren, Asaph the son of Berechiah; and of their brethren,
the sons of Merari, Ethan the son of Kushaiah; 18 and with them their
brethren of the second *rank:* Zechariah, Ben,[a] Jaaziel, Shemiramoth,
Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattithiah, Elipheleh,
Mikneiah, Obed-Edom, and Jeiel, the gatekeepers; 19 the singers,
Heman, Asaph, and Ethan, *were* to sound the cymbals of bronze;
20 Zechariah, Aziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Maaseiah, and
Benaiah, with strings according to Alamoth; 21 Mattithiah, Elipheleh,

15:18 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Septuagint omits *Ben*.

is not as much in God's silence as it is in your ability to hear. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God helps us avoid future mistakes by sending people to correct us. When you are corrected, use the opportunity to learn and improve your attitude and work!

EXPLORATION

Obedience—Exodus 24:7; Psalm 143:10; Isaiah 1:19; Matthew 12:50; John 14:15, 23, 31.

We know He has a tattoo, and we know what it says. "I have written your name on My hand," He declares (Isaiah 49:16).

—Max Lucado (In the Grip of Grace)

Life LESSONS

1 Chronicles 15:1—17:27

SITUATION
David learned from his previous mistake. When they moved the Ark, David and his men carefully followed God's instructions.

OBSERVATION
David's praise-filled reception of God's Ark demonstrates genuine spiritual worship. God showed that He was greatly pleased with such worship and honor.

INSPIRATION
Worship properly positions the worshiper. And oh how we need it! We walk through life so bent out of shape. Five-talent folks swaggering: "I bet God's glad to have me." Two-talent folks struggling: "I bet God's sick of putting up with me." So sold on ourselves that we think someone died and made us ruler. Or so down on ourselves that we think everyone died and just left us.

Treat both conditions with worship. Cure any flare-up of commonness by setting your eyes on our uncommon King.

During our summer vacation I took my daughters on a snorkeling trip. I took advantage of the occasion to solicit a sailing lesson. Ever puzzled by the difference in leeward, starboard, and stern, I asked the crew a few questions. After a while the captain offered, "Would you like to sail us home?" I reminded him that no West Texan has ever won the America's Cup. He assured me I would have no trouble and pointed

Mikneiah, Obed-Edom, Jeiel, and Azaziah, to direct with harps on the Sheminith; 22 Chenaniah, leader of the Levites, was instructor *in charge of* the music, because he *was* skillful; 23 Berechiah and Elkanah *were* doorkeepers for the ark; 24 Shebaniah, Joshaphat, Nethanel, Amasai, Zechariah, Benaiah, and Eliezer, the priests, were to blow the trumpets before the ark of God; and Obed-Edom and Jehiah, doorkeepers for the ark.

25 So David, the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord from the house of Obed-Edom with joy. 26 And so it was, when God helped the Levites who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that they offered seven bulls and seven rams. 27 David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, as were all the Levites who bore the ark, the singers, and Chenaniah the music master *with* the singers. David also wore a linen ephod. 28 Thus all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the horn, with trumpets and with cymbals, making music with stringed instruments and harps.

29 And it happened, *as* the ark of the covenant of the Lord came to the City of David, that Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window and saw King David whirling and playing music; and she despised him in her heart.

The Ark Placed in the Tabernacle

16 So they brought the ark of God, and set it in the midst of the tabernacle that David had erected for it. Then they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before God. 2 And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord. 3 Then he distributed to everyone of Israel, both man and woman, to everyone a loaf of bread, a piece *of meat,* and a cake of raisins.

4 And he appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the Lord, to commemorate, to thank, and to praise the Lord God of Israel: 5 Asaph the chief, and next to him Zechariah, *then* Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, and Obed-Edom: Jeiel with stringed instruments and harps, but Asaph made music with cymbals; 6 Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests regularly *blew* the trumpets before the ark of the covenant of God.

David's Song of Thanksgiving

7 On that day David first delivered *this psalm* into the hand of Asaph and his brethren, to thank the Lord:

8 Oh, give thanks to the Lord!
Call upon His name;
Make known His deeds among the peoples!
9 Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him;
Talk of all His wondrous works!
10 Glory in His holy name;
Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the Lord!
11 Seek the Lord and His strength;
Seek His face evermore!
12 Remember His marvelous works which He has done,

His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth,
13 O seed of Israel His servant,
You children of Jacob, His chosen ones!

14 He *is* the Lord our God;
His judgments *are* in all the earth.
15 Remember His covenant forever,
The word which He commanded, for a thousand generations,
16 *The* covenant which He made with Abraham,
And His oath to Isaac,
17 And confirmed it to Jacob for a statute,
To Israel *for* an everlasting covenant,
18 Saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan
As the allotment of your inheritance,"
19 When you were few in number,
Indeed very few, and strangers in it.

20 When they went from one nation to another,
And from *one* kingdom to another people,
21 He permitted no man to do them wrong;
Yes, He rebuked kings for their sakes,
22 *Saying,* "Do not touch My anointed ones,
And do My prophets no harm."[a]

23 Sing to the Lord, all the earth;
Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day.
24 Declare His glory among the nations,
His wonders among all peoples.

25 For the Lord *is* great and greatly to be praised;
He *is* also to be feared above all gods.
26 For all the gods of the peoples *are* idols,
But the Lord made the heavens.
27 Honor and majesty *are* before Him;
Strength and gladness are in His place.

28 Give to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
Give to the Lord glory and strength.
29 Give to the Lord the glory *due* His name;
Bring an offering, and come before Him.
Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!
30 Tremble before Him, all the earth.
The world also is firmly established,
It shall not be moved.

31 Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
And let them say among the nations, "The Lord reigns."
32 Let the sea roar, and all its fullness;
Let the field rejoice, and all that *is* in it.

16:22 [a]Compare verses 8–22 with Psalm 105:1–15

to a rocky outcrop on the shore. "Target that cliff," he instructed. "Set your eyes and the boat on it."

I found the instruction hard to follow. Other sights invited my attention: the rich mahogany of the deck, my giggling daughters beneath the sail, rich foam cresting on the waves. I wanted to look at it all. But look too long and risk losing the course. The boat stayed on target as long as I set my eyes beyond the vessel.

Worship helps us do this in life. It lifts our eyes off the boat with its toys and passengers and sets them on "those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1). (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Plan for a special day this Sunday. On Saturday night, start preparing your heart and mind for worship. On Sunday, anticipate worship.

EXPLORATION

Attitude of Worship—
1 Chronicles 29:9; Psalm 27:4; 51:16, 17; 84:1–3; John 4:23, 24; Romans 12:1; Philippians 3:3; Hebrews 10:1–10.

33 Then the trees of the woods shall rejoice
before the Lord,
For He is coming to judge the earth.[a]

34 Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for *He is*
good!
For His mercy *endures* forever.[a]
35 And say, "Save us, O God of our salvation;
Gather us together, and deliver us from
the Gentiles,
To give thanks to Your holy name,
To triumph in Your praise."

36 Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel
From everlasting to everlasting![a]

And all the people said, "Amen!" and praised the Lord.

Regular Worship Maintained

37 So he left Asaph and his brothers there before the ark of the covenant of the Lord to minister before the ark regularly, as every day's work required; 38 and Obed-Edom with his sixty-eight brethren, including Obed-Edom the son of Jeduthun, and Hosah, *to be* gatekeepers; 39 and Zadok the priest and his brethren the priests, before the tabernacle of the Lord at the high place that *was* at Gibeon, 40 to offer burnt offerings to the Lord on the altar of burnt offering regularly morning and evening, and *to do* according to all that is written in the Law of the Lord which He commanded Israel; 41 and with them Heman and Jeduthun and the rest who were chosen, who were designated by name, to give thanks to the Lord, because His mercy *endures* forever; 42 and with them Heman and Jeduthun, to sound aloud with trumpets and cymbals and the musical instruments of God. Now the sons of Jeduthun *were* gatekeepers.

43 Then all the people departed, every man to his house; and David returned to bless his house.

God's Covenant with David

17 Now it came to pass, when David was dwelling in his house, that David said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the Lord *is* under tent curtains."

2 Then Nathan said to David, "Do all that *is* in your heart, for God *is* with you."

3 But it happened that night that the word of God came to Nathan, saying, 4 "Go and tell My servant David, 'Thus says the Lord: "You shall not build Me a house to dwell in. 5 For I have not dwelt in a house since the time that I brought up Israel, even to this day, but have gone from tent to tent, and from *one* tabernacle *to another.* 6 Wherever I have moved about with all Israel, have I ever spoken a word to any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'" ' 7 Now therefore, thus shall you say to My servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: "I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people Israel. 8 And I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and have made you a name like the name of the great men who *are* on the earth. 9 Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore, as previously, 10 since the time that I commanded judges *to be* over My people Israel. Also I will subdue all your enemies. Furthermore I tell you that the Lord will build you a house.[a] 11 And it shall be, when your days are fulfilled, when you must go *to be* with your fathers, that I will set up your seed after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom. 12 He shall build Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever. 13 I will be his Father, and he shall be My son; and I will not take My mercy away from him, as I took *it* from *him* who was before you. 14 And I will establish him in My house and in My kingdom forever; and his throne shall be established forever." ' "

15 According to all these words and according to all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David.

16 Then King David went in and sat before the Lord; and he said: "Who *am* I, O Lord God? And what is my house, that You have

16:33 [a]Compare verses 23–33 with Psalm 96:1–13 **16:34** [a]Compare verse 34 with Psalm 106:1 **16:36** [a]Compare verses 35, 36 with Psalm 106:47, 48 **17:10** [a]That is, a royal dynasty

brought me this far? 17 And *yet* this was a small thing in Your sight, O God; and You have *also* spoken of Your servant's house for a great while to come, and have regarded me according to the rank of a man of high degree, O Lord God. 18 What more can David *say* to You for the honor of Your servant? For You know Your servant. 19 O Lord, for Your servant's sake, and according to Your own heart, You have done all this greatness, in making known all these great things. 20 O Lord, *there is* none like You, nor *is there any* God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears. 21 And who *is* like Your people Israel, the one nation on the earth whom God went to redeem for Himself *as* a people—to make for Yourself a name by great and awesome deeds, by driving out nations from before Your people whom You redeemed from Egypt? 22 For You have made Your people Israel Your very own people forever; and You, Lord, have become their God.

23 "And now, O Lord, the word which You have spoken concerning Your servant and concerning his house, *let it* be established forever, and do as You have said. 24 So let it be established, that Your name may be magnified forever, saying, 'The Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, *is* Israel's God.' And let the house of Your servant David be established before You. 25 For You, O my God, have revealed to Your servant that You will build him a house. Therefore Your servant has found it *in his heart* to pray before You. 26 And now, Lord, You are God, and have promised this goodness to Your servant. 27 Now You have been pleased to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue before You forever; for You have blessed it, O Lord, and *it shall be* blessed forever."

David's Further Conquests

18 After this it came to pass that David attacked the Philistines, subdued them, and took Gath and its towns from the hand of the Philistines. 2 Then he defeated Moab, and the Moabites became David's servants, *and* brought tribute.

3 And David defeated Hadadezer[a] king of Zobah *as far as* Hamath, as he went to establish his power by the River Euphrates. 4 David took from him one thousand chariots, seven thousand[a] horsemen, and twenty thousand foot soldiers. Also David hamstrung all the chariot *horses,* except that he spared enough of them for one hundred chariots.

5 When the Syrians of Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, David killed twenty-two thousand of the Syrians. 6 Then David put *garrisons* in Syria of Damascus; and the Syrians became David's servants, *and* brought tribute. So the Lord preserved David wherever he went. 7 And David took the shields of gold that were on the servants of Hadadezer, and brought them to Jerusalem. 8 Also from Tibhath[a] and from Chun, cities of Hadadezer, David brought a large amount of bronze, with which Solomon made the bronze Sea, the pillars, and the articles of bronze.

9 Now when Tou[a] king of Hamath heard that David had defeated all the army of Hadadezer king of Zobah, 10 he sent Hadoram[a] his son

18:3 [a]Hebrew *Hadarezer,* and so throughout chapters 18 and 19 **18:4** [a]Or *seven hundred* (compare 2 Samuel 8:4) **18:8** [a]Spelled *Betah* in 2 Samuel 8:8
18:9 [a]Spelled *Toi* in 2 Samuel 8:9, 10 **18:10** [a]Spelled *Joram* in 2 Samuel 8:10

Life Lessons

1 Chronicles 18:1—22:1

SITUATION
God gave David victory over the surrounding kings. David congratulated himself by taking a census of the people to portray his power.

OBSERVATION
In repenting, David acknowledged that he would rather fall into the hands of the Lord than the hands of men (21:13). He said of the Lord, "His mercies are very great."

INSPIRATION
Mercy is the deepest gesture of kindness. Paul equates the two. "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). Jesus said:

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you. . . . If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? . . . Love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful" (Luke 6:27, 28, 32, 35, 36).

Kindness at home. Kindness in public. Kindness at church and kindness with your enemies. Pretty well covers the gamut, don't you think? Almost. Someone else needs your kindness. Who could that be? You.

Don't we tend to be tough on ourselves? And rightly so. Like the young couple at the wedding, we don't always plan

ahead. Like Zacchaeus, we've cheated our share of friends. We've been self-serving. And like the woman with the illness, our world sometimes seems out of control.

But did Jesus scold the couple? No. Did He punish Zacchaeus? No. Was He hard on the woman? No. He is kind to the forgetful. He is kind to the greedy. He is kind to the sick.

And He is kind to us. And since He is so kind to us, can't we be a little kinder to ourselves? *Oh, but you don't know me, Max. You don't know my faults and my thoughts. You don't know the gripes I grumble and the complaints I mumble.* No, I don't, but He does. He knows everything about you, yet He doesn't hold back His kindness toward you. Has He, knowing all your secrets, retracted one promise or reclaimed one gift?

No, he is kind to you. Why don't you be kind to yourself? He forgives your faults. Why don't you do the same? He thinks tomorrow is worth living. Why don't you agree? He believes in you enough to call you His ambassador, His follower, even His child. Why not take His cue and believe in yourself?

In the book entitled *Sweet Thursday,* John Steinbeck introduces us to Madam Fauna. She runs a brothel and takes a liking to a prostitute by the name of Suzy. Madam Fauna sets Suzy up on a real date with a man, not a client. She buys Suzy a nice dress and helps her get ready for the evening. As Suzy is leaving, she, moved by Madam Fauna's kindness, asks her, "You have done so much for me. Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes," the older woman

to King David, to greet him and bless him, because he had fought against Hadadezer and defeated him (for Hadadezer had been at war with Tou); and *Hadoram brought with him* all kinds of articles of gold, silver, and bronze. 11 King David also dedicated these to the Lord, along with the silver and gold that he had brought from all *these* nations—from Edom, from Moab, from the people of Ammon, from the Philistines, and from Amalek.

12 Moreover Abishai the son of Zeruiah killed eighteen thousand Edomites[a] in the Valley of Salt. 13 He also put garrisons in Edom, and all the Edomites became David's servants. And the Lord preserved David wherever he went.

David's Administration

14 So David reigned over all Israel, and administered judgment and justice to all his people. 15 Joab the son of Zeruiah *was* over the army; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud *was* recorder; 16 Zadok the son of Ahitub and Abimelech the son of Abiathar *were* the priests; Shavsha[a] *was* the scribe; 17 Benaiah the son of Jehoiada *was* over the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and David's sons *were* chief ministers at the king's side.

The Ammonites and Syrians Defeated

19 It happened after this that Nahash the king of the people of Ammon died, and his son reigned in his place. 2 Then David said, "I will show kindness to Hanun the son of Nahash, because his father showed kindness to me." So David sent messengers to comfort him concerning his father. And David's servants came to Hanun in the land of the people of Ammon to comfort him.

3 And the princes of the people of Ammon said to Hanun, "Do you think that David really honors your father because he has sent comforters to you? Did his servants not come to you to search and to overthrow and to spy out the land?"

4 Therefore Hanun took David's servants, shaved them, and cut off their garments in the middle, at their buttocks, and sent them away. 5 Then *some* went and told David about the men; and he sent to meet them, because the men were greatly ashamed. And the king said, "Wait at Jericho until your beards have grown, and *then* return."

6 When the people of Ammon saw that they had made themselves repulsive to David, Hanun and the people of Ammon sent a thousand talents of silver to hire for themselves chariots and horsemen from Mesopotamia,[a] from Syrian Maacah, and from Zobah.[b] 7 So they hired for themselves thirty-two thousand chariots, with the king of Maacah and his people, who came and encamped before Medeba. Also the people of Ammon gathered together from their cities, and came to battle.

8 Now when David heard *of it,* he sent Joab and all the army of the mighty men. 9 Then the people of Ammon came out and put themselves in battle array before the gate of the city, and the kings who had come *were* by themselves in the field.

18:12 [a] Or *Syrians* (compare 2 Samuel 8:13) **18:16** [a] Spelled *Seraiah* in 2 Samuel 8:17
19:6 [a] Hebrew *Aram Naharaim* [b] Spelled *Zoba* in 2 Samuel 10:6

10 When Joab saw that the battle line was against him before and
behind, he chose some of Israel's best, and put *them* in battle array
against the Syrians. 11 And the rest of the people he put under the
command of Abishai his brother, and they set *themselves* in battle
array against the people of Ammon. 12 Then he said, "If the Syrians are
too strong for me, then you shall help me; but if the people of Ammon
are too strong for you, then I will help you. 13 Be of good courage, and
let us be strong for our people and for the cities of our God. And may
the Lord do *what is* good in His sight."

14 So Joab and the people who *were* with him drew near for the
battle against the Syrians, and they fled before him. 15 When the peo-
ple of Ammon saw that the Syrians were fleeing, they also fled before
Abishai his brother, and entered the city. So Joab went to Jerusalem.

16 Now when the Syrians saw that they had been defeated by Israel,
they sent messengers and brought the Syrians who were beyond the
River,[a] and Shophach[b] the commander of Hadadezer's army *went*
before them. 17 When it was told David, he gathered all Israel, crossed
over the Jordan and came upon them, and set up in *battle* array
against them. So when David had set up in battle array against the
Syrians, they fought with him. 18 Then the Syrians fled before Israel;
and David killed seven thousand[a] charioteers and forty thousand
foot soldiers[b] of the Syrians, and killed Shophach the commander of
the army. 19 And when the servants of Hadadezer saw that they were
defeated by Israel, they made peace with David and became his ser-
vants. So the Syrians were not willing to help the people of Ammon
anymore.

Rabbah Is Conquered

20 It happened in the spring of the year, at the time kings go out
to battle, that Joab led out the armed forces and ravaged the
country of the people of Ammon, and came and besieged Rabbah.
But David stayed at Jerusalem. And Joab defeated Rabbah and over-
threw it. 2 Then David took their king's crown from his head, and
found it to weigh a talent of gold, and *there were* precious stones in
it. And it was set on David's head. Also he brought out the spoil of the
city in great abundance. 3 And he brought out the people who *were* in
it, and put *them* to work[a] with saws, with iron picks, and with axes. So
David did to all the cities of the people of Ammon. Then David and all
the people returned *to* Jerusalem.

Philistine Giants Destroyed

4 Now it happened afterward that war broke out at Gezer with the
Philistines, at which time Sibbechai the Hushathite killed Sippai,[a] *who*
was one of the sons of the giant. And they were subdued.

5 Again there was war with the Philistines, and Elhanan the son of
Jair[a] killed Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose
spear *was* like a weaver's beam.

19:16 [a]That is, the Euphrates [b]Spelled *Shobach* in 2 Samuel 10:16 **19:18** [a]Or *seven hundred* (compare 2 Samuel 10:18) [b]Or *horsemen* (compare 2 Samuel 10:18)
20:3 [a]Septuagint reads *cut them.* **20:4** [a]Spelled *Saph* in 2 Samuel 21:18
20:5 [a]Spelled *Jaare-Oregim* in 2 Samuel 21:19

replies, "you can say, 'I'm Suzy and no one else.'"

Suzy does. Then Madam Fauna requests, "Now say, 'I'm Suzy, and I'm a good thing.'"

And so Suzy tries. "I'm Suzy, and I'm a good . . ." And Suzy begins to cry.

Wouldn't God want you to say the same words? In His book you are a *good thing.* Be kind to yourself. God thinks you're worth His kindness. And He's a good judge of character. (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What an amazing concept: mercy. Spend the next week thanking God daily for His immeasurable mercy and grace. Thank Him that you will receive more mercy from Him than from others.

EXPLORATION

Mercy—Exodus 34:6; Psalm 103:8; Romans 9:15; 1 Corinthians 7:25; Ephesians 2:4; James 5:11.

If humility precedes an event, then confidence may follow.

—Max Lucado (Traveling Light)

6 Yet again there was war at Gath, where
there was a man of *great* stature, with twenty-
four fingers and toes, six *on each hand* and six
on each foot; and he also was born to the giant.
7 So when he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of
Shimea,[a] David's brother, killed him.
8 These were born to the giant in Gath, and
they fell by the hand of David and by the hand
of his servants.

The Census of Israel and Judah

21 Now Satan stood up against Israel, and
moved David to number Israel. 2 So
David said to Joab and to the leaders of the
people, "Go, number Israel from Beersheba to
Dan, and bring the number of them to me that
I may know *it.*"
3 And Joab answered, "May the Lord make
His people a hundred times more than they
are. But, my lord the king, *are* they not all my
lord's servants? Why then does my lord require
this thing? Why should he be a cause of guilt
in Israel?"
4 Nevertheless the king's word prevailed
against Joab. Therefore Joab departed and
went throughout all Israel and came to Jerusa-
lem. 5 Then Joab gave the sum of the number
of the people to David. All Israel *had* one mil-
lion one hundred thousand men who drew
the sword, and Judah *had* four hundred and
seventy thousand men who drew the sword.
6 But he did not count Levi and Benjamin
among them, for the king's word was abomi-
nable to Joab.
7 And God was displeased with this thing;
therefore He struck Israel. 8 So David said to
God, "I have sinned greatly, because I have
done this thing; but now, I pray, take away the
iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very
foolishly."
9 Then the Lord spoke to Gad, David's seer,
saying, 10 "Go and tell David, saying, 'Thus
says the Lord: "I offer you three *things;* choose
one of them for yourself, that I may do *it* to
you."' "
11 So Gad came to David and said to him,
"Thus says the Lord: 'Choose for yourself,
12 either three[a] years of famine, or three
months to be defeated by your foes with the
sword of your enemies overtaking *you,* or
else for three days the sword of the Lord—
the plague in the land, with the angel[b] of the
Lord destroying throughout all the territory
of Israel.' Now consider what answer I should
take back to Him who sent me."
13 And David said to Gad, "I am in great
distress. Please let me fall into the hand of the
Lord, for His mercies *are* very great; but do not
let me fall into the hand of man."
14 So the Lord sent a plague upon Israel, and
seventy thousand men of Israel fell. 15 And God
sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it. As he[a]
was destroying, the Lord looked and relented
of the disaster, and said to the angel who was
destroying, "It is enough; now restrain your[b]
hand." And the angel of the Lord stood by the
threshing floor of Ornan[c] the Jebusite.
16 Then David lifted his eyes and saw the
angel of the Lord standing between earth and
heaven, having in his hand a drawn sword
stretched out over Jerusalem. So David and
the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell on their
faces. 17 And David said to God, "Was it not
I who commanded the people to be num-
bered? I am the one who has sinned and done
evil indeed; but these sheep, what have they
done? Let Your hand, I pray, O Lord my God,
be against me and my father's house, but
not against Your people that they should be
plagued."
18 Therefore, the angel of the Lord com-
manded Gad to say to David that David should
go and erect an altar to the Lord on the thresh-
ing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. 19 So David
went up at the word of Gad, which he had
spoken in the name of the Lord. 20 Now Ornan
turned and saw the angel; and his four sons
who were with him hid themselves, but Ornan
continued threshing wheat. 21 So David came
to Ornan, and Ornan looked and saw David.
And he went out from the threshing floor,
and bowed before David with *his* face to the
ground. 22 Then David said to Ornan, "Grant
me the place of *this* threshing floor, that I may
build an altar on it to the Lord. You shall grant
it to me at the full price, that the plague may
be withdrawn from the people."
23 But Ornan said to David, "Take *it* to your-

20:7 [a]Spelled *Shimeah* in 2 Samuel 21:21 and *Shammah* in 1 Samuel 16:9 **21:12** [a]Or *seven* (compare 2 Samuel 24:13) [b]Or *Angel*, and so elsewhere in this chapter **21:15** [a]Or *He* [b]Or *Your* [c]Spelled *Araunah* in 2 Samuel 24:16

self, and let my lord the king do *what is* good in his eyes. Look, I *also* give *you* the oxen for burnt offerings, the threshing implements for wood, and the wheat for the grain offering; I give *it* all."

24 Then King David said to Ornan, "No, but I will surely buy *it* for the full price, for I will not take what is yours for the Lord, nor offer burnt offerings with *that which* costs *me* nothing." 25 So David gave Ornan six hundred shekels of gold by weight for the place. 26 And David built there an altar to the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called on the Lord; and He answered him from heaven by fire on the altar of burnt offering.

27 So the Lord commanded the angel, and he returned his sword to its sheath.

28 At that time, when David saw that the Lord had answered him on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, he sacrificed there. 29 For the tabernacle of the Lord and the altar of the burnt offering, which Moses had made in the wilderness, *were* at that time at the high place in Gibeon. 30 But David could not go before it to inquire of God, for he was afraid of the sword of the angel of the Lord.

David Prepares to Build the Temple

22 Then David said, "This *is* the house of the Lord God, and this *is* the altar of burnt offering for Israel." 2 So David commanded to gather the aliens who *were* in the land of Israel; and he appointed masons to cut hewn stones to build the house of God. 3 And David prepared iron in abundance for the nails of the doors of the gates and for the joints, and bronze in abundance beyond measure, 4 and cedar trees in abundance; for the Sidonians and those from Tyre brought much cedar wood to David.

5 Now David said, "Solomon my son *is* young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the Lord *must be* exceedingly magnificent, famous and glorious throughout all countries. I will now make preparation for it." So David made abundant preparations before his death.

6 Then he called for his son Solomon, and charged him to build a house for the Lord God of Israel. 7 And David said to Solomon: "My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build a house to the name of the Lord my God; 8 but the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'You have shed much blood and have made great wars; you shall not build a house for My name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in My sight. 9 Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies all around. His name shall be Solomon,[a] for I will give peace and quietness to Israel in his days. 10 He shall build a house for My name, and he shall be My son, and I *will be* his Father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.' 11 Now, my son, may the Lord be with you; and may you prosper, and build the house of the Lord your God, as He has said to you. 12 Only may the Lord give you wisdom and understanding, and give you charge concerning Israel, that you may keep the law of the Lord your God. 13 Then you will prosper, if you take care to fulfill the statutes and judgments with which the Lord charged

22:9 [a]Literally *Peaceful*

Life Lessons

1 Chronicles 22:2—24:31

SITUATION
David planned the temple. After the exile, these dimensions were used to rebuild the temple.

OBSERVATION
In service to God, everyone's job remains important. Each person's part honors God.

INSPIRATION
A temple. David had wanted to build a temple. What he had done for Israel, he wanted to do for the ark—protect it. What he had done with Jerusalem, he wanted to do with the temple—establish it. And who better than he to do so? Hadn't he, literally, written the book on worship? Didn't he rescue the ark of the covenant? The temple would have been his swan song, his signature deed. David had expected to dedicate his final years to building a shrine to God.

At least, that had been his intention. "I had it in my heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and for the footstool of our God, and had made preparations to build it" (1 Chronicles 28:2).

Preparations. Architects chosen. Builders selected. Blueprints and plans, drawings and numbers. Temple columns sketched. Steps designed.

"I had intended . . . I had made preparations . . ."

Intentions. Preparations. But no temple. Why? Did David grow discouraged? No. He stood willing. Were the people resistant? Hardly. They gave generously. Were

Moses concerning Israel. Be strong and of good courage; do not fear nor be dismayed. 14 Indeed I have taken much trouble to prepare for the house of the Lord one hundred thousand talents of gold and one million talents of silver, and bronze and iron beyond measure, for it is so abundant. I have prepared timber and stone also, and you may add to them. 15 Moreover *there are* workmen with you in abundance: woodsmen and stonecutters, and all types of skillful men for every kind of work. 16 Of gold and silver and bronze and iron *there is* no limit. Arise and begin working, and the Lord be with you."

17 David also commanded all the leaders of Israel to help Solomon his son, *saying,* 18 "*Is* not the Lord your God with you? And has He *not* given you rest on every side? For He has given the inhabitants of the land into my hand, and the land is subdued before the Lord and before His people. 19 Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God. Therefore arise and build the sanctuary of the Lord God, to bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord and the holy articles of God into the house that is to be built for the name of the Lord."

The Divisions of the Levites

23 So when David was old and full of days, he made his son Solomon king over Israel.

2 And he gathered together all the leaders of Israel, with the priests and the Levites. 3 Now the Levites were numbered from the age of thirty years and above; and the number of individual males was thirty-eight thousand. 4 Of these, twenty-four thousand *were* to look after the work of the house of the Lord, six thousand *were* officers and judges, 5 four thousand *were* gatekeepers, and four thousand praised the Lord with *musical* instruments, "which I made," *said David,* "for giving praise."

6 Also David separated them into divisions among the sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

7 Of the Gershonites: Laadan[a] and Shimei. 8 The sons of Laadan: the first Jehiel, then Zetham and Joel—three *in all.* 9 The sons of Shimei: Shelomith, Haziel, and Haran—three *in all.* These were the heads of the fathers' *houses* of Laadan. 10 And the sons of Shimei: Jahath, Zina,[a] Jeush, and Beriah. These *were* the four sons of Shimei. 11 Jahath was the first and Zizah the second. But Jeush and Beriah did not have many sons; therefore they were assigned as one father's house.

12 The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel—four *in all.* 13 The sons of Amram: Aaron and Moses; and Aaron was set apart, he and his sons forever, that he should sanctify the most holy things, to burn incense before the Lord, to minister to Him, and to give the blessing in His name forever. 14 Now the sons of Moses the man of God were reckoned to the tribe of Levi. 15 The sons of Moses *were* Gershon[a] and Eliezer. 16 Of the sons of Gershon, Shebuel[a] *was* the first. 17 Of the descendants of Eliezer, Rehabiah was the first. And Eliezer had no other sons, but the sons of Rehabiah were very many. 18 Of the sons of Izhar, Shelomith *was* the first. 19 Of the sons of Hebron, Jeriah *was* the

23:7 [a]Spelled *Libni* in Exodus 6:17 **23:10** [a]Septuagint and Vulgate read *Zizah* (compare verse 11). **23:15** [a]Hebrew *Gershom* (compare 6:16) **23:16** [a]Spelled *Shubael* in 24:20

the resources scarce? Far from it. David "prepared iron in abundance for the nails of the doors of the gates and for the joints, and bronze in abundance beyond measure, and cedar trees in abundance" (1 Chronicles 22:3, 4). Then what happened?

A conjunction happened.

Conjunctions operate as the signal lights of sentences. Some, such as *and,* are green. Others, such as *however,* are yellow. A few are red. Sledgehammer red. They stop you. David got a red light. . . .

David's bloodthirsty temperament cost him the temple privilege. All he could do was say:

I had intended . . .

I had made preparations . . .

But God . . .

What do you do with the "but God" moments in life? When God interrupts your good plans, how do you respond? (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How can you begin to serve God? Perhaps you can help lead a Bible study for new believers or even open your home so someone else can. Look for a way you can lift the load from someone else. Ask God for guidance and then listen to what He would have you do.

EXPLORATION

Body of Believers—Romans 12:3–8; 1 Corinthians 12:4–27; Ephesians 2:19–22; 4:11, 12, 15, 16.

first, Amariah the second, Jahaziel the third, and Jekameam the fourth. 20 Of the sons of Uzziel, Michah *was* the first and Jesshiah the second.

21 The sons of Merari *were* Mahli and Mushi. The sons of Mahli *were* Eleazar and Kish. 22 And Eleazar died, and had no sons, but only daughters; and their brethren, the sons of Kish, took them *as wives.* 23 The sons of Mushi *were* Mahli, Eder, and Jeremoth—three *in all.*

24 These *were* the sons of Levi by their fathers' houses—the heads of the fathers' *houses* as they were counted individually by the number of their names, who did the work for the service of the house of the Lord, from the age of twenty years and above.

25 For David said, "The Lord God of Israel has given rest to His people, that they may dwell in Jerusalem forever"; 26 and also to the Levites, "They shall no longer carry the tabernacle, or any of the articles for its service." 27 For by the last words of David the Levites *were* numbered from twenty years old and above; 28 because their duty *was* to help the sons of Aaron in the service of the house of the Lord, in the courts and in the chambers, in the purifying of all holy things and the work of the service of the house of God, 29 both with the showbread and the fine flour for the grain offering, with the unleavened cakes and *what is baked in* the pan, with what is mixed and with all kinds of measures and sizes; 30 to stand every morning to thank and praise the Lord, and likewise at evening; 31 and at every presentation of a burnt offering to the Lord on the Sabbaths and on the New Moons and on the set feasts, by number according to the ordinance governing them, regularly before the Lord; 32 and that they should attend to the needs of the tabernacle of meeting, the needs of the holy *place,* and the needs of the sons of Aaron their brethren in the work of the house of the Lord.

The Divisions of the Priests

24 Now *these are* the divisions of the sons of Aaron. The sons of Aaron *were* Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. 2 And Nadab and Abihu died before their father, and had no children; therefore Eleazar and Ithamar ministered as priests. 3 Then David with Zadok of the sons of Eleazar, and Ahimelech of the sons of Ithamar, divided them according to the schedule of their service.

4 There were more leaders found of the sons of Eleazar than of the sons of Ithamar, and *thus* they were divided. Among the sons of Eleazar *were* sixteen heads of *their* fathers' houses, and eight heads of their fathers' houses among the sons of Ithamar. 5 Thus they were divided by lot, one group as another, for there were officials of the sanctuary and officials *of the house* of God, from the sons of Eleazar and from the sons of Ithamar. 6 And the scribe, Shemaiah the son of Nethanel, *one of* the Levites, wrote them down before the king, the leaders, Zadok the priest, Ahimelech the son of Abiathar, and the heads of the fathers' *houses* of the priests and Levites, one father's house taken for Eleazar and *one* for Ithamar.

7 Now the first lot fell to Jehoiarib, the second to Jedaiah, 8 the third to Harim, the fourth to Seorim, 9 the fifth to Malchijah, the sixth to Mijamin, 10 the seventh to Hakkoz, the eighth to Abijah, 11 the ninth to Jeshua, the tenth to Shecaniah, 12 the eleventh to Eliashib, the twelfth to Jakim, 13 the thirteenth to Huppah, the fourteenth to Jeshebeab, 14 the fifteenth to Bilgah, the sixteenth to Immer, 15 the seventeenth to Hezir, the eighteenth to Happizzez,[a] 16 the nineteenth to Pethahiah, the twentieth to Jehezekel,[a] 17 the twenty-first to Jachin, the twenty-second to Gamul, 18 the twenty-third to Delaiah, the twenty-fourth to Maaziah.

19 This *was* the schedule of their service for coming into the house of the Lord according to their ordinance by the hand of Aaron their father, as the Lord God of Israel had commanded him.

Other Levites

20 And the rest of the sons of Levi: of the sons of Amram, Shubael;[a] of the sons of Shubael, Jehdeiah. 21 Concerning Rehabiah, of the sons of Rehabiah, the first *was* Isshiah. 22 Of the Izharites, Shelomoth;[a] of the sons of

24:15 [a]Septuagint and Vulgate read *Aphses.* **24:16** [a]Masoretic Text reads *Jehezekel.* **24:20** [a]Spelled *Shebuel* in 23:16
24:22 [a]Spelled *Shelomith* in 23:18

Life LESSONS

1 Chronicles 25:1—27:34

SITUATION
King David hoped to build the temple for God. In addition to planning and funding the temple, David spent time preparing the temple servants to be ready when Solomon finished the temple.

OBSERVATION
David developed a plan so that operations would go smoothly. Each person fulfilled his or her role, working for the common good of God's people.

INSPIRATION
The view from Colorado's Mount Chrysolite steals what little breath the climb doesn't. A shawl of snow rests on the peaks to the east, marking the Continental Divide. You'd swear that's Montana you see to the north. Circles of ice-cold, trout-packed, pristine ponds stretch through the valley beneath you like a straight string of pearls.

Each Thursday during the summer some four hundred kids make the fourteen-thousand-foot climb. They've traveled from all over the nation to spend a week at Frontier Ranch, a Young Life camp. Some come to escape parents or hang out with a boyfriend. But before the week culminates, all hear about Jesus. And all will witness His work from the top of Mount Chrysolite.

They *all* will climb the peak. For that reason, several Young Life directors caboose the end of the pack. They prod and applaud, making sure every

Shelomoth, Jahath. 23 Of the sons *of Hebron,*[a] Jeriah *was the first,*[b] Amariah the second, Jahaziel the third, *and* Jekameam the fourth. 24 *Of* the sons of Uzziel, Michah; of the sons of Michah, Shamir. 25 The brother of Michah, Isshiah; of the sons of Isshiah, Zechariah. 26 The sons of Merari *were* Mahli and Mushi; the son of Jaaziah, Beno. 27 The sons of Merari by Jaaziah *were* Beno, Shoham, Zaccur, and Ibri. 28 Of Mahli: Eleazar, who had no sons. 29 Of Kish: the son of Kish, Jerahmeel.

30 Also the sons of Mushi *were* Mahli, Eder, and Jerimoth. These *were* the sons of the Levites according to their fathers' houses.

31 These also cast lots just as their brothers the sons of Aaron did, in the presence of King David, Zadok, Ahimelech, and the heads of the fathers' *houses* of the priests and Levites. The chief fathers *did* just as their younger brethren.

The Musicians

25 Moreover David and the captains of the army separated for the service *some* of the sons of Asaph, of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who *should* prophesy with harps, stringed instruments, and cymbals. And the number of the skilled men performing their service was: 2 Of the sons of Asaph: Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah, and Asharelah;[a] the sons of Asaph *were* under the direction of Asaph, who prophesied according to the order of the king. 3 Of Jeduthun, the sons of Jeduthun: Gedaliah, Zeri,[a] Jeshaiah, *Shimei,* Hashabiah, and Mattithiah, six,[b] under the direction of their father Jeduthun, who prophesied with a harp to give thanks and to praise the Lord. 4 Of Heman, the sons of Heman: Bukkiah, Mattaniah, Uzziel,[a] Shebuel,[b] Jerimoth,[c] Hananiah, Hanani, Eliathah, Giddalti, Romamti-Ezer, Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir, *and* Mahazioth. 5 All these *were* the sons of Heman the king's seer in the words of God, to exalt his horn.[a] For God gave Heman fourteen sons and three daughters.

6 All these *were* under the direction of their father for the music *in* the house of the Lord, with cymbals, stringed instruments, and harps, for the service of the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman *were* under the authority of the king. 7 So the number of them, with their brethren who were instructed in the songs of the Lord, all who were skillful, *was* two hundred and eighty-eight.

8 And they cast lots for their duty, the small as well as the great, the teacher with the student.

9 Now the first lot for Asaph came out for Joseph; the second for Gedaliah, him with his brethren and sons, twelve; 10 the third for Zaccur, his sons and his brethren, twelve; 11 the fourth for Jizri,[a] his sons and his brethren, twelve; 12 the fifth for Nethaniah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; 13 the sixth for Bukkiah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; 14 the seventh for Jesharelah,[a] his sons and his brethren, twelve;

24:23 [a]Supplied from 23:19 (following some Hebrew manuscripts and Septuagint manuscripts) [b]Supplied from 23:19 (following some Hebrew manuscripts and Septuagint manuscripts) **25:2** [a]Spelled *Jesharelah* in verse 14 **25:3** [a]Spelled *Jizri* in verse 11 [b]*Shimei,* appearing in one Hebrew and several Septuagint manuscripts, completes the total of six sons (compare verse 17). **25:4** [a]Spelled *Azarel* in verse 18 [b]Spelled *Shubael* in verse 20 [c]Spelled *Jeremoth* in verse 22 **25:5** [a]That is, to increase his power or influence **25:11** [a]Spelled *Zeri* in verse 3 **25:14** [a]Spelled *Asharelah* in verse 2

15 the eighth for Jeshaiah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; 16 the
ninth for Mattaniah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; 17 the tenth for
Shimei, his sons and his brethren, twelve; 18 the eleventh for Azarel,[a]
his sons and his brethren, twelve; 19 the twelfth for Hashabiah, his sons
and his brethren, twelve; 20 the thirteenth for Shubael,[a] his sons and
his brethren, twelve; 21 the fourteenth for Mattithiah, his sons and his
brethren, twelve; 22 the fifteenth for Jeremoth,[a] his sons and his breth-
ren, twelve; 23 the sixteenth for Hananiah, his sons and his brethren,
twelve; 24 the seventeenth for Joshbekashah, his sons and his brethren,
twelve; 25 the eighteenth for Hanani, his sons and his brethren, twelve;
26 the nineteenth for Mallothi, his sons and his brethren, twelve; 27 the
twentieth for Eliathah, his sons and his brethren, twelve; 28 the twenty-
first for Hothir, his sons and his brethren, twelve; 29 the twenty-second
for Giddalti, his sons and his brethren, twelve; 30 the twenty-third for
Mahazioth, his sons and his brethren, twelve; 31 the twenty-fourth for
Romamti-Ezer, his sons and his brethren, twelve.

The Gatekeepers

26 Concerning the divisions of the gatekeepers: of the Korahites,
Meshelemiah the son of Kore, of the sons of Asaph. 2 And the
sons of Meshelemiah *were* Zechariah the firstborn, Jediael the second,
Zebadiah the third, Jathniel the fourth, 3 Elam the fifth, Jehohanan the
sixth, Eliehoenai the seventh.

4 Moreover the sons of Obed-Edom *were* Shemaiah the firstborn,
Jehozabad the second, Joah the third, Sacar the fourth, Nethanel the
fifth, 5 Ammiel the sixth, Issachar the seventh, Peulthai the eighth; for
God blessed him.

6 Also to Shemaiah his son were sons born who governed their
fathers' houses, because they *were* men of great ability. 7 The sons of
Shemaiah *were* Othni, Rephael, Obed, and Elzabad, whose brothers
Elihu and Semachiah *were* able men.

8 All these *were* of the sons of Obed-Edom, they and their sons
and their brethren, able men with strength for the work: sixty-two of
Obed-Edom.

9 And Meshelemiah had sons and brethren, eighteen able men.

10 Also Hosah, of the children of Merari, had sons: Shimri the first
(for *though* he was not the firstborn, his father made him the first),
11 Hilkiah the second, Tebaliah the third, Zechariah the fourth; all the
sons and brethren of Hosah *were* thirteen.

12 Among these *were* the divisions of the gatekeepers, among the
chief men, *having* duties just like their brethren, to serve in the house
of the Lord. 13 And they cast lots for each gate, the small as well as the
great, according to their father's house. 14 The lot for the East *Gate* fell
to Shelemiah. Then they cast lots *for* his son Zechariah, a wise coun-
selor, and his lot came out for the North Gate; 15 to Obed-Edom the
South Gate, and to his sons the storehouse.[a] 16 To Shuppim and Hosah
the lot came out for the West Gate, with the Shallecheth Gate on the
ascending highway—watchman opposite watchman. 17 On the east
were six Levites, on the north four each day, on the south four each

25:18 [a]Spelled *Uzziel* in verse 4 **25:20** [a]Spelled *Shebuel* in verse 4 **25:22** [a]Spelled *Jerimoth* in verse 4 **26:15** [a]Hebrew *asuppim*

camper crests the top. I walked with them.

One young student, whose sweet spot shows great actuarial potential, counted the strides to the peak. Eight thousand. Somewhere around number four thousand [he] decided to call it quits, said he was too tired to take another step. . . .

A Young Life staffer spelled out the consequences. "Can't send you down alone, friend. You turn back, we all turn back."

The small circle of "we," I realized, included "me." I didn't want to go back. I had two options: miss the mountaintop or help Matt see it.

I coaxed him, begged him, negotiated a plan with him. Thirty steps of walking. Sixty seconds of resting. We inched our way at this pace for an hour. Finally we stood within a thousand feet of the peak. But the last stretch of trail rose up as straight as a fireman's ladder.

We got serious. Two guys each took an arm, and I took the rear. I placed both hands on Matt's gluteus maximus and shoved. We all but dragged him past the timberline.

That's when we heard the applause. Four hundred kids on the crest of Mount Chrysolite gave [him] a standing ovation. They whooped and hollered and slapped him on the back.

As I slumped down to rest, this thought steamrolled my way. *There it is, Max, a picture of my plan. Do all you can to push each other to the top.* From God? Sounds like something He might say.

After all, His Son did that. Jesus' self-assigned purpose statement reads: "For even the Son of Man did not

come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

God's cure for the common life includes a strong dose of servanthood. Timely reminder. As you celebrate your unique design, be careful. Don't so focus on what you love to do that you neglect what needs to be done. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

The Holy Spirit has assigned gifts and opportunities for service to each Believer. How are you serving God with your abilities? Look for an opportunity today to honor God by giving of yourself to others.

EXPLORATION

Serving God—Isaiah 45:9; Luke 12:47; Acts 13:2; 26:16; Romans 9:20, 21; 1 Corinthians 12:4–7; Ephesians 6:7.

day, and for the storehouse[a] two by two. 18 As for the Parbar[a] on the west, *there were* four on the highway *and* two at the Parbar. 19 These were the divisions of the gatekeepers among the sons of Korah and among the sons of Merari.

The Treasuries and Other Duties

20 Of the Levites, Ahijah *was* over the treasuries of the house of God and over the treasuries of the dedicated things. 21 The sons of Laadan, the descendants of the Gershonites of Laadan, heads of their fathers' *houses,* of Laadan the Gershonite: Jehieli. 22 The sons of Jehieli, Zetham and Joel his brother, *were* over the treasuries of the house of the Lord. 23 Of the Amramites, the Izharites, the Hebronites, and the Uzzielites: 24 Shebuel the son of Gershom, the son of Moses, *was* overseer of the treasuries. 25 And his brethren by Eliezer *were* Rehabiah his son, Jeshaiah his son, Joram his son, Zichri his son, and Shelomith his son.

26 This Shelomith and his brethren *were* over all the treasuries of the dedicated things which King David and the heads of fathers' *houses,* the captains over thousands and hundreds, and the captains of the army, had dedicated. 27 Some of the spoils won in battles they dedicated to maintain the house of the Lord. 28 And all that Samuel the seer, Saul the son of Kish, Abner the son of Ner, and Joab the son of Zeruiah had dedicated, every dedicated *thing,* was under the hand of Shelomith and his brethren.

29 Of the Izharites, Chenaniah and his sons *performed* duties as officials and judges over Israel outside Jerusalem.

30 Of the Hebronites, Hashabiah and his brethren, one thousand seven hundred able men, had the oversight of Israel on the west side of the Jordan for all the business of the Lord, and in the service of the king. 31 Among the Hebronites, Jerijah *was* head of the Hebronites according to his genealogy of the fathers. In the fortieth year of the reign of David they were sought, and there were found among them capable men at Jazer of Gilead. 32 And his brethren *were* two thousand seven hundred able men, heads of fathers' *houses,* whom King David made officials over the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, for every matter pertaining to God and the affairs of the king.

The Military Divisions

27 And the children of Israel, according to their number, the heads of fathers' *houses,* the captains of thousands and hundreds and their officers, served the king in every matter of the *military* divisions. *These divisions* came in and went out month by month throughout all the months of the year, each division *having* twenty-four thousand.

2 Over the first division for the first month *was* Jashobeam the son of Zabdiel, and in his division *were* twenty-four thousand; 3 *he was* of the children of Perez, and the chief of all the captains of the army for the first month. 4 Over the division of the second month *was* Dodai[a]

26:17 [a]Hebrew *asuppim* **26:18** [a]Probably a court or colonnade extending west of the temple **27:4** [a]Hebrew *Dodai,* usually spelled *Dodo* (compare 2 Samuel 23:9)

an Ahohite, and of his division Mikloth also *was* the leader; in his division *were* twenty-four thousand. 5 The third captain of the army for the third month *was* Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada the priest, who was chief; in his division *were* twenty-four thousand. 6 This was the Benaiah *who was* mighty *among* the thirty, and was over the thirty; in his division *was* Ammizabad his son. 7 The fourth *captain* for the fourth month *was* Asahel the brother of Joab, and Zebadiah his son after him; in his division *were* twenty-four thousand. 8 The fifth captain for the fifth month *was* Shamhuth[a] the Izrahite; in his division were twenty-four thousand. 9 The sixth *captain* for the sixth month *was* Ira the son of Ikkesh the Tekoite; in his division *were* twenty-four thousand. 10 The seventh *captain* for the seventh month *was* Helez the Pelonite, of the children of Ephraim; in his division *were* twenty-four thousand. 11 The eighth *captain* for the eighth month *was* Sibbechai the Hushathite, of the Zarhites; in his division *were* twenty-four thousand. 12 The ninth *captain* for the ninth month *was* Abiezer the Anathothite, of the Benjamites; in his division *were* twenty-four thousand. 13 The tenth *captain* for the tenth month *was* Maharai the Netophathite, of the Zarhites; in his division *were* twenty-four thousand. 14 The eleventh *captain* for the eleventh month *was* Benaiah the Pirathonite, of the children of Ephraim; in his division *were* twenty-four thousand. 15 The twelfth *captain* for the twelfth month *was* Heldai[a] the Netophathite, of Othniel; in his division *were* twenty-four thousand.

Leaders of Tribes

16 Furthermore, over the tribes of Israel: the officer over the Reubenites *was* Eliezer the son of Zichri; over the Simeonites, Shephatiah the son of Maachah; 17 *over* the Levites, Hashabiah the son of Kemuel; over the Aaronites, Zadok; 18 *over* Judah, Elihu, *one* of David's brothers; *over* Issachar, Omri the son of Michael; 19 *over* Zebulun, Ishmaiah the son of Obadiah; *over* Naphtali, Jerimoth the son of Azriel; 20 *over* the children of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Azaziah; *over* the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joel the son of Pedaiah; 21 *over* the half-*tribe* of Manasseh in Gilead, Iddo the son of Zechariah; *over* Benjamin, Jaasiel the son of Abner; 22 *over* Dan, Azarel the son of Jeroham. These *were* the leaders of the tribes of Israel.

23 But David did not take the number of those twenty years old and under, because the Lord had said He would multiply Israel like the stars of the heavens. 24 Joab the son of Zeruiah began a census, but he did not finish, for wrath came upon Israel because of this census; nor was the number recorded in the account of the chronicles of King David.

Other State Officials

25 And Azmaveth the son of Adiel *was* over the king's treasuries; and Jehonathan the son of Uzziah was over the storehouses in the field, in the cities, in the villages, and in the fortresses. 26 Ezri the son of Chelub was over those who did the work of the field for tilling the ground. 27 And Shimei the Ramathite *was* over the vineyards, and Zabdi the Shiphmite was over the produce of the vineyards for the supply of wine. 28 Baal-Hanan the Gederite was over the olive trees and the sycamore trees that *were* in the lowlands, and Joash *was* over the store of oil. 29 And Shitrai the Sharonite *was* over the herds that fed in Sharon, and Shaphat the son of Adlai was over the herds *that were* in the valleys. 30 Obil the Ishmaelite *was* over the camels, Jehdeiah the Meronothite *was* over the donkeys, 31 and Jaziz the Hagrite *was* over the flocks. All these *were* the officials over King David's property.

32 Also Jehonathan, David's uncle, *was* a counselor, a wise man, and a scribe; and Jehiel the son of Hachmoni *was* with the king's sons. 33 Ahithophel *was* the king's counselor, and Hushai the Archite *was* the king's companion. 34 After Ahithophel *was* Jehoiada the son of Benaiah, then Abiathar. And the general of the king's army *was* Joab.

Solomon Instructed to Build the Temple

28 Now David assembled at Jerusalem all the leaders of Israel: the officers of the tribes and the captains of the divisions who served the king, the captains over thousands

27:8 [a]Spelled *Shammoth* in 11:27 and *Shammah* in 2 Samuel 23:11 **27:15** [a]Spelled *Heled* in 11:30 and *Heleb* in 2 Samuel 23:29

Life Lessons

1 Chronicles 28:1—29:30

SITUATION
As David grew old, he handed his temple building plans to his son Solomon. God chose Solomon to reign after David (even though he wasn't the oldest son). David also gave Solomon wise advice about his relationship with God.

OBSERVATION
David's final words consisted of thanksgiving and praise. David recognized that even the gifts Israel presented to God came from the Lord.

INSPIRATION
God is committed to caring for our needs. Paul tells us that a man who won't feed his own family is worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8). How much more will a holy God care for His children? After all, how can we fulfill His mission unless our needs are met? How can we teach or minister or influence unless we have our basic needs satisfied? Will God enlist us in His army and not provide a commissary? Of course not.

"May the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight" (Hebrews 13:20, 21). Hasn't that prayer been answered in our life? We may not have had a feast, but haven't we always had food? Perhaps there was no banquet, but at least there was bread. And many times there was a banquet.

and captains over hundreds, and the stewards over all the substance and possessions of the king and of his sons, with the officials, the valiant men, and all the mighty men of valor.

2 Then King David rose to his feet and said, "Hear me, my brethren and my people: I *had* it in my heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and for the footstool of our God, and had made preparations to build it. 3 But God said to me, 'You shall not build a house for My name, because you *have been* a man of war and have shed blood.' 4 However the Lord God of Israel chose me above all the house of my father to be king over Israel forever, for He has chosen Judah *to be* the ruler. And of the house of Judah, the house of my father, and among the sons of my father, He was pleased with me to make *me* king over all Israel. 5 And of all my sons (for the Lord has given me many sons) He has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel. 6 Now He said to me, 'It is your son Solomon *who* shall build My house and My courts; for I have chosen him *to be* My son, and I will be his Father. 7 Moreover I will establish his kingdom forever, if he is steadfast to observe My commandments and My judgments, as it is this day.' 8 Now therefore, in the sight of all Israel, the assembly of the Lord, and in the hearing of our God, be careful to seek out all the commandments of the Lord your God, that you may possess this good land, and leave *it* as an inheritance for your children after you forever.

9 "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever. 10 Consider now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary; be strong, and do it."

11 Then David gave his son Solomon the plans for the vestibule, its houses, its treasuries, its upper chambers, its inner chambers, and the place of the mercy seat; 12 and the plans for all that he had by the Spirit, of the courts of the house of the Lord, of all the chambers all around, of the treasuries of the house of God, and of the treasuries for the dedicated things; 13 also for the division of the priests and the Levites, for all the work of the service of the house of the Lord, and for all the articles of service in the house of the Lord. 14 *He gave* gold by weight for *things* of gold, for all articles used in every kind of service; also *silver* for all articles of silver by weight, for all articles used in every kind of service; 15 the weight for the lampstands of gold, and their lamps of gold, by weight for each lampstand and its lamps; for the lampstands of silver by weight, for the lampstand and its lamps, according to the use of each lampstand. 16 And by weight *he gave* gold for the tables of the showbread, for each table, and silver for the tables of silver; 17 also pure gold for the forks, the basins, the pitchers of pure gold, and the golden bowls—*he gave gold* by weight for every bowl; and for the silver bowls, *silver* by weight for every bowl; 18 and refined gold by weight for the altar of incense, and for the construction of the chariot, that is, the gold cherubim that spread *their wings* and overshadowed the ark of the covenant of the Lord. 19 "All *this*," *said David*, "the Lord made me understand in writing, by *His* hand upon me, all the works of these plans."

20 And David said to his son Solomon, "Be strong and of good courage, and do *it;* do not fear nor be dismayed, for the Lord God—my God—*will be* with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you, until you have finished all the work for the service of the house of the Lord.
21 *Here are* the divisions of the priests and the Levites for all the service of the house of God; and every willing craftsman *will be* with you for all manner of workmanship, for every kind of service; also the leaders and all the people *will be* completely at your command."

Offerings for Building the Temple

29 Furthermore King David said to all the assembly: "My son Solomon, whom alone God has chosen, *is* young and inexperienced; and the work *is* great, because the temple[a] *is* not for man but for the Lord God. 2 Now for the house of my God I have prepared with all my might: gold for *things to be made of* gold, silver for *things of* silver, bronze for *things of* bronze, iron for *things of* iron, wood for *things of* wood, onyx stones, *stones* to be set, glistening stones of various colors, all kinds of precious stones, and marble slabs in abundance. 3 Moreover, because I have set my affection on the house of my God, I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, my own special treasure of gold and silver: 4 three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses; 5 the gold for *things of* gold and the silver for *things of* silver, and for all kinds of work *to be done* by the hands of craftsmen. Who *then* is willing to consecrate himself this day to the Lord?"

6 Then the leaders of the fathers' *houses,* leaders of the tribes of Israel, the captains of thousands and of hundreds, with the officers over the king's work, offered willingly. 7 They gave for the work of the house of God five thousand talents and ten thousand darics of gold, ten thousand talents of silver, eighteen thousand talents of bronze, and one hundred thousand talents of iron. 8 And whoever had *precious* stones gave *them* to the treasury of the house of the Lord, into the hand of Jehiel[a] the Gershonite. 9 Then the people rejoiced, for they had offered willingly, because with a loyal heart they had offered willingly to the Lord; and King David also rejoiced greatly.

David's Praise to God

10 Therefore David blessed the Lord before all the assembly; and David said:

"Blessed are You, Lord God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever.
11 Yours, O Lord, *is* the greatness,
The power and the glory,
The victory and the majesty;
For all *that is* in heaven and in earth *is Yours;*
Yours *is* the kingdom, O Lord,
And You are exalted as head over all.
12 Both riches and honor *come* from You,
And You reign over all.

29:1 [a]Literally *palace* **29:8** [a]Possibly the same as *Jehieli* (compare 26:21, 22)

In fact, many of us in the United States have trouble relating to the phrase "Give us this day our daily bread" because our pantries are so packed and our bellies so full we seldom ask for food. We ask for self-control. We don't say, "God let me eat." We say, "God, help me not to eat so much." You won't find books in our stores on surviving starvation, but you'll find shelves loaded with books on losing weight. This doesn't negate the importance of this phrase, however. Just the opposite. For us, the blessed of belly, this prayer has double meaning.

We pray, only to find our prayer already answered! We are like the high school senior who decides to go to college and then learns the cost of tuition. He runs to his father and pleads, "I'm sorry to ask so much, Dad, but I have nowhere else to go. I want to go to college and I don't have a penny." The father puts his arms around the son and smiles and says, "Don't worry, son. The day you were born I began saving for your education. I've already provided for your tuition."

The boy made the request only to find the father had already met it. The same happens to you. At some point in your life it occurs to you that someone is providing for your needs. You take a giant step in maturity when you agree with David's words in 1 Chronicles 29:14: "All things come from You, and of Your own we have given You." You may be writing a check and stirring the soup, but there's more to putting food on the table than that. What about the ancient symbiosis of the seed and the soil and the sun and the rain? Who created animals for food and minerals for

metal? Long before you knew you needed someone to provide for your needs, God already had.

So the first rule in the kitchen is one of dependence. Ask God for whatever you need. He is committed to you. God lives with the self-assigned task of providing for His own, and so far, you've got to admit, He's done pretty well at the job. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you usually see yourself as self-sufficient or as someone whose needs are met directly by God? Acknowledge the fact that everything you have is a gift from God. Make a list of what you consider your "wants" and your "needs." Thank Him for His abundant goodness to you.

EXPLORATION

Meeting Our Needs—Matthew 6:8; 2 Corinthians 9:6–9; Philippians 4:18, 19; 1 Thessalonians 4:11, 12; 1 John 3:17, 18.

In Your hand *is* power and might;
In Your hand *it is* to make great
And to give strength to all.

13 "Now therefore, our God,
We thank You
And praise Your glorious name.
14 But who *am* I, and who *are* my people,
That we should be able to offer so willingly as this?
For all things *come* from You,
And of Your own we have given You.
15 For we *are* aliens and pilgrims before You,
As *were* all our fathers;
Our days on earth *are* as a shadow,
And without hope.

16 "O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have prepared to build You a house for Your holy name is from Your hand, and *is* all Your own. 17 I know also, my God, that You test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of my heart I have willingly offered all these *things;* and now with joy I have seen Your people, who are present here to offer willingly to You. 18 O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep this forever in the intent of the thoughts of the heart of Your people, and fix their heart toward You. 19 And give my son Solomon a loyal heart to keep Your commandments and Your testimonies and Your statutes, to do all *these things,* and to build the temple[a] for which I have made provision."

20 Then David said to all the assembly, "Now bless the Lord your God." So all the assembly blessed the Lord God of their fathers, and bowed their heads and prostrated themselves before the Lord and the king.

Solomon Anointed King

21 And they made sacrifices to the Lord and offered burnt offerings to the Lord on the next day: a thousand bulls, a thousand rams, a thousand lambs, with their drink offerings, and sacrifices in abundance for all Israel. 22 So they ate and drank before the Lord with great gladness on that day. And they made Solomon the son of David king the second time, and anointed *him* before the Lord *to be* the leader, and Zadok *to be* priest. 23 Then Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king instead of David his father, and prospered; and all Israel obeyed him. 24 All the leaders and the mighty men, and also all the sons of King David, submitted themselves to King Solomon. 25 So the Lord exalted Solomon exceedingly in the sight of all Israel, and bestowed on him *such* royal majesty as had not been on any king before him in Israel.

The Close of David's Reign

26 Thus David the son of Jesse reigned over all Israel. 27 And the period that he reigned over Israel *was* forty years; seven years he

29:19 [a] Literally *palace*

reigned in Hebron, and thirty-three *years* he
reigned in Jerusalem. 28 So he died in a good
old age, full of days and riches and honor; and
Solomon his son reigned in his place. 29 Now
the acts of King David, first and last, indeed
they *are* written in the book of Samuel the seer,
in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the
book of Gad the seer, 30 with all his reign and his
might, and the events that happened to him,
to Israel, and to all the kingdoms of the lands.

THE BOOK OF

2 CHRONICLES

INTRODUCTION

A friend tells me of the time his five-year-old daughter took inventory of her friends.

Seems she took a tumble down the stairs and banged her head on the wall. Her mom rushed her to the emergency room and, though the injury wasn't severe, the doctor felt it wise to keep her overnight for observation. So the little girl spent the night in the hospital.

The next morning they took her home, and the dad carried her upstairs and put her in bed for a nap. As he closed the door he heard her voice. At first he thought she was speaking to him, so he stopped to listen.

"Sleepy? Grumpy? Dopey?"

My friend smiled. Painted on his daughter's bedroom wall were the characters from the Snow White story. For his daughter they were more than characters, however, they were friends. Every day she spent time talking to them. The dad knew what she was doing. "She was taking inventory of her friends," he said. "She'd been through a rough night and just wanted to make sure they were okay."

God has been known to do that. His people have a tendency to take tumbles. Some of those tumbles are severe. Second Chronicles will give you a few examples.

They aren't very pretty.

Some are very shameful. Still, they are His children and every so often He takes inventory of those who matter to Him.

Buried in this large quarry called Chronicles are several jewels worth mining.

Here are two of the finest:

"If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (7:14).

"For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Probably Ezra

Date Written: 500–400 B.C.

Key Themes:

- One of Solomon's greatest achievements was the construction of the temple in Jerusalem.
- As kings came and went in the divided kingdom, each king had to make a choice whether to follow God or not.
- As God had warned, the disobedience of each kingdom led to their eventual destruction and loss of their land.

Key Verse:

"If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Contents:

I. Solomon's Kingdom 1:1—9:31

II. The Northern and Southern Tribes Struggle to Survive 10:1—35:27

III. Judah Is Taken into Exile 36:1–23

strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have wars" (16:9).

Keep those verses in your hip pocket. You never know when you may take a spill yourself. Those words might be just what you need to get back on your feet.

Solomon Requests Wisdom

Now Solomon the son of David was strengthened in his kingdom,
and the LORD his God *was* with him and exalted him exceedingly.
2 And Solomon spoke to all Israel, to the captains of thousands and
of hundreds, to the judges, and to every leader in all Israel, the heads
of the fathers' *houses.* 3 Then Solomon, and all the assembly with
him, went to the high place that *was* at Gibeon; for the tabernacle of
meeting with God was there, which Moses the servant of the LORD had
made in the wilderness. 4 But David had brought up the ark of God
from Kirjath Jearim to *the place* David had prepared for it, for he had
pitched a tent for it at Jerusalem. 5 Now the bronze altar that Bezalel
the son of Uri, the son of Hur, had made, he put[a] before the tabernacle
of the LORD; Solomon and the assembly sought Him *there.* 6 And Sol-
omon went up there to the bronze altar before the LORD, which *was*
at the tabernacle of meeting, and offered a thousand burnt offerings
on it.

7 On that night God appeared to Solomon, and said to him, "Ask!
What shall I give you?"

8 And Solomon said to God: "You have shown great mercy to David
my father, and have made me king in his place. 9 Now, O LORD God, let
Your promise to David my father be established, for You have made
me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude. 10 Now
give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before
this people; for who can judge this great people of Yours?"

11 Then God said to Solomon: "Because this was in your heart,
and you have not asked riches or wealth or honor or the life of your
enemies, nor have you asked long life—but have asked wisdom and
knowledge for yourself, that you may judge My people over whom I
have made you king— 12 wisdom and knowledge *are* granted to you;
and I will give you riches and wealth and honor, such as none of the
kings have had who *were* before you, nor shall any after you have the
like."

Solomon's Military and Economic Power

13 So Solomon came to Jerusalem from the high place that *was*
at Gibeon, from before the tabernacle of meeting, and reigned over
Israel. 14 And Solomon gathered chariots and horsemen; he had one
thousand four hundred chariots and twelve thousand horsemen,

1:5 [a] Some authorities read *it was there.*

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 1:1–17

SITUATION
Solomon became king over Israel. God gave him an opportunity to ask for anything.

OBSERVATION
Put God first, and He will provide other needed resources.

INSPIRATION
Ever have trouble determining God's will for your future? You are not alone. "Do I move to Mobile or Minnesota?" "Do I retire or keep working?" "An engineer at IBM or a clerk at Sears?" "Do I marry or stay single?" The questions are endless. One follows another. Every new responsibility brings new decisions. "What college should my son attend?". . .

How in the world do we know what God wants? Do we set out a fleece? Seek advice? Pray? Read the Bible? All these are right yet there is one decision that must be made first. (Hang on, it's a tough one.)

To know God's will, we must totally surrender to God's will. Our tendency is to make God's decision for Him. I used to do that with my mom. As a child, I hated to get the flu for two reasons: (1) it hurt; (2) my

mom was a nurse. Since she was an RN, she knew the fastest way to tackle the flu bug was with a needle . . . in my bottom. Ouch! (I grew up thinking penicillin was a dirty word.)

When she would tell me "to go get the medicine," I would get everything but the dreaded needle. I'd come back with an armful: aspirin, Pepto Bismol, ear drops, nose drops, ankle wraps—anything but penicillin. But as good moms do, she always got her point across. "Now you know better," she'd say with a smile, and would go get the (gulp) needle.

Here's the point. Don't go to God with options and expect Him to choose one of your preferences. Go to Him with empty hands—no hidden agendas, no crossed fingers, nothing behind your back. Go to Him with a willingness to do whatever He says. If you surrender your will, then He will "make you complete in every good work to do His will" (Hebrews 13:21). It's a promise. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

If God asked you for a wish list, what would be your top three items? Pray about these priorities today—for God to refine the list to include items He desires for you.

EXPLORATION

Asking—Matthew 6:31–34; 7:7, 8; Luke 18:1–8; John 14:13, 14.

whom he stationed in the chariot cities and with the king in Jerusalem. 15 Also the king made silver and gold as common in Jerusalem as stones, and he made cedars as abundant as the sycamores which *are* in the lowland. 16 And Solomon had horses imported from Egypt and Keveh; the king's merchants bought them in Keveh at the *current* price. 17 They also acquired and imported from Egypt a chariot for six hundred *shekels* of silver, and a horse for one hundred and fifty; thus, through their agents,[a] they exported them to all the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Syria.

Solomon Prepares to Build the Temple

2 Then Solomon determined to build a temple for the name of the Lord, and a royal house for himself. 2 Solomon selected seventy thousand men to bear burdens, eighty thousand to quarry *stone* in the mountains, and three thousand six hundred to oversee them.

3 Then Solomon sent to Hiram[a] king of Tyre, saying:

As you have dealt with David my father, and sent him cedars to build himself a house to dwell in, *so deal with me.* 4 Behold, I am building a temple for the name of the Lord my God, to dedicate *it* to Him, to burn before Him sweet incense, for the continual showbread, for the burnt offerings morning and evening, on the Sabbaths, on the New Moons, and on the set feasts of the Lord our God. This *is an ordinance* forever to Israel.

5 And the temple which I build *will be* great, for our God is greater than all gods. 6 But who is able to build Him a temple, since heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him? Who *am* I then, that I should build Him a temple, except to burn sacrifice before Him?

7 Therefore send me at once a man skillful to work in gold and silver, in bronze and iron, in purple and crimson and blue, who has skill to engrave with the skillful men who are with me in Judah and Jerusalem, whom David my father provided. 8 Also send me cedar and cypress and algum logs from Lebanon, for I know that your servants have skill to cut timber in Lebanon; and indeed my servants *will be* with your servants, 9 to prepare timber for me in abundance, for the temple which I am about to build *shall be* great and wonderful.

10 And indeed I will give to your servants, the woodsmen who cut timber, twenty thousand kors of ground wheat, twenty thousand kors of barley, twenty thousand baths of wine, and twenty thousand baths of oil.

11 Then Hiram king of Tyre answered in writing, which he sent to Solomon:

Because the Lord loves His people, He has made you king over them.

1:17 [a]Literally *by their hands* **2:3** [a]Hebrew *Huram* (compare 1 Kings 5:1)

12 Hiram[a] also said:

Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel, who made heaven and earth,
for He has given King David a wise son, endowed with prudence
and understanding, who will build a temple for the Lord and a
royal house for himself!

13 And now I have sent a skillful man, endowed with
understanding, Huram[a] my master[b] *craftsman* 14 (the son of a
woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of
Tyre), skilled to work in gold and silver, bronze and iron, stone
and wood, purple and blue, fine linen and crimson, and to make
any engraving and to accomplish any plan which may be given
to him, with your skillful men and with the skillful men of my
lord David your father.

15 Now therefore, the wheat, the barley, the oil, and the wine which
my lord has spoken of, let him send to his servants. 16 And we will
cut wood from Lebanon, as much as you need; we will bring it to
you in rafts by sea to Joppa, and you will carry it up to Jerusalem.

17 Then Solomon numbered all the aliens who *were* in the land of
Israel, after the census in which David his father had numbered them;
and there were found to be one hundred and fifty-three thousand
six hundred. 18 And he made seventy thousand of them bearers of
burdens, eighty thousand stonecutters in the mountain, and three
thousand six hundred overseers to make the people work.

Solomon Builds the Temple

3 Now Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem
on Mount Moriah, where *the Lord*[a] had appeared to his father
David, at the place that David had prepared on the threshing floor of
Ornan[b] the Jebusite. 2 And he began to build on the second *day* of the
second month in the fourth year of his reign.

3 This is the foundation which Solomon laid for building the house
of God: The length *was* sixty cubits (by cubits according to the former
measure) and the width twenty cubits. 4 And the vestibule that *was*
in front *of the sanctuary*[a] was twenty cubits long across the width of
the house, and the height *was* one hundred and[b] twenty. He overlaid
the inside with pure gold. 5 The larger room[a] he paneled with cypress
which he overlaid with fine gold, and he carved palm trees and
chainwork on it. 6 And he decorated the house with precious stones
for beauty, and the gold *was* gold from Parvaim. 7 He also overlaid the
house—the beams and doorposts, its walls and doors—with gold; and
he carved cherubim on the walls.

2:12 [a]Hebrew *Huram* (compare 1 Kings 5:1) **2:13** [a]Spelled *Hiram* in 1 Kings 7:13 [b]Literally *father* (compare 1 Kings 7:13, 14) **3:1** [a]Literally *He,* following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *the Lord;* Targum reads *the Angel of the Lord.* [b]Spelled *Araunah* in 2 Samuel 24:16ff **3:4** [a]The main room of the temple; elsewhere called the holy place (compare 1 Kings 6:3) [b]Following Masoretic Text, Septuagint, and Vulgate; Arabic, some manuscripts of the Septuagint, and Syriac omit *one hundred and.* **3:5** [a]Literally *house*

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 2:1—5:1

SITUATION
Solomon prepared to build a temple in Jerusalem according to the plans his father, David, had given him. Only the best wood and precious metals were used for God's house.

OBSERVATION
God deserves the best we can give. God deserves our finest possessions, our most valuable time, and our precious money.

INSPIRATION
Tucked away in the cedar chest of my memory is the image of a robust and rather rotund children's Bible class teacher in a small West Texas church. She wore black eyeglasses that peaked on the corners like a masquerade mask. Silver streaked through her black hair like a vein on the wall of a mine. She smelled like my mom's makeup and smiled like a kid on Christmas when she saw us coming to her class. Low-heeled shoes contained her thick ankles, but nothing contained her great passion. Hugs as we entered and hugs as we left. She knew all six of us by name and made class so fun we'd rather miss the ice-cream truck than Sunday school.

Here is why I tell you about her. She enjoyed giving us each a can of crayons and a sketch of Jesus torn from a coloring book. We each had our own can, mind you, reassigned from cupboard duty to classroom. What had held peaches or spinach now held a dozen or so Crayolas. "Take the crayons I gave you," she would

instruct, "and color Jesus." And so we would.

We didn't illustrate pictures of ourselves; we colored the Son of God. We didn't pirate crayons from other cans; we used what she gave us. This was the fun of it. "Do the best you can with the can you get." No blue for the sky? Make it purple. If Jesus' hair is blond instead of brown, the teacher won't mind. She loaded the can.

She taught us to paint Jesus with our own colors.

God made you to do likewise. He loaded your can. He made you unique. But knowing what He gave you is not enough. You need to understand why He gave it: so you could illustrate Christ. Make a big deal out of Him. Beautify His face; adorn His image. . . . Color Christ with the crayons God gave you.

Don't waste years embellishing your own image. No disrespect, but who needs to see your face? Who doesn't need to see God's?

Besides, God promises no applause for self-promoters. But great reward awaits God-promoters: "'Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:23). (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Take a moment to consider the various things you do to serve? Why do you do them? Are you actively seeking to show people Christ through your service—or is it more about you? Ask God to help you honor Him in all you do.

EXPLORATION

Preparations—Proverbs 15:22; 20:18; Luke 14:28–32; 2 Corinthians 1:17.

8 And he made the Most Holy Place. Its length was according to
the width of the house, twenty cubits, and its width twenty cubits. He
overlaid it with six hundred talents of fine gold. 9 The weight of the
nails *was* fifty shekels of gold; and he overlaid the upper area with
gold. 10 In the Most Holy Place he made two cherubim, fashioned by
carving, and overlaid them with gold. 11 The wings of the cherubim
were twenty cubits in *overall* length: one wing *of the one cherub was*
five cubits, touching the wall of the room, and the other wing *was*
five cubits, touching the wing of the other cherub; 12 *one* wing of the
other cherub *was* five cubits, touching the wall of the room, and the
other wing *also was* five cubits, touching the wing of the other cherub.
13 The wings of these cherubim spanned twenty cubits overall. They
stood on their feet, and they faced inward. 14 And he made the veil
of blue, purple, crimson, and fine linen, and wove cherubim into it.

15 Also he made in front of the temple[a] two pillars thirty-five[b] cubits
high, and the capital that *was* on the top of each of *them* was five
cubits. 16 He made wreaths of chainwork, as in the inner sanctuary,
and put *them* on top of the pillars; and he made one hundred pome-
granates, and put *them* on the wreaths of chainwork. 17 Then he set up
the pillars before the temple, one on the right hand and the other on
the left; he called the name of the one on the right hand Jachin, and
the name of the one on the left Boaz.

Furnishings of the Temple

4 Moreover he made a bronze altar: twenty cubits was its length,
twenty cubits its width, and ten cubits its height.

2 Then he made the Sea of cast *bronze,* ten cubits from one brim
to the other; *it was* completely round. Its height *was* five cubits, and
a line of thirty cubits measured its circumference. 3 And under it *was*
the likeness of oxen encircling it all around, ten to a cubit, all the way
around the Sea. The oxen *were* cast in two rows, when it was cast. 4 It
stood on twelve oxen: three looking toward the north, three looking
toward the west, three looking toward the south, and three looking
toward the east; the Sea *was set* upon them, and all their back parts
pointed inward. 5 It *was* a handbreadth thick; and its brim was shaped
like the brim of a cup, *like* a lily blossom. It contained three thousand[a]
baths.

6 He also made ten lavers, and put five on the right side and five
on the left, to wash in them; such things as they offered for the burnt
offering they would wash in them, but the Sea *was* for the priests to
wash in. 7 And he made ten lampstands of gold according to their
design, and set *them* in the temple, five on the right side and five on
the left. 8 He also made ten tables, and placed *them* in the temple,
five on the right side and five on the left. And he made one hundred
bowls of gold.

9 Furthermore he made the court of the priests, and the great court
and doors for the court; and he overlaid these doors with bronze. 10 He
set the Sea on the right side, toward the southeast.

11 Then Huram made the pots and the shovels and the bowls. So

3:15 [a]Literally *house* [b]Or *eighteen* (compare 1 Kings 7:15; 2 Kings 25:17; and Jeremiah 52:21) **4:5** [a]Or *two thousand* (compare 1 Kings 7:26)

Huram finished doing the work that he was to do for King Solomon
for the house of God: 12 the two pillars and the bowl-shaped capitals
that were on top of the two pillars; the two networks covering the two
bowl-shaped capitals which *were* on top of the pillars; 13 four hundred
pomegranates for the two networks (two rows of pomegranates for
each network, to cover the two bowl-shaped capitals that *were* on the
pillars); 14 he also made carts and the lavers on the carts; 15 one Sea
and twelve oxen under it; 16 also the pots, the shovels, the forks—and
all their articles Huram his master[a] *craftsman* made of burnished
bronze for King Solomon for the house of the Lord.

17 In the plain of Jordan the king had them cast in clay molds,
between Succoth and Zeredah.[a] 18 And Solomon had all these articles
made in such great abundance that the weight of the bronze was not
determined.

19 Thus Solomon had all the furnishings made for the house of God:
the altar of gold and the tables on which *was* the showbread; 20 the
lampstands with their lamps of pure gold, to burn in the prescribed
manner in front of the inner sanctuary, 21 with the flowers and the
lamps and the wick-trimmers of gold, of purest gold; 22 the trimmers,
the bowls, the ladles, and the censers of pure gold. As for the entry of
the sanctuary, its inner doors to the Most Holy *Place,* and the doors
of the main hall of the temple, *were* gold.

5 So all the work that Solomon had done for the house of the Lord
was finished; and Solomon brought in the things which his father
David had dedicated: the silver and the gold and all the furnishings.
And he put *them* in the treasuries of the house of God.

The Ark Brought into the Temple

2 Now Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of
the tribes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel, in Jerusalem, that
they might bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord up from the City
of David, which *is* Zion. 3 Therefore all the men of Israel assembled
with the king at the feast, which *was* in the seventh month. 4 So all
the elders of Israel came, and the Levites took up the ark. 5 Then
they brought up the ark, the tabernacle of meeting, and all the holy
furnishings that *were* in the tabernacle. The priests and the Levites
brought them up. 6 Also King Solomon, and all the congregation of
Israel who were assembled with him before the ark, were sacrificing
sheep and oxen that could not be counted or numbered for multi-
tude. 7 Then the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the Lord
to its place, into the inner sanctuary of the temple,[a] to the Most Holy
Place, under the wings of the cherubim. 8 For the cherubim spread
their wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubim overshadowed
the ark and its poles. 9 The poles extended so that the ends of the poles
of the ark could be seen from *the holy place,* in front of the inner sanc-
tuary; but they could not be seen from outside. And they are there to
this day. 10 Nothing was in the ark except the two tablets which Moses
put *there* at Horeb, when the Lord made *a covenant* with the children
of Israel, when they had come out of Egypt.

11 And it came to pass when the priests came out of the *Most* Holy

4:16 [a]Literally *father* **4:17** [a]Spelled *Zaretan* in 1 Kings 7:46 **5:7** [a]Literally *house*

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 5:2—7:22

SITUATION

Solomon dedicated the new temple in Jerusalem. He invited tribal elders and chiefs from throughout Israel. While the sacred furnishings from the tent of meeting were moved inside the temple, sacrifices began. Amid song, praise, and music, God's glory filled the temple.

OBSERVATION

The Lord appeared to Solomon and told him that his work on the temple pleased Him. He said that if His judgment fell on the nation due to sin, they could turn to the Lord in repentance. The Lord would then respond to true repentance by forgiving their sin and healing their land.

INSPIRATION

With each denial Peter inches closer to the edge of the canyon . . . until the ground gives way and he falls.

Have you been there? Have you felt the ground of conviction give way beneath your feet? The ledge crumbles, your eyes widen, and down you go. *Poof!*

Now what do you do? You could stay in the canyon. Many do. Many live their lives in the shadows. Many never return. Some dismiss their deeds. "Well, everybody has a little slip now and then." Some deny their deeds. "Fall? Me? Are you kidding? These aren't bruises. These aren't cuts. I'm as healthy as I've ever been. Me and Jesus? We are tight." Some distort their deeds. "I'm not to blame. It's his fault. It's society's

responsibility. If the people hadn't asked me, I wouldn't have answered. Don't point the finger at me."

When we fall, we can dismiss it. We can deny it. We can distort it. Or we can deal with it.

Luke adds a chilling phrase to his account of Peter's denial of Christ. When the cock crowed, "the Lord turned and looked at Peter" (Luke 22:61).

The rooster reminds Peter of Jesus' warning. Peter lifts his eyes and looks across the courtyard, only to find Jesus looking at him. Jesus is being assailed by accusations, but He doesn't hear them. He hears only the denial of His friend.

If Peter ever thought he could keep his fall a secret, he now knows he can't. "There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

We keep no secrets from God. Confession is not telling God what we did. He already knows. Confession is simply agreeing with God that our acts were wrong. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

If you know there is unconfessed sin in your life, confess it now. Also ask the Lord to search you to see if there is anything in your life that might be keeping you from full fellowship with Him. Remember that God wants to forgive your sinful deeds and thoughts through His wonderful grace.

EXPLORATION

Confession of Sin—Nehemiah 1:5–9; Job 42:5, 6; Psalm 32:5; James 5:16; 1 John 1:8, 9.

Place (for all the priests who *were* present had sanctified themselves, without keeping to their divisions), 12 and the Levites *who were* the singers, all those of Asaph and Heman and Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, stood at the east end of the altar, clothed in white linen, having cymbals, stringed instruments and harps, and with them one hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets— 13 indeed it came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers *were* as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord, and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, *saying:*

"*For He is* good,
For His mercy *endures* forever,"[a]

that the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, 14 so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.

6 Then Solomon spoke:

"The Lord said He would dwell in the dark cloud.
2 I have surely built You an exalted house,
And a place for You to dwell in forever."

Solomon's Speech upon Completion of the Work

3 Then the king turned around and blessed the whole assembly of Israel, while all the assembly of Israel was standing. 4 And he said: "Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel, who has fulfilled with His hands *what* He spoke with His mouth to my father David, saying, 5 'Since the day that I brought My people out of the land of Egypt, I have chosen no city from any tribe of Israel *in which* to build a house, that My name might be there, nor did I choose any man to be a ruler over My people Israel. 6 Yet I have chosen Jerusalem, that My name may be there, and I have chosen David to be over My people Israel.' 7 Now it was in the heart of my father David to build a temple[a] for the name of the Lord God of Israel. 8 But the Lord said to my father David, 'Whereas it was in your heart to build a temple for My name, you did well in that it was in your heart. 9 Nevertheless you shall not build the temple, but your son who will come from your body, he shall build the temple for My name.' 10 So the Lord has fulfilled His word which He spoke, and I have filled the position of my father David, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the Lord promised; and I have built the temple for the name of the Lord God of Israel. 11 And there I have put the ark, in which *is* the covenant of the Lord which He made with the children of Israel."

Solomon's Prayer of Dedication

12 Then *Solomon*[a] stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands 13 (for Solomon had made a bronze platform five cubits long, five cubits wide, and

5:13 [a]Compare Psalm 106:1 **6:7** [a]Literally *house,* and so in verses 8–10
6:12 [a]Literally *he* (compare 1 Kings 8:22)

three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court; and he stood on it, knelt down on his knees before all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven); 14 and he said: "Lord God of Israel, *there is* no God in heaven or on earth like You, who keep *Your* covenant and mercy with Your servants who walk before You with all their hearts. 15 You have kept what You promised Your servant David my father; You have both spoken with Your mouth and fulfilled *it* with Your hand, as *it is* this day. 16 Therefore, Lord God of Israel, now keep what You promised Your servant David my father, saying, 'You shall not fail to have a man sit before Me on the throne of Israel, only if your sons take heed to their way, that they walk in My law as you have walked before Me.' 17 And now, O Lord God of Israel, let Your word come true, which You have spoken to Your servant David.

18 "But will God indeed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple[a] which I have built! 19 Yet regard the prayer of Your servant and his supplication, O Lord my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant is praying before You: 20 that Your eyes may be open toward this temple day and night, toward the place where *You* said *You would* put Your name, that You may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place. 21 And may You hear the supplications of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and when You hear, forgive.

22 "If anyone sins against his neighbor, and is forced to take an oath, and comes *and* takes an oath before Your altar in this temple, 23 then hear from heaven, and act, and judge Your servants, bringing retribution on the wicked by bringing his way on his own head, and justifying the righteous by giving him according to his righteousness.

24 "Or if Your people Israel are defeated before an enemy because they have sinned against You, and return and confess Your name, and pray and make supplication before You in this temple, 25 then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the land which You gave to them and their fathers.

26 "When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against You, when they pray toward this place and confess Your name, and turn from their sin because You afflict them, 27 then hear *in* heaven, and forgive the sin of Your servants, Your people Israel, that You may teach them the good way in which they should walk; and send rain on Your land which You have given to Your people as an inheritance.

28 "When there is famine in the land, pestilence or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers; when their enemies besiege them in the land of their cities; whatever plague or whatever sickness *there is;* 29 whatever prayer, whatever supplication is *made* by anyone, or by all Your people Israel, when each one knows his own burden and his own grief, and spreads out his hands to this temple: 30 then hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You alone know the hearts of the sons of men), 31 that they may fear You, to walk in Your ways as long as they live in the land which You gave to our fathers.

32 "Moreover, concerning a foreigner, who is not of Your people Israel, but has come from a far country for the sake of Your great name and Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm, when they come and pray in this temple; 33 then hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, that all peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You, as *do* Your people Israel, and that they may know that this temple which I have built is called by Your name.

34 "When Your people go out to battle against their enemies, wherever You send them, and when they pray to You toward this city which You have chosen and the temple which I have built for Your name, 35 then hear from heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause.

36 "When they sin against You (for *there is* no one who does not sin), and You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to a land

6:18 [a] Literally *house*

far or near; 37 *yet* when they come to themselves in the land where they were carried captive, and repent, and make supplication to You in the land of their captivity, saying, 'We have sinned, we have done wrong, and have committed wickedness'; 38 and *when* they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, where they have been carried captive, and pray toward their land which You gave to their fathers, the city which You have chosen, and toward the temple which I have built for Your name: 39 then hear from heaven Your dwelling place their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive Your people who have sinned against You. 40 Now, my God, I pray, let Your eyes be open and *let* Your ears *be* attentive to the prayer *made* in this place.

41 "Now therefore,
Arise, O Lord God, to Your resting place,
You and the ark of Your strength.
Let Your priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation,
And let Your saints rejoice in goodness.

42 "O Lord God, do not turn away the face of Your Anointed;
Remember the mercies of Your servant David."[a]

Solomon Dedicates the Temple

7 When Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the temple.[a] 2 And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord had filled the Lord's house. 3 When all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the Lord on the temple, they bowed their faces to the ground on the pavement, and worshiped and praised the Lord, *saying:*

"For *He is* good,
For His mercy *endures* forever."[a]

4 Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the Lord. 5 King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand bulls and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the people dedicated the house of God. 6 And the priests attended to their services; the Levites also with instruments of the music of the Lord, which King David had made to praise the Lord, saying, "For His mercy *endures* forever,"[a] whenever David offered praise by their ministry. The priests sounded trumpets opposite them, while all Israel stood.

7 Furthermore Solomon consecrated the middle of the court that *was* in front of the house of the Lord; for there he offered burnt offerings and the fat of the peace offerings, because the bronze altar which Solomon had made was not able to receive the burnt offerings, the grain offerings, and the fat.

8 At that time Solomon kept the feast seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great assembly from the entrance of Hamath to the Brook of Egypt.[a] 9 And on the eighth day they held a sacred assembly, for they observed the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast seven days. 10 On the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people away to their tents, joyful and glad of heart for the good that the Lord had done for David, for Solomon, and for His people Israel. 11 Thus Solomon finished the house of the Lord and the king's house; and Solomon successfully accomplished all that came into his heart to make in the house of the Lord and in his own house.

God's Second Appearance to Solomon

12 Then the Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him: "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. 13 When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, 14 if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. 15 Now My eyes will be open and My

6:42 [a]Compare Psalm 132:8–10 **7:1** [a]Literally *house* **7:3** [a]Compare Psalm 106:1 **7:6** [a]Compare Psalm 106:1
7:8 [a]That is, the Shihor (compare 1 Chronicles 13:5)

ears attentive to prayer *made* in this place. 16 For now I have chosen
and sanctified this house, that My name may be there forever; and
My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually. 17 As for you, if you
walk before Me as your father David walked, and do according to
all that I have commanded you, and if you keep My statutes and My
judgments, 18 then I will establish the throne of your kingdom, as I
covenanted with David your father, saying, 'You shall not fail *to have*
a man as ruler in Israel.'

19 "But if you turn away and forsake My statutes and My command-
ments which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods, and
worship them, 20 then I will uproot them from My land which I have
given them; and this house which I have sanctified for My name I will
cast out of My sight, and will make it a proverb and a byword among
all peoples.

21 "And *as for* this house, which is exalted, everyone who passes by
it will be astonished and say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land
and this house?' 22 Then they will answer, 'Because they forsook the
Lord God of their fathers, who brought them out of the land of Egypt,
and embraced other gods, and worshiped them and served them;
therefore He has brought all this calamity on them.' "

Solomon's Additional Achievements

8 It came to pass at the end of twenty years, when Solomon had
built the house of the Lord and his own house, 2 that the cities
which Hiram[a] had given to Solomon, Solomon built them; and he
settled the children of Israel there. 3 And Solomon went to Hamath
Zobah and seized it. 4 He also built Tadmor in the wilderness, and all
the storage cities which he built in Hamath. 5 He built Upper Beth
Horon and Lower Beth Horon, fortified cities *with* walls, gates, and
bars, 6 also Baalath and all the storage cities that Solomon had, and
all the chariot cities and the cities of the cavalry, and all that Solomon
desired to build in Jerusalem, in Lebanon, and in all the land of his
dominion.

7 All the people *who were* left of the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites,
Hivites, and Jebusites, who *were* not of Israel— 8 that is, their descen-
dants who were left in the land after them, whom the children of
Israel did not destroy—from these Solomon raised forced labor, as it is
to this day. 9 But Solomon did not make the children of Israel servants
for his work. Some *were* men of war, captains of his officers, captains
of his chariots, and his cavalry. 10 And others *were* chiefs of the officials
of King Solomon: two hundred and fifty, who ruled over the people.

11 Now Solomon brought the daughter of Pharaoh up from the City
of David to the house he had built for her, for he said, "My wife shall
not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because *the places* to
which the ark of the Lord has come are holy."

12 Then Solomon offered burnt offerings to the Lord on the altar
of the Lord which he had built before the vestibule, 13 according to
the daily rate, offering according to the commandment of Moses,
for the Sabbaths, the New Moons, and the three appointed yearly
feasts—the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the

8:2 [a]Hebrew *Huram* (compare 2 Chronicles 2:3)

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 8:1—9:31

SITUATION
Solomon built Israel into a wealthy and powerful nation. Neighboring rulers came to visit him and sought to learn from his great wisdom. Solomon became caught up in worldly affairs, eventually marrying pagan women.

OBSERVATION
Solomon used his God-given wisdom to make Israel strong. But as Solomon became wealthy, he grew distant from God.

INSPIRATION
Our obsession with stuff carries a hefty price tag. . . . We no longer measure ourselves against the Joneses next door but against the star on the screen or the stud on the magazine cover. Hollywood's diamonds make yours look like a gumball-machine toy. Who can satisfy Madison Avenue? No one can. For that reason Jesus warns, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Luke 12:15).

Greed comes in many forms. Greed for approval. Greed for applause. Greed for status. Greed for the best office, the fastest car, the prettiest date. Greed has many faces, but speaks one language: the language of more. Epicurus noted, "Nothing is enough for the man to whom enough is too little." . . .

Wise was the one who wrote, "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never

satisfied with his income" (Ecclesiastes 5:10 NIV).

Greed has a growling stomach. Feed it, and you risk more than budget-busting debt. You risk losing purpose. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Is wealth your aim? Put that dream aside and give priority to God. Do something today to curb the appetite for money, and be content with what you have.

EXPLORATION

True Wealth—Deuteronomy 4:40; Mark 10:17–31; Luke 12:33; 16:1–13.

Feast of Tabernacles. 14 And, according to the order of David his father, he appointed the divisions of the priests for their service, the Levites for their duties (to praise and serve before the priests) as the duty of each day required, and the gatekeepers by their divisions at each gate; for so David the man of God had commanded. 15 They did not depart from the command of the king to the priests and Levites concerning any matter or concerning the treasuries.

16 Now all the work of Solomon was well-ordered from[a] the day of the foundation of the house of the Lord until it was finished. So the house of the Lord was completed.

17 Then Solomon went to Ezion Geber and Elath[a] on the seacoast, in the land of Edom. 18 And Hiram sent him ships by the hand of his servants, and servants who knew the sea. They went with the servants of Solomon to Ophir, and acquired four hundred and fifty talents of gold from there, and brought it to King Solomon.

The Queen of Sheba's Praise of Solomon

9 Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she came to Jerusalem to test Solomon with hard questions, *having* a very great retinue, camels that bore spices, gold in abundance, and precious stones; and when she came to Solomon, she spoke with him about all that was in her heart. 2 So Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing so difficult for Solomon that he could not explain it to her. 3 And when the queen of Sheba had seen the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, 4 the food on his table, the seating of his servants, the service of his waiters and their apparel, his cupbearers and their apparel, and his entryway by which he went up to the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit in her.

5 Then she said to the king: "*It was* a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. 6 However I did not believe their words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed the half of the greatness of your wisdom was not told me. You exceed the fame of which I heard. 7 Happy *are* your men and happy *are* these your servants, who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom! 8 Blessed be the Lord your God, who delighted in you, setting you on His throne *to be* king for the Lord your God! Because your God has loved Israel, to establish them forever, therefore He made you king over them, to do justice and righteousness."

9 And she gave the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold, spices in great abundance, and precious stones; there never were any spices such as those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

10 Also, the servants of Hiram and the servants of Solomon, who brought gold from Ophir, brought algum[a] wood and precious stones. 11 And the king made walkways *of* the algum[a] wood for the house of the Lord and for the king's house, also harps and stringed instruments for singers; and there were none such *as these* seen before in the land of Judah.

12 Now King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all she desired,

8:16 [a]Following Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text reads *as far as*. **8:17** [a]Hebrew *Eloth* (compare 2 Kings 14:22) **9:10** [a]Or *almug* (compare 1 Kings 10:11, 12) **9:11** [a]Or *almug* (compare 1 Kings 10:11, 12)

whatever she asked, *much more* than she had brought to the king. So she turned and went to her own country, she and her servants.

Solomon's Great Wealth

13 The weight of gold that came to Solomon
yearly was six hundred and sixty-six talents of
gold, 14 besides *what* the traveling merchants
and traders brought. And all the kings of
Arabia and governors of the country brought
gold and silver to Solomon. 15 And King Sol-
omon made two hundred large shields of
hammered gold; six hundred *shekels* of ham-
mered gold went into each shield. 16 *He* also
made three hundred shields of hammered
gold; three hundred *shekels*[a] of gold went into
each shield. The king put them in the House of
the Forest of Lebanon.

17 Moreover the king made a great throne
of ivory, and overlaid it with pure gold. 18 The
throne *had* six steps, with a footstool of gold,
which were fastened to the throne; there were
armrests on either side of the place of the
seat, and two lions stood beside the armrests.
19 Twelve lions stood there, one on each side of
the six steps; nothing like *this* had been made
for any *other* kingdom.

20 All King Solomon's drinking vessels *were*
gold, and all the vessels of the House of the
Forest of Lebanon *were* pure gold. Not *one*
was silver, for this was accounted as nothing
in the days of Solomon. 21 For the king's ships
went to Tarshish with the servants of Hiram.[a]
Once every three years the merchant ships[b]
came, bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes, and
monkeys.[c]

22 So King Solomon surpassed all the kings
of the earth in riches and wisdom. 23 And all
the kings of the earth sought the presence
of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God
had put in his heart. 24 Each man brought his
present: articles of silver and gold, garments,
armor, spices, horses, and mules, at a set rate
year by year.

25 Solomon had four thousand stalls for
horses and chariots, and twelve thousand
horsemen whom he stationed in the chariot
cities and with the king at Jerusalem.

26 So he reigned over all the kings from the
River[a] to the land of the Philistines, as far as
the border of Egypt. 27 The king made silver *as*
common in Jerusalem as stones, and he made
cedar trees as abundant as the sycamores
which *are* in the lowland. 28 And they brought
horses to Solomon from Egypt and from all
lands.

Death of Solomon

29 Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, first
and last, *are* they not written in the book of
Nathan the prophet, in the prophecy of Ahijah
the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the
seer concerning Jeroboam the son of Nebat?
30 Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel
forty years. 31 Then Solomon rested with his
fathers, and was buried in the City of David
his father. And Rehoboam his son reigned in
his place.

The Revolt Against Rehoboam

10 And Rehoboam went to Shechem, for
all Israel had gone to Shechem to make
him king. 2 So it happened, when Jeroboam
the son of Nebat heard *it* (he was in Egypt,
where he had fled from the presence of King
Solomon), that Jeroboam returned from
Egypt. 3 Then they sent for him and called
him. And Jeroboam and all Israel came and
spoke to Rehoboam, saying, 4 "Your father
made our yoke heavy; now therefore, lighten
the burdensome service of your father and his
heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will
serve you."

5 So he said to them, "Come back to me
after three days." And the people departed.

6 Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders
who stood before his father Solomon while he
still lived, saying, "How do you advise *me* to
answer these people?"

7 And they spoke to him, saying, "If you are
kind to these people, and please them, and
speak good words to them, they will be your
servants forever."

8 But he rejected the advice which the elders
had given him, and consulted the young men
who had grown up with him, who stood before
him. 9 And he said to them, "What advice do
you give? How should we answer this people

9:16 [a]Or *three minas* (compare 1 Kings 10:17) **9:21** [a]Hebrew *Huram* (compare 1 Kings 10:22) [b]Literally *ships of Tarshish* (deep-sea vessels) [c]Or *peacocks* **9:26** [a]That is, the Euphrates

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 10:1—11:17

SITUATION
King Solomon died. Rehoboam, in prideful youth, turned down the wisdom of older counselors. His blunder sparked the division of Israel.

OBSERVATION
God used Rehoboam's pride to accomplish His divine plan. Due to Solomon's sin, God planned to divide the kingdom. God uses our sinful decisions to accomplish His plan.

INSPIRATION
One can't, at once, promote two reputations. Promote God's and forget yours. Or promote yours and forget God's. We must choose. . . .

God grants us an uncommon life to the degree we surrender our common one. "Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25). Would you forfeit your reputation to see Jesus born into your world?

Consider these situations:

You're a photographer for an ad agency. Your boss wants to assign you to your biggest photo shoot ever. The account? An adult magazine. He knows of your faith. Say yes and polish your reputation. Say yes and use your God-given gift to tarnish Christ's reputation. What do you choose?

The college philosophy teacher daily harangues against Christ. He derides spirituality and denigrates the need for forgiveness. One day he dares any

who have spoken to me, saying, 'Lighten the yoke which your father put on us'?"

10 Then the young men who had grown up with him spoke to him, saying, "Thus you should speak to the people who have spoken to you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you make *it* lighter on us'—thus you shall say to them: 'My little *finger* shall be thicker than my father's waist! 11 And now, whereas my father put a heavy yoke on you, I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I *will chastise you* with scourges!' "[a]

12 So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, as the king had directed, saying, "Come back to me the third day." 13 Then the king answered them roughly. King Rehoboam rejected the advice of the elders, 14 and he spoke to them according to the advice of the young men, saying, "My father[a] made your yoke heavy, but I will add to it; my father chastised you with whips, but I *will chastise you* with scourges!"[b] 15 So the king did not listen to the people; for the turn *of events* was from God, that the Lord might fulfill His word, which He had spoken by the hand of Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

16 Now when all Israel *saw* that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, saying:

"What share have we in David?
We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse.
Every man to your tents, O Israel!
Now see to your own house, O David!"

So all Israel departed to their tents. 17 But Rehoboam reigned over the children of Israel who dwelt in the cities of Judah.

18 Then King Rehoboam sent Hadoram, who *was* in charge of revenue; but the children of Israel stoned him with stones, and he died. Therefore King Rehoboam mounted *his* chariot in haste to flee to Jerusalem. 19 So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

11 Now when Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled from the house of Judah and Benjamin one hundred and eighty thousand chosen *men* who were warriors, to fight against Israel, that he might restore the kingdom to Rehoboam.

2 But the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, 3 "Speak to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, saying, 4 'Thus says the Lord: "You shall not go up or fight against your brethren! Let every man return to his house, for this thing is from Me." ' " Therefore they obeyed the words of the Lord, and turned back from attacking Jeroboam.

Rehoboam Fortifies the Cities

5 So Rehoboam dwelt in Jerusalem, and built cities for defense in Judah. 6 And he built Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa, 7 Beth Zur, Sochoh,

10:11 [a]Literally *scorpions* **10:14** [a]Following many Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate (compare verse 10 and 1 Kings 12:14); Masoretic Text reads *I*. [b]Literally *scorpions*

Adullam, [8] Gath, Mareshah, Ziph, [9] Adoraim, Lachish, Azekah, [10] Zorah, Aijalon, and Hebron, which are in Judah and Benjamin, fortified cities. [11] And he fortified the strongholds, and put captains in them, and stores of food, oil, and wine. [12] Also in every city *he put* shields and spears, and made them very strong, having Judah and Benjamin on his side.

Priests and Levites Move to Judah

[13] And from all their territories the priests and the Levites who *were* in all Israel took their stand with him. [14] For the Levites left their common-lands and their possessions and came to Judah and Jerusalem, for Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them from serving as priests to the Lord. [15] Then he appointed for himself priests for the high places, for the demons, and the calf idols which he had made. [16] And after *the Levites left,*[a] those from all the tribes of Israel, such as set their heart to seek the Lord God of Israel, came to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the Lord God of their fathers. [17] So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong for three years, because they walked in the way of David and Solomon for three years.

The Family of Rehoboam

[18] Then Rehoboam took for himself as wife Mahalath the daughter of Jerimoth the son of David, *and of* Abihail the daughter of Eliah the son of Jesse. [19] And she bore him children: Jeush, Shamariah, and Zaham. [20] After her he took Maachah the granddaughter[a] of Absalom; and she bore him Abijah, Attai, Ziza, and Shelomith. [21] Now Rehoboam loved Maachah the granddaughter of Absalom more than all his wives and his concubines; for he took eighteen wives and sixty concubines, and begot twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters. [22] And Rehoboam appointed Abijah the son of Maachah as chief, *to be* leader among his brothers; for he *intended* to make him king. [23] He dealt wisely, and dispersed some of his sons throughout all the territories of Judah and Benjamin, to every fortified city; and he gave them provisions in abundance. He also sought many wives *for them.*

Egypt Attacks Judah

12 Now it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom and had strengthened himself, that he forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel along with him. [2] And it happened in the fifth year of King Rehoboam *that* Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had transgressed against the Lord, [3] with twelve hundred chariots, sixty thousand horsemen, and people without number who came with him out of Egypt—the Lubim and the Sukkiim and the Ethiopians. [4] And he took the fortified cities of Judah and came to Jerusalem.

[5] Then Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and the leaders of Judah, who were gathered together in Jerusalem because of

11:16 [a] Literally *after them* **11:20** [a] Literally *daughter,* but in the broader sense of granddaughter (compare 2 Chronicles 13:2)

Christian in the class to speak up. Would you?

One more. You enjoy the role of a Christmas Christian. You sing the carols, attend the services . . . Come January, you'll jettison your faith and reshelve your Bible. But during December, you soar.

But this December something hits you. The immensity of it all hits you. *Heaven hung her highest hope and King on a cross, for me.* Radical thoughts begin to surface: joining a weekly Bible study, going on a mission trip, volunteering at a soup kitchen. Your family and friends think you are crazy. Your changing world changes theirs. They want the Christmas Christian back.

You can protect your reputation or protect His. You have a choice. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What is your reputation with family and friends? Do they see you as a sensitive person, or as a selfish person who has little time for their needs and concerns? Listen and be sensitive to their needs. Ask God for the opportunity to spend time with someone this week who needs a listening ear. Be prepared to respond when God sends someone.

EXPLORATION

Concern for Others—Psalm 103:13; Luke 10:25–37; Acts 20:35; Galatians 6:2; Philippians 2:3, 4; Hebrews 4:15; James 1:27.

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 11:18—15:19

SITUATION
King Rehoboam showed wisdom after Israel and Judah split. He sought to honor God as his father and grandfather had done. But after becoming well established, Rehoboam stopped depending on God. God used the ambitious king of Egypt to cause Rehoboam to look to God again. But the consequences of Rehoboam's decisions still followed him and affected the whole nation.

OBSERVATION
No matter what circumstance or temptation causes us to drift away from God, He still loves us and wants us back. God forgives us and calls us back to Himself. Sometimes God uses a difficult situation to call us back, as in the case of Rehoboam. When we repent, we may still bear the consequences of our sin, but God forgives and restores us.

INSPIRATION
A lot of us live with a hidden fear that God is angry at us. Somewhere, sometime, some Sunday school class or some television show convinced us that God has a whip behind His back, a paddle in His back pocket, and He's going to nail us when we've gone too far. No concept could be more wrong! Your Savior's Father is very fond of you and only wants to share His love with you.

Could you use the genuine fresh air of God's forgiveness? Would you love to stand in the approval of God again? How do you do

Shishak, and said to them, "Thus says the Lord: 'You have forsaken Me, and therefore I also have left you in the hand of Shishak.' "

6 So the leaders of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, "The Lord *is* righteous."

7 Now when the Lord saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah, saying, "They have humbled themselves; *therefore* I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance. My wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. 8 Nevertheless they will be his servants, that they may distinguish My service from the service of the kingdoms of the nations."

9 So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house; he took everything. He also carried away the gold shields which Solomon had made. 10 Then King Rehoboam made bronze shields in their place, and committed *them* to the hands of the captains of the guard, who guarded the doorway of the king's house. 11 And whenever the king entered the house of the Lord, the guard would go and bring them out; then they would take them back into the guardroom. 12 When he humbled himself, the wrath of the Lord turned from him, so as not to destroy *him* completely; and things also went well in Judah.

The End of Rehoboam's Reign

13 Thus King Rehoboam strengthened himself in Jerusalem and reigned. Now Rehoboam *was* forty-one years old when he became king; and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the Lord had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put His name there. His mother's name *was* Naamah, an Ammonitess. 14 And he did evil, because he did not prepare his heart to seek the Lord.

15 The acts of Rehoboam, first and last, *are* they not written in the book of Shemaiah the prophet, and of Iddo the seer concerning genealogies? And *there were* wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all their days. 16 So Rehoboam rested with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David. Then Abijah[a] his son reigned in his place.

Abijah Reigns in Judah

13 In the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam, Abijah became king over Judah. 2 He reigned three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name *was* Michaiah[a] the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah.

And there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. 3 Abijah set the battle in order with an army of valiant warriors, four hundred thousand choice men. Jeroboam also drew up in battle formation against him with eight hundred thousand choice men, mighty men of valor.

4 Then Abijah stood on Mount Zemaraim, which *is* in the mountains of Ephraim, and said, "Hear me, Jeroboam and all Israel: 5 Should you not know that the Lord God of Israel gave the dominion over Israel to David forever, to him and his sons, by a covenant of salt? 6 Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon the son of

12:16 [a]Spelled *Abijam* in 1 Kings 14:31 **13:2** [a]Spelled *Maachah* in 11:20, 21 and 1 Kings 15:2

David, rose up and rebelled against his lord. 7Then worthless rogues gathered to him, and strengthened themselves against Rehoboam the son of Solomon, when Rehoboam was young and inexperienced and could not withstand them. 8And now you think to withstand the kingdom of the Lord, which is in the hand of the sons of David; and you *are* a great multitude, and with you are the gold calves which Jeroboam made for you as gods. 9Have you not cast out the priests of the Lord, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and made for yourselves priests, like the peoples of *other* lands, so that whoever comes to consecrate himself with a young bull and seven rams may be a priest of *things that are* not gods? 10But as for us, the Lord *is* our God, and we have not forsaken Him; and the priests who minister to the Lord *are* the sons of Aaron, and the Levites *attend* to *their* duties. 11And they burn to the Lord every morning and every evening burnt sacrifices and sweet incense; *they* also *set* the showbread *in order on* the pure *gold* table, and the lampstand of gold with its lamps to burn every evening; for we keep the command of the Lord our God, but you have forsaken Him. 12Now look, God Himself is with us as *our* head, and His priests with sounding trumpets to sound the alarm against you. O children of Israel, do not fight against the Lord God of your fathers, for you shall not prosper!"

13But Jeroboam caused an ambush to go around behind them; so they were in front of Judah, and the ambush *was* behind them. 14And when Judah looked around, to their surprise the battle line *was* at both front and rear; and they cried out to the Lord, and the priests sounded the trumpets. 15Then the men of Judah gave a shout; and as the men of Judah shouted, it happened that God struck Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. 16And the children of Israel fled before Judah, and God delivered them into their hand. 17Then Abijah and his people struck them with a great slaughter; so five hundred thousand choice men of Israel fell slain. 18Thus the children of Israel were subdued at that time; and the children of Judah prevailed, because they relied on the Lord God of their fathers.

19And Abijah pursued Jeroboam and took cities from him: Bethel with its villages, Jeshanah with its villages, and Ephrain[a] with its villages. 20So Jeroboam did not recover strength again in the days of Abijah; and the Lord struck him, and he died.

21But Abijah grew mighty, married fourteen wives, and begot twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters. 22Now the rest of the acts of Abijah, his ways, and his sayings *are* written in the annals of the prophet Iddo.

14 So Abijah rested with his fathers, and they buried him in the City of David. Then Asa his son reigned in his place. In his days the land was quiet for ten years.

Asa Reigns in Judah

2Asa did *what was* good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God, 3for he removed the altars of the foreign *gods* and the high places, and broke down the *sacred* pillars and cut down the wooden images. 4He commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to

13:19 [a]Or *Ephron*

it? By genuinely admitting to God that you've made a mistake, knowing that God loves you more than He hates your mistakes. And knowing that He will forgive those mistakes.

Does the Word of God say, "There is *limited* condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"? No. Does it say, "There is *some* condemnation . . ." ? No. It says, "There is *no* condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Think of it—regardless of our sin, we are not guilty! (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "God Forgives")

APPLICATION

By His nature God wants to forgive and restore you. He wants to meet your deepest longings. What does it mean to you that your Father is "very fond of you"? Think about that through the next day. Then, think of at least one person with whom you can share this good news.

EXPLORATION

Forgiveness by God—Luke 24:46–48; Acts 10:43; Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 1:9.

observe the law and the commandment. 5He also removed the high places and the incense altars from all the cities of Judah, and the kingdom was quiet under him. 6And he built fortified cities in Judah, for the land had rest; he had no war in those years, because the Lord had given him rest. 7Therefore he said to Judah, "Let us build these cities and make walls around *them,* and towers, gates, and bars, *while* the land *is* yet before us, because we have sought the Lord our God; we have sought *Him,* and He has given us rest on every side." So they built and prospered. 8And Asa had an army of three hundred thousand from Judah who carried shields and spears, and from Benjamin two hundred and eighty thousand men who carried shields and drew bows; all these *were* mighty men of valor.

9Then Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and three hundred chariots, and he came to Mareshah. 10So Asa went out against him, and they set the troops in battle array in the Valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. 11And Asa cried out to the Lord his God, and said, "Lord, *it is* nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power; help us, O Lord our God, for we rest on You, and in Your name we go against this multitude. O Lord, You *are* our God; do not let man prevail against You!"

12So the Lord struck the Ethiopians before Asa and Judah, and the Ethiopians fled. 13And Asa and the people who *were* with him pursued them to Gerar. So the Ethiopians were overthrown, and they could not recover, for

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: Our Physician

February 15, 1921. New York City. The operating room of the Kane Summit Hospital. A doctor is performing an appendectomy.

In many ways the events leading to the surgery are uneventful. The patient has complained of severe abdominal pain. The diagnosis is clear: an inflamed appendix. Dr. Evan O'Neill Kane is performing the surgery. In his distinguished thirty-seven-year medical career, he has performed nearly four thousand appendectomies, so this surgery will be uneventful in all ways except two . . . The first novelty of this operation? The use of local anesthesia in major surgery. . . . The second is the patient. The courageous candidate for surgery by Dr. Kane was Dr. Kane.

To prove his point, Dr. Kane operated on himself!

A wise move. The doctor became a patient in order to convince the patients to trust the doctor.

. . . The story of the doctor who became his own patient is mild compared to the story of the God who became human. But Jesus did. So that you and I would believe that the Healer knows our hurts, He voluntarily became one of us. He placed Himself in our position. He suffered our pains and felt our fears.

Rejection? He felt it. Temptation? He knew it. Loneliness? He experienced it. Death? He tasted it.

And stress? He could write a best-selling book about it.

Why did He do it? One reason. So that when you hurt you will go to Him—your Father and your Physician—and let him heal. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 658.

they were broken before the Lord and His army. And they carried away very much spoil. 14 Then they defeated all the cities around Gerar, for the fear of the Lord came upon them; and they plundered all the cities, for there was exceedingly much spoil in them. 15 They also attacked the livestock enclosures, and carried off sheep and camels in abundance, and returned to Jerusalem.

The Reforms of Asa

15 Now the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded. 2 And he went out to meet Asa, and said to him: "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The Lord *is* with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. 3 For a long time Israel *has been* without the true God, without a teaching priest, and without law; 4 but when in their trouble they turned to the Lord God of Israel, and sought Him, He was found by them. 5 And in those times *there was* no peace to the one who went out, nor to the one who came in, but great turmoil *was* on all the inhabitants of the lands. 6 So nation was destroyed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every adversity. 7 But you, be strong and do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded!"

8 And when Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Oded[a] the prophet, he took courage, and removed the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the cities which he had taken in the mountains of Ephraim; and he restored the altar of the Lord that *was* before the vestibule of the Lord. 9 Then he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those who dwelt with them from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon, for they came over to him in great numbers from Israel when they saw that the Lord his God was with him.

10 So they gathered together at Jerusalem in the third month, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa. 11 And they offered to the Lord at that time seven hundred bulls and seven thousand sheep from the spoil they had brought. 12 Then they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul; 13 and whoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel was to be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman. 14 Then they took an oath before the Lord with a loud voice, with shouting and trumpets and rams' horns. 15 And all Judah rejoiced at the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart and sought Him with all their soul; and He was found by them, and the Lord gave them rest all around.

16 Also he removed Maachah, the mother of Asa the king, from *being* queen mother, because she had made an obscene image of Asherah;[a] and Asa cut down her obscene image, then crushed and burned *it* by the Brook Kidron. 17 But the high places were not removed from Israel. Nevertheless the heart of Asa was loyal all his days.

18 He also brought into the house of God the things that his father had dedicated and that he himself had dedicated: silver and gold and utensils. 19 And there was no war until the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa.

Asa's Treaty with Syria

16 In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel came up against Judah and built Ramah, that he might let none go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. 2 Then Asa brought silver and gold from the treasuries of the house of the Lord and of the king's house, and sent to Ben-Hadad king of Syria, who dwelt in Damascus, saying, 3 "*Let there be* a treaty between you and me, as there was between my father and your father. See, I have sent you silver and gold; come, break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel, so that he will withdraw from me."

4 So Ben-Hadad heeded King Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel. They attacked Ijon, Dan, Abel Maim, and all the storage cities of Naphtali. 5 Now it happened, when Baasha heard *it,* that he stopped building Ramah and ceased his work. 6 Then King Asa took all Judah, and they carried away the stones and timber of Ramah, which Baasha had used for building; and with them he built Geba and Mizpah.

15:8 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Septuagint; Syriac and Vulgate read *Azariah the son of Oded* (compare verse 1).
15:16 [a]A Canaanite deity

Life LESSONS

2 Chronicles 16:1—19:3

SITUATION
Jehoshaphat feared and loved God. But he foolishly made an alliance with Ahab, the wicked king of Israel. Judah adopted Israel's evil practices, which led to judgment on both nations.

OBSERVATION
Partnerships with non-Christians can bring compromise if the believer does not constantly guard against this danger.

INSPIRATION
I used to think there were two kinds of people: the saved and unsaved. Paul corrects me by describing a third: the *saved, but unspiritual.* The spiritual person is Spirit dependent, Spirit directed, Spirit dominated. He seeks to "walk in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16). Conversely, the unspiritual person . . . people act "like people of the world" (1 Corinthians 3:3 NCV). In language, lifestyle, priorities, and personality, they blend in with nonbelievers. They let God save them, but not change them.

Such carnal Christianity frustrates Paul. "Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh" (Galatians 3:3).

Foolish and miserable. You don't want to carpool with unspiritual Christians. They have no kind words to share. There is "envy, strife, and divisions" among them (1 Corinthians 3:3). The only joy they know graduated from high school last year. And gratitude? Gratitude for what? . . . The saved

Hanani's Message to Asa

7 And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and
said to him: "Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and have
not relied on the Lord your God, therefore the army of the king of
Syria has escaped from your hand. 8 Were the Ethiopians and the
Lubim not a huge army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet,
because you relied on the Lord, He delivered them into your hand.
9 For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth,
to show Himself strong on behalf of *those* whose heart *is* loyal to Him.
In this you have done foolishly; therefore from now on you shall have
wars." 10 Then Asa was angry with the seer, and put him in prison, for
he was enraged at him because of this. And Asa oppressed *some* of the
people at that time.

Illness and Death of Asa

11 Note that the acts of Asa, first and last, are indeed written in the
book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 12 And in the thirty-ninth year of
his reign, Asa became diseased in his feet, and his malady was severe;
yet in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but the physicians.

13 So Asa rested with his fathers; he died in the forty-first year of
his reign. 14 They buried him in his own tomb, which he had made for
himself in the City of David; and they laid him in the bed which was
filled with spices and various ingredients prepared in a mixture of
ointments. They made a very great burning for him.

Jehoshaphat Reigns in Judah

17 Then Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his place, and strengthened himself against Israel. 2 And he placed troops in all the
fortified cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah and in
the cities of Ephraim which Asa his father had taken. 3 Now the Lord
was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the former ways of his
father David; he did not seek the Baals, 4 but sought the God[a] of his
father, and walked in His commandments and not according to the
acts of Israel. 5 Therefore the Lord established the kingdom in his
hand; and all Judah gave presents to Jehoshaphat, and he had riches
and honor in abundance. 6 And his heart took delight in the ways of
the Lord; moreover he removed the high places and wooden images
from Judah.

7 Also in the third year of his reign he sent his leaders, Ben-Hail,
Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel, and Michaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah. 8 And with them *he sent* Levites: Shemaiah, Nethaniah,
Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah, and
Tobadonijah—the Levites; and with them Elishama and Jehoram,
the priests. 9 So they taught in Judah, and *had* the Book of the Law of
the Lord with them; they went throughout all the cities of Judah and
taught the people.

10 And the fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms of the lands
that *were* around Judah, so that they did not make war against
Jehoshaphat. 11 Also *some* of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat
presents and silver as tribute; and the Arabians brought him flocks,

17:4 [a] Septuagint reads *Lord God.*

seven thousand seven hundred rams and seven thousand seven hundred male goats.

12 So Jehoshaphat became increasingly powerful, and he built fortresses and storage cities in Judah. 13 He had much property in the cities of Judah; and the men of war, mighty men of valor, *were* in Jerusalem.

14 These *are* their numbers, according to their fathers' houses. Of Judah, the captains of thousands: Adnah the captain, and with him three hundred thousand mighty men of valor; 15 and next to him *was* Jehohanan the captain, and with him two hundred and eighty thousand; 16 and next to him *was* Amasiah the son of Zichri, who willingly offered himself to the Lord, and with him two hundred thousand mighty men of valor. 17 Of Benjamin: Eliada a mighty man of valor, and with him two hundred thousand men armed with bow and shield; 18 and next to him *was* Jehozabad, and with him one hundred and eighty thousand prepared for war. 19 These served the king, besides those the king put in the fortified cities throughout all Judah.

Micaiah Warns Ahab

18 Jehoshaphat had riches and honor in abundance; and by marriage he allied himself with Ahab. 2 After some years he went down to *visit* Ahab in Samaria; and Ahab killed sheep and oxen in abundance for him and the people who were with him, and persuaded him to go up *with him* to Ramoth Gilead. 3 So Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, "Will you go with me *against* Ramoth Gilead?"

And he answered him, "I *am* as you *are,* and my people as your people; *we will be* with you in the war."

4 Also Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "Please inquire for the word of the Lord today."

5 Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, four hundred men, and said to them, "Shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?"

So they said, "Go up, for God will deliver it into the king's hand."

6 But Jehoshaphat said, "*Is there* not still a prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of Him?"[a]

7 So the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "*There is* still one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord; but I hate him, because he never prophesies good concerning me, but always evil. He *is* Micaiah the son of Imla."

And Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say such things!"

8 Then the king of Israel called one *of his* officers and said, "Bring Micaiah the son of Imla quickly!"

9 The king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah, clothed in *their* robes, sat each on his throne; and they sat at a threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them. 10 Now Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah had made horns of iron for himself; and he said, "Thus says the Lord: 'With these you shall gore the Syrians until they are destroyed.'"

11 And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, "Go up to Ramoth

18:6 [a] Or *him*

but unspiritual see salvation the way a farmer sees a hundred acres of untilled soil—lots of work. *Church attendance, sin resistance—have I done enough?* No wonder they're tired. No wonder they argue. "You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your own desires?" (1 Corinthians 3:3 NLT). (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Evaluate your alliances in career, leisure, and finances. Which "allies" tempt you to compromise? Which "allies" help you know the Bible? Pray? Add a spiritual ally this week.

EXPLORATION

Alliances—Numbers 25:1; 1 Kings 3:1; Isaiah 52:11; 2 Corinthians 6:14–18; Ephesians 5:6, 7; Revelation 18:4.

Gilead and prosper, for the Lord will deliver *it* into the king's hand."

12 Then the messenger who had gone to call Micaiah spoke to him, saying, "Now listen, the words of the prophets with one accord encourage the king. Therefore please let your word be like *the word of* one of them, and speak encouragement."

13 And Micaiah said, "*As* the Lord lives, whatever my God says, that I will speak."

14 Then he came to the king; and the king said to him, "Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or shall I refrain?"

And he said, "Go and prosper, and they shall be delivered into your hand!"

15 So the king said to him, "How many times shall I make you swear that you tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?"

16 Then he said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, 'These have no master. Let each return to his house in peace.' "

17 And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell you he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?"

18 Then *Micaiah* said, "Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing on His right hand and His left. 19 And the Lord said, 'Who will persuade Ahab king of Israel to go up, that he may fall at Ramoth Gilead?' So one spoke in this manner, and another spoke in that manner. 20 Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, and said, 'I will persuade him.' The Lord said to him, 'In what way?' 21 So he said, 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And *the Lord* said, 'You shall persuade *him* and also prevail; go out and do so.' 22 Therefore look! The Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these prophets of yours, and the Lord has declared disaster against you."

23 Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah went near and struck Micaiah on the cheek, and said, "Which way did the spirit from the Lord go from me to speak to you?"

24 And Micaiah said, "Indeed you shall see on that day when you go into an inner chamber to hide!"

25 Then the king of Israel said, "Take Micaiah, and return him to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king's son; 26 and say, 'Thus says the king: "Put this *fellow* in prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and water of affliction, until I return in peace." ' "

27 But Micaiah said, "If you ever return in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me." And he said, "Take heed, all you people!"

Ahab Dies in Battle

28 So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth Gilead. 29 And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself and go into battle; but you put on your robes." So the king of Israel disguised himself, and they went into battle.

30 Now the king of Syria had commanded the captains of the chariots who *were* with him, saying, "Fight with no one small or great, but only with the king of Israel."

31 So it was, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, "It *is* the king of Israel!" Therefore they surrounded him to attack; but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the Lord helped him, and God diverted them from him. 32 For so it was, when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him. 33 Now a certain man drew a bow at random, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of his armor. So he said to the driver of his chariot, "Turn around and take me out of the battle, for I am wounded." 34 The battle increased that day, and the king of Israel propped *himself* up in *his* chariot facing the Syrians until evening; and about the time of sunset he died.

19 Then Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned safely to his house in Jerusalem. 2 And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to King Jehoshaphat, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Therefore the wrath of the Lord *is* upon you. 3 Nevertheless good things are found in you, in that you have removed the wooden images from the land, and have prepared your heart to seek God."

The Reforms of Jehoshaphat

4 So Jehoshaphat dwelt at Jerusalem; and he went out again among the people from Beersheba to the mountains of Ephraim, and

brought them back to the Lord God of their fathers. 5Then he set judges in the land throughout all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, 6and said to the judges, "Take heed to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the Lord, who *is* with you in the judgment. 7Now therefore, let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take care and do *it,* for *there is* no iniquity with the Lord our God, no partiality, nor taking of bribes."

8Moreover in Jerusalem, for the judgment of the Lord and for controversies, Jehoshaphat appointed some of the Levites and priests, and some of the chief fathers of Israel, when they returned to Jerusalem.[a] 9And he commanded them, saying, "Thus you shall act in the fear of the Lord, faithfully and with a loyal heart: 10Whatever case comes to you from your brethren who dwell in their cities, whether of bloodshed or offenses against law or commandment, against statutes or ordinances, you shall warn them, lest they trespass against the Lord and wrath come upon you and your brethren. Do this, and you will not be guilty. 11And take notice: Amariah the chief priest *is* over you in all matters of the Lord; and Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the ruler of the house of Judah, for all the king's matters; also the Levites *will be* officials before you. Behave courageously, and the Lord will be with the good."

Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir Defeated

20 It happened after this *that* the people of Moab with the people of Ammon, and *others* with them besides the Ammonites,[a] came to battle against Jehoshaphat. 2Then some came and told Jehoshaphat, saying, "A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea, from Syria;[a] and they are in Hazazon Tamar" (which *is* En Gedi). 3And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. 4So Judah gathered together to ask *help* from the Lord; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord.

5Then Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord, before the new court, 6and said: "O Lord God of our fathers, *are* You not God in heaven, and do You *not* rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand *is there not* power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You? 7*Are* You not our God, *who* drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever? 8And they dwell in it, and have built You a sanctuary in it for Your name, saying, 9'If disaster comes upon us—sword, judgment, pestilence, or famine—we will stand before this temple and in Your presence (for Your name *is* in this temple), and cry out to You in our affliction, and You will hear and save.' 10And now, here are the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir—whom You would not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them and did not destroy them— 11here they are, rewarding us by coming to throw us out of Your possession which You have given us to inherit.

19:8 [a]Septuagint and Vulgate read *for the inhabitants of Jerusalem*.
20:1 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *Meunites* (compare 26:7). **20:2** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Septuagint, and Vulgate; some Hebrew manuscripts and Old Latin read *Edom*.

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 19:4—21:3

SITUATION
Jehoshaphat concentrated on administration by appointing loyal, faithful, capable, and God-fearing judges throughout the land. To ensure justice, he laid down rules for judging the people.

OBSERVATION
Godly leaders focus on God's power and answer to God for their judgments.

INSPIRATION
Some years ago Denalyn and I were a signature away from moving from one house to another. The structure was nice, and the price was fair. . . . It seemed a wise move. But I didn't feel peaceful about it. The project stirred unease and restlessness. I finally drove to the builder's office and removed my name from his list. To this day I can't pinpoint the source of the discomfort. I just didn't feel peaceful about it.

A few months ago I was asked to speak at a racial unity conference. I intended to decline but couldn't bring myself to do so. The event kept surfacing in my mind like a cork in a lake. Finally I agreed. Returning from the event, I still couldn't explain the impression to be there. But I felt peaceful about the decision, and that was enough.

Sometimes a choice just "feels" right. . . .

You need no ephod or precious stones; you have a heart in which God's Spirit dwells. . . .

You have a heart for God? Heed it.

A family of faith? Consult it.

A Bible? Read it.

You have all you need to face the giant-size questions of your life. Most of all you have a God who loves you too much to let you wander. Trust Him. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

We spend our whole life making judgments and judging various situations and actions. How do you go about making these judgments? Josiah gives us some pointers: realize we are judging for the Lord; judge impartially, without injustice; serve faithfully and in the fear of the Lord (19:6, 7, 9).

EXPLORATION

Judging Others—1 Samuel 16:7; Isaiah 11:3–5; Matthew 7:1–5; John 8:7; Acts 11:2–18; 1 Corinthians 5:12, 13.

I know that a struggle today will result in music tomorrow.

—Max Lucado (A Gentle Thunder)

12 O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against
this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what
to do, but our eyes *are* upon You."

13 Now all Judah, with their little ones, their wives, and their children, stood before the Lord.

14 Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel the son of
Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah,
a Levite of the sons of Asaph, in the midst of the assembly. 15 And he
said, "Listen, all you of Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and
you, King Jehoshaphat! Thus says the Lord to you: 'Do not be afraid
nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle *is* not
yours, but God's. 16 Tomorrow go down against them. They will surely
come up by the Ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of
the brook before the Wilderness of Jeruel. 17 You will not *need* to fight
in this *battle*. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of
the Lord, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem!' Do not fear or be
dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the Lord *is* with you."

18 And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with *his* face to the ground,
and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem bowed before the
Lord, worshiping the Lord. 19 Then the Levites of the children of the
Kohathites and of the children of the Korahites stood up to praise the
Lord God of Israel with voices loud and high.

20 So they rose early in the morning and went out into the
Wilderness of Tekoa; and as they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and
said, "Hear me, O Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in
the Lord your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets,
and you shall prosper." 21 And when he had consulted with the people,
he appointed those who should sing to the Lord, and who should
praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and
were saying:

"Praise the Lord,
For His mercy *endures* forever."[a]

22 Now when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set
ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who
had come against Judah; and they were defeated. 23 For the people of
Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir to
utterly kill and destroy *them*. And when they had made an end of the
inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another.

24 So when Judah came to a place overlooking the wilderness, they
looked toward the multitude; and there *were* their dead bodies, fallen
on the earth. No one had escaped.

25 When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away their spoil,
they found among them an abundance of valuables on the dead
bodies,[a] and precious jewelry, which they stripped off for themselves,
more than they could carry away; and they were three days gathering
the spoil because there was so much. 26 And on the fourth day they
assembled in the Valley of Berachah, for there they blessed the Lord;

20:21 [a]Compare Psalm 106:1 **20:25** [a]A few Hebrew manuscripts, Old Latin, and Vulgate read *garments;* Septuagint reads *armor.*

therefore the name of that place was called The Valley of Berachah[a] until this day. 27 Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, with Jehoshaphat in front of them, to go back to Jerusalem with joy, for the Lord had made them rejoice over their enemies. 28 So they came to Jerusalem, with stringed instruments and harps and trumpets, to the house of the Lord. 29 And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of *those* countries when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel. 30 Then the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest all around.

The End of Jehoshaphat's Reign

31 So Jehoshaphat was king over Judah. *He was* thirty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name *was* Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. 32 And he walked in the way of his father Asa, and did not turn aside from it, doing *what was* right in the sight of the Lord. 33 Nevertheless the high places were not taken away, for as yet the people had not directed their hearts to the God of their fathers.

34 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, indeed they *are* written in the book of Jehu the son of Hanani, which *is* mentioned in the book of the kings of Israel.

35 After this Jehoshaphat king of Judah allied himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who acted very wickedly. 36 And he allied himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish, and they made the ships in Ezion Geber. 37 But Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, "Because you have allied yourself with Ahaziah, the Lord has destroyed your works." Then the ships were wrecked, so that they were not able to go to Tarshish.

Jehoram Reigns in Judah

21 And Jehoshaphat rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the City of David. Then Jehoram his son reigned in his place. 2 He had brothers, the sons of Jehoshaphat: Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azaryahu, Michael, and Shephatiah; all these *were* the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel. 3 Their father gave them great gifts of silver and gold and precious things, with fortified cities in Judah; but he gave the kingdom to Jehoram, because he *was* the firstborn.

4 Now when Jehoram was established over the kingdom of his father, he strengthened himself and killed all his brothers with the sword, and also *others* of the princes of Israel.

5 Jehoram *was* thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. 6 And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done, for he had the daughter of Ahab as a wife; and he did evil in the sight of the Lord. 7 Yet the Lord would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that He had made with David, and since He had promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons forever.

8 In his days Edom revolted against Judah's authority, and made a king over themselves. 9 So Jehoram went out with his officers, and

20:26 [a] Literally *Blessing*

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 21:4—24:27

SITUATION

Under the guidance of Jehoiada the priest, Joash restored worship in the temple and destroyed the altars of Baal. When Jehoiada died, Joash turned his back on God and felt God's punishment.

OBSERVATION

Surrounded by company that honored God, Joash made God-honoring decisions. When his counselor died, he failed to replace this voice in his life. When Joash sinned, God gave him many chances to repent.

INSPIRATION

Ever wonder why there were two crosses next to Christ? Why not six or ten? Ever wonder why Jesus was in the center? Why not on the far right or far left? Could it be that the two crosses on the hill symbolize one of God's greatest gifts? The gift of choice.

The two criminals have so much in common. Convicted by the same system. Condemned to the same death. Surrounded by the same crowd. Equally close to the same Jesus. In fact, they begin with the same sarcasm: "Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him" (Matthew 27:44).

But one changed. "He said to Jesus, 'Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.' And Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise'" (Luke 23:42, 43).

Think about the thief who repented. Though we

know little about him, we know this: He made some bad mistakes in life. He chose the wrong crowd, the wrong morals, the wrong behavior. But would you consider his life a waste? Is he spending eternity reaping the fruit of all the bad choices he made? No, just the opposite. He is enjoying the fruit of the one good choice he made. In the end all his bad choices were redeemed by a solitary good one.

You've made some bad choices in life, haven't you? You look back over your life and say, "If only . . . if only I could make up for those bad choices." You can. One good choice for eternity offsets a thousand bad ones on earth.

The choice is yours. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What would be the hardest part of true repentance for you? What would be the most liberating part? Seek help from Christian friends who will pray with you through the process.

EXPLORATION

Repentance—1 Kings 21:29; 1 Chronicles 21:8; Ezra 10:2–4, 11; Psalm 80:3, 7, 19; Matthew 3:1–6; Luke 3:8, 9; 19:1–10; Acts 3:19; 2 Corinthians 7:10.

all his chariots with him. And he rose by night and attacked the Edomites who had surrounded him and the captains of the chariots.
10 Thus Edom has been in revolt against Judah's authority to this day. At that time Libnah revolted against his rule, because he had forsaken the Lord God of his fathers. 11 Moreover he made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit harlotry, and led Judah astray.

12 And a letter came to him from Elijah the prophet, saying,

> Thus says the Lord God of your father David:
> Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father, or in the ways of Asa king of Judah, 13 but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and have made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the harlot like the harlotry of the house of Ahab, and also have killed your brothers, those of your father's household, *who were* better than yourself, 14 behold, the Lord will strike your people with a serious affliction—your children, your wives, and all your possessions; 15 and you *will become* very sick with a disease of your intestines, until your intestines come out by reason of the sickness, day by day.

16 Moreover the Lord stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines and the Arabians who *were* near the Ethiopians. 17 And they came up into Judah and invaded it, and carried away all the possessions that were found in the king's house, and also his sons and his wives, so that there was not a son left to him except Jehoahaz,[a] the youngest of his sons.

18 After all this the Lord struck him in his intestines with an incurable disease. 19 Then it happened in the course of time, after the end of two years, that his intestines came out because of his sickness; so he died in severe pain. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning for his fathers.

20 He was thirty-two years old when he became king. He reigned in Jerusalem eight years and, to no one's sorrow, departed. However they buried him in the City of David, but not in the tombs of the kings.

Ahaziah Reigns in Judah

22 Then the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his place, for the raiders who came with the Arabians into the camp had killed all the older *sons.* So Ahaziah the son of Jehoram, king of Judah, reigned. 2 Ahaziah *was* forty-two[a] years old when he became king, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name *was* Athaliah the granddaughter of Omri. 3 He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother advised him to do wickedly. 4 Therefore he did evil in the sight of the Lord, like the house of Ahab; for they were his counselors after the death of his father, to his destruction. 5 He also followed their advice, and went with Jehoram[a] the son of Ahab king of Israel to war against Hazael

21:17 [a]Elsewhere called *Ahaziah* (compare 2 Chronicles 22:1) **22:2** [a]Or *twenty-two* (compare 2 Kings 8:26) **22:5** [a]Also spelled *Joram* (compare verses 5 and 7; 2 Kings 8:28; and elsewhere)

king of Syria at Ramoth Gilead; and the Syrians wounded Joram. 6Then he returned to Jezreel to recover from the wounds which he had received at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael king of Syria. And Azariah[a] the son of Jehoram, king of Judah, went down to see Jehoram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was sick.

7His going to Joram was God's occasion for Ahaziah's downfall; for when he arrived, he went out with Jehoram against Jehu the son of Nimshi, whom the Lord had anointed to cut off the house of Ahab. 8And it happened, when Jehu was executing judgment on the house of Ahab, and found the princes of Judah and the sons of Ahaziah's brothers who served Ahaziah, that he killed them. 9Then he searched for Ahaziah; and they caught him (he was hiding in Samaria), and brought him to Jehu. When they had killed him, they buried him, "because," they said, "he is the son of Jehoshaphat, who sought the Lord with all his heart."

So the house of Ahaziah had no one to assume power over the kingdom.

Athaliah Reigns in Judah

10Now when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal heirs of the house of Judah. 11But Jehoshabeath,[a] the daughter of the king, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him away from among the king's sons who were being murdered, and put him and his nurse in a bedroom. So Jehoshabeath, the daughter of King Jehoram, the wife of Jehoiada the priest (for she was the sister of Ahaziah), hid him from Athaliah so that she did not kill him. 12And he was hidden with them in the house of God for six years, while Athaliah reigned over the land.

Joash Crowned King of Judah

23 In the seventh year Jehoiada strengthened himself, *and made a* covenant with the captains of hundreds: Azariah the son of Jeroham, Ishmael the son of Jehohanan, Azariah the son of Obed, Maaseiah the son of Adaiah, and Elishaphat the son of Zichri. 2And they went throughout Judah and gathered the Levites from all the cities of Judah, and the chief fathers of Israel, and they came to Jerusalem.

3Then all the assembly made a covenant with the king in the house of God. And he said to them, "Behold, the king's son shall reign, as the Lord has said of the sons of David. 4This *is* what you shall do: One-third of you entering on the Sabbath, of the priests and the Levites, *shall be* keeping watch over the doors; 5one-third *shall be* at the king's house; and one-third at the Gate of the Foundation. All the people *shall be* in the courts of the house of the Lord. 6But let no one come into the house of the Lord except the priests and those of the Levites who serve. They may go in, for they *are* holy; but all the people shall keep the watch of the Lord. 7And the Levites shall surround the king on all sides, every man with his weapons in his hand; and whoever comes into the house, let him be put to death. You are to be with the king when he comes in and when he goes out."

8So the Levites and all Judah did according to all that Jehoiada the priest commanded. And each man took his men who were to be on duty on the Sabbath, with those who were going *off duty* on the Sabbath; for Jehoiada the priest had not dismissed the divisions. 9And Jehoiada the priest gave to the captains of hundreds the spears and the large and small shields which *had belonged* to King David, that *were* in the temple of God. 10Then he set all the people, every man with his weapon in his hand, from the right side of the temple to the left side of the temple, along by the altar and by the temple, all around the king. 11And they brought out the king's son, put the crown on him, *gave him* the Testimony,[a] and made him king. Then Jehoiada and his sons anointed him, and said, "*Long* live the king!"

Death of Athaliah

12Now when Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she came to the people *in* the temple of the Lord. 13*When* she looked, there was the king standing by his pillar at the entrance; and the

22:6 [a]Some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Syriac, Vulgate, and 2 Kings 8:29 read *Ahaziah.* **22:11** [a]Spelled *Jehosheba* in 2 Kings 11:2 **23:11** [a]That is, the Law (compare Exodus 25:16, 21; 31:18)

leaders and the trumpeters *were* by the king. All the people of the land were rejoicing and blowing trumpets, also the singers with musical instruments, and those who led in praise. So Athaliah tore her clothes and said, "Treason! Treason!"

14 And Jehoiada the priest brought out the captains of hundreds who were set over the army, and said to them, "Take her outside under guard, and slay with the sword whoever follows her." For the priest had said, "Do not kill her in the house of the Lord."

15 So they seized her; and she went by way of the entrance of the Horse Gate *into* the king's house, and they killed her there.

16 Then Jehoiada made a covenant between himself, the people, and the king, that they should be the Lord's people. 17 And all the people went to the temple[a] of Baal, and tore it down. They broke in pieces its altars and images, and killed Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars. 18 Also Jehoiada appointed the oversight of the house of the Lord to the hand of the priests, the Levites, whom David had assigned in the house of the Lord, to offer the burnt offerings of the Lord, as *it is* written in the Law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, *as it was established* by David. 19 And he set the gatekeepers at the gates of the house of the Lord, so that no one *who was* in any way unclean should enter.

20 Then he took the captains of hundreds, the nobles, the governors of the people, and all the people of the land, and brought the king down from the house of the Lord; and they went through the Upper Gate to the king's house, and set the king on the throne of the kingdom. 21 So all the people of the land rejoiced; and the city was quiet, for they had slain Athaliah with the sword.

Joash Repairs the Temple

24 Joash *was* seven years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name *was* Zibiah of Beersheba. 2 Joash did *what was* right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest. 3 And Jehoiada took two wives for him, and he had sons and daughters.

4 Now it happened after this *that* Joash set his heart on repairing the house of the Lord. 5 Then he gathered the priests and the Levites, and said to them, "Go out to the cities of Judah, and gather from all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that you do it quickly."

However the Levites did not do it quickly. 6 So the king called Jehoiada the chief *priest,* and said to him, "Why have you not required the Levites to bring in from Judah and from Jerusalem the collection, *according to the commandment* of Moses the servant of the Lord and of the assembly of Israel, for the tabernacle of witness?" 7 For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken into the house of God, and had also presented all the dedicated things of the house of the Lord to the Baals.

8 Then at the king's command they made a chest, and set it outside at the gate of the house of the Lord. 9 And they made a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to bring to the Lord the collection *that* Moses the servant of God *had imposed* on Israel in the wilderness. 10 Then all the leaders and all the people rejoiced, brought their contributions, and put *them* into the chest until all had given. 11 So it was, at that time, when the chest was brought to the king's official by the hand of the Levites, and when they saw that *there was* much money, that the king's scribe and the high priest's officer came and emptied the chest, and took it and returned it to its place. Thus they did day by day, and gathered money in abundance.

12 The king and Jehoiada gave it to those who did the work of the service of the house of the Lord; and they hired masons and carpenters to repair the house of the Lord, and also those who worked in iron and bronze to restore the house of the Lord. 13 So the workmen labored, and the work was completed by them; they restored the house of God to its original condition and reinforced it. 14 When they had finished, they brought the rest of the money before the king and Jehoiada; they made from it articles for the house of the Lord, articles for serving and offering, spoons and vessels of gold and silver. And they offered burnt offerings in the house of the Lord continually all the days of Jehoiada.

23:17 [a] Literally *house*

Apostasy of Joash

15 But Jehoiada grew old and was full of days, and he died; *he was*
one hundred and thirty years old when he died. 16 And they buried
him in the City of David among the kings, because he had done good
in Israel, both toward God and His house.

17 Now after the death of Jehoiada the leaders of Judah came and
bowed down to the king. And the king listened to them. 18 Therefore
they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, and served wooden
images and idols; and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem because
of their trespass. 19 Yet He sent prophets to them, to bring them back
to the Lord; and they testified against them, but they would not listen.

20 Then the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada
the priest, who stood above the people, and said to them, "Thus says
God: 'Why do you transgress the commandments of the Lord, so that
you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, He also has
forsaken you.' " 21 So they conspired against him, and at the command
of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of
the Lord. 22 Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness which
Jehoiada his father had done to him, but killed his son; and as he died,
he said, "The Lord look on *it,* and repay!"

Death of Joash

23 So it happened in the spring of the year *that* the army of Syria
came up against him; and they came to Judah and Jerusalem, and
destroyed all the leaders of the people from among the people, and
sent all their spoil to the king of Damascus. 24 For the army of the Syr-
ians came with a small company of men; but the Lord delivered a very
great army into their hand, because they had forsaken the Lord God
of their fathers. So they executed judgment against Joash. 25 And when
they had withdrawn from him (for they left him severely wounded),
his own servants conspired against him because of the blood of the
sons[a] of Jehoiada the priest, and killed him on his bed. So he died. And
they buried him in the City of David, but they did not bury him in the
tombs of the kings.

26 These are the ones who conspired against him: Zabad[a] the son
of Shimeath the Ammonitess, and Jehozabad the son of Shimrith[b] the
Moabitess. 27 Now *concerning* his sons, and the many oracles about
him, and the repairing of the house of God, indeed they *are* written
in the annals of the book of the kings. Then Amaziah his son reigned
in his place.

Amaziah Reigns in Judah

25 Amaziah *was* twenty-five years old *when* he became king, and
he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name
was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. 2 And he did *what was* right in the sight
of the Lord, but not with a loyal heart.

3 Now it happened, as soon as the kingdom was established for him,
that he executed his servants who had murdered his father the king.
4 However he did not execute their children, but *did* as *it is* written

24:25 [a]Septuagint and Vulgate read *son* (compare verses 20–22). **24:26** [a]Or *Jozachar* (compare 2 Kings 12:21) [b]Or *Shomer* (compare 2 Kings 12:21)

2 Chronicles 25:1—26:23

SITUATION
Both Amaziah and Uzziah were God-fearing kings. As long as they acknowledged God's part in their achievements, they prospered. When ambition and pride caused them to forget God, they paid the price for their sin.

OBSERVATION
Pride causes us to set ourselves up as gods. Because of pride, we sin without regard to God's standards.

INSPIRATION
The request came when I was twenty. "Can you address our church youth group?" We aren't talking citywide crusade here. Think more in terms of a dozen kids around a West Texas campfire. I was new to the faith, hence new to the power of the faith. I told my story, and, lo and behold, they listened! One even approached me afterward and said something like, "That moved me, Max." My chest lifted, and my feet shifted just a step in the direction of the painting.

God has been nudging me back ever since.

Some of you don't relate. The limelight never woos you. You and John the Baptist sing the same tune: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). God bless you. You might pray for the rest of us. We applause-aholics have done it all: dropped names, sung loudly, dressed up to look classy, dressed down to look cool, quoted authors we've never read, spouted Greek we've never studied. For the

life of me, I believe Satan trains battalions of demons to whisper one question in our ears: "What are people thinking of you?"

A deadly query. What they think of us matters not. What they think of God matters all. God will not share His glory with another (Isaiah 42:8). Next time you need a nudge away from the spotlight, remember: *You are simply one link in a chain, an unimportant link at that. . . .*

We entrusted with the gospel dare not seek applause but best deflect applause. For our message is about Someone else. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Pride and ambition may creep in and sweep away our devotion to God. Success often tries to squeeze God out of our mind. Check your attitudes. Resist pride. Focus on Christ.

EXPLORATION

Pride—Numbers 16:8–10; Judges 8:1–3; 17:6; Mark 9:34; Luke 18:9–14; Ephesians 2:11–13.

in the Law in the Book of Moses, where the Lord commanded, saying, "The fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall the children be put to death for their fathers; but a person shall die for his own sin."[a]

The War Against Edom

5 Moreover Amaziah gathered Judah together and set over them captains of thousands and captains of hundreds, according to *their* fathers' houses, throughout all Judah and Benjamin; and he numbered them from twenty years old and above, and found them to be three hundred thousand choice *men, able* to go to war, who could handle spear and shield. 6 He also hired one hundred thousand mighty men of valor from Israel for one hundred talents of silver. 7 But a man of God came to him, saying, "O king, do not let the army of Israel go with you, for the Lord *is* not with Israel—*not with* any of the children of Ephraim. 8 But if you go, be gone! Be strong in battle! *Even so,* God shall make you fall before the enemy; for God has power to help and to overthrow."

9 Then Amaziah said to the man of God, "But what *shall we* do about the hundred talents which I have given to the troops of Israel?"

And the man of God answered, "The Lord is able to give you much more than this." 10 So Amaziah discharged the troops that had come to him from Ephraim, to go back home. Therefore their anger was greatly aroused against Judah, and they returned home in great anger.

11 Then Amaziah strengthened himself, and leading his people, he went to the Valley of Salt and killed ten thousand of the people of Seir. 12 Also the children of Judah took captive ten thousand alive, brought them to the top of the rock, and cast them down from the top of the rock, so that they all were dashed in pieces.

13 But as for the soldiers of the army which Amaziah had discharged, so that they would not go with him to battle, they raided the cities of Judah from Samaria to Beth Horon, killed three thousand in them, and took much spoil.

14 Now it was so, after Amaziah came from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the people of Seir, set them up *to be* his gods, and bowed down before them and burned incense to them. 15 Therefore the anger of the Lord was aroused against Amaziah, and He sent him a prophet who said to him, "Why have you sought the gods of the people, which could not rescue their own people from your hand?"

16 So it was, as he talked with him, that *the king* said to him, "Have we made you the king's counselor? Cease! Why should you be killed?"

Then the prophet ceased, and said, "I know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this and have not heeded my advice."

Israel Defeats Judah

17 Now Amaziah king of Judah asked advice and sent to Joash[a] the son of Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, "Come, let us face one another *in battle.*"

25:4 [a]Deuteronomy 24:16 **25:17** [a]Spelled *Jehoash* in 2 Kings 14:8ff

18 And Joash king of Israel sent to Amaziah
king of Judah, saying, "The thistle that *was* in
Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Leba-
non, saying, 'Give your daughter to my son as
wife'; and a wild beast that *was* in Lebanon
passed by and trampled the thistle. 19 Indeed
you say that you have defeated the Edomites,
and your heart is lifted up to boast. Stay at
home now; why should you meddle with
trouble, that you should fall—you and Judah
with you?"

20 But Amaziah would not heed, for it *came*
from God, that He might give them into the
hand *of their enemies,* because they sought the
gods of Edom. 21 So Joash king of Israel went
out; and he and Amaziah king of Judah faced
one another at Beth Shemesh, which *belongs*
to Judah. 22 And Judah was defeated by Israel,
and every man fled to his tent. 23 Then Joash
the king of Israel captured Amaziah king of
Judah, the son of Joash, the son of Jehoahaz,
at Beth Shemesh; and he brought him to
Jerusalem, and broke down the wall of Jeru-
salem from the Gate of Ephraim to the Corner
Gate—four hundred cubits. 24 And *he took* all
the gold and silver, all the articles that were
found in the house of God with Obed-Edom,
the treasures of the king's house, and hos-
tages, and returned to Samaria.

Death of Amaziah

25 Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah,
lived fifteen years after the death of Joash the
son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel. 26 Now the
rest of the acts of Amaziah, from first to last,
indeed *are* they not written in the book of
the kings of Judah and Israel? 27 After the time
that Amaziah turned away from following the
Lord, they made a conspiracy against him in
Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish; but they
sent after him to Lachish and killed him there.
28 Then they brought him on horses and bur-
ied him with his fathers in the City of Judah.

Uzziah Reigns in Judah

26 Now all the people of Judah took
Uzziah,[a] who *was* sixteen years old, and
made him king instead of his father Amaziah.
2 He built Elath[a] and restored it to Judah, after
the king rested with his fathers.

3 Uzziah *was* sixteen years old when he
became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in
Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecholiah
of Jerusalem. 4 And he did *what was* right in
the sight of the Lord, according to all that his
father Amaziah had done. 5 He sought God in
the days of Zechariah, who had understand-
ing in the visions[a] of God; and as long as he
sought the Lord, God made him prosper.

6 Now he went out and made war against the
Philistines, and broke down the wall of Gath,
the wall of Jabneh, and the wall of Ashdod;
and he built cities *around* Ashdod and among
the Philistines. 7 God helped him against the
Philistines, against the Arabians who lived in
Gur Baal, and against the Meunites. 8 Also the
Ammonites brought tribute to Uzziah. His
fame spread as far as the entrance of Egypt, for
he became exceedingly strong.

9 And Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at
the Corner Gate, at the Valley Gate, and at the
corner buttress of the wall; then he fortified
them. 10 Also he built towers in the desert. He
dug many wells, for he had much livestock,
both in the lowlands and in the plains; *he also
had* farmers and vinedressers in the moun-
tains and in Carmel, for he loved the soil.

11 Moreover Uzziah had an army of fight-
ing men who went out to war by companies,
according to the number on their roll as pre-
pared by Jeiel the scribe and Maaseiah the
officer, under the hand of Hananiah, *one* of
the king's captains. 12 The total number of
chief officers[a] of the mighty men of valor *was*
two thousand six hundred. 13 And under their
authority *was* an army of three hundred and
seven thousand five hundred, that made war
with mighty power, to help the king against
the enemy. 14 Then Uzziah prepared for them,
for the entire army, shields, spears, helmets,
body armor, bows, and slings *to cast* stones.
15 And he made devices in Jerusalem, invented
by skillful men, to be on the towers and the
corners, to shoot arrows and large stones. So
his fame spread far and wide, for he was mar-
velously helped till he became strong.

26:1 [a]Called *Azariah* in 2 Kings 14:21ff **26:2** [a]Hebrew *Eloth* **26:5** [a]Several Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Arabic read *fear.* **26:12** [a]Literally *chief fathers*

The Penalty for Uzziah's Pride

16 But when he was strong his heart was
lifted up, to *his* destruction, for he trans-
gressed against the Lord his God by entering
the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the
altar of incense. 17 So Azariah the priest went
in after him, and with him were eighty priests
of the Lord—valiant men. 18 And they with-
stood King Uzziah, and said to him, "*It* is not
for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord,
but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are
consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the
sanctuary, for you have trespassed! You *shall*
have no honor from the Lord God."

19 Then Uzziah became furious; and he
had a censer in his hand to burn incense. And
while he was angry with the priests, leprosy
broke out on his forehead, before the priests
in the house of the Lord, beside the incense
altar. 20 And Azariah the chief priest and all
the priests looked at him, and there, on his
forehead, he *was* leprous; so they thrust him
out of that place. Indeed he also hurried to get
out, because the Lord had struck him.

21 King Uzziah was a leper until the day
of his death. He dwelt in an isolated house,
because he was a leper; for he was cut off from
the house of the Lord. Then Jotham his son
was over the king's house, judging the people
of the land.

22 Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, from
first to last, the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz
wrote. 23 So Uzziah rested with his fathers, and
they buried him with his fathers in the field of

New Life In Christ

As long as [Uzziah] sought the Lord, God made him prosper. —2 Chronicles 26:5

Obedience to Jesus Leads to Success

We . . . learn God's will by spending time in His presence. The key to knowing God's heart is having a relationship with Him. A personal relationship. God will speak to you differently than He will speak to others. Just because God spoke to Moses through a burning bush, that doesn't mean we should all sit next to a bush waiting for God to speak. God used a fish to convict Jonah. Does that mean we should have worship services at Sea World? No. God reveals His heart personally to each person.

For that reason, your walk with God is essential. His heart is not seen in an occasional chat or weekly visit. We learn His will as we take up residence in His house every single day.

If you were to take a name at random out of the phone book and ask me, "Max, how does Chester Whomever feel about adultery?" I couldn't answer. I don't know Chester Whomever. But if you were to ask me, "Max, how does Denalyn Lucado feel about adultery?" I wouldn't even have to call her. I know. She's my wife. We have walked together long enough that I know what she thinks.

The same is true with God. Walk with Him long enough and you come to know His heart. When you spend time with Him in His study, you see His passion. Welcome Him to enter the gateway of your soul and you'll perceive His will. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

Question: What is something you can do today to help you get to know God better?

For more on "New Life in Christ," see page 725.

burial which *belonged* to the kings, for they said, "He is a leper." Then Jotham his son reigned in his place.

Jotham Reigns in Judah

27 Jotham *was* twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name *was* Jerushah[a] the daughter of Zadok. 2 And he did *what was* right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Uzziah had done (although he did not enter the temple of the Lord). But still the people acted corruptly.

3 He built the Upper Gate of the house of the Lord, and he built extensively on the wall of Ophel. 4 Moreover he built cities in the mountains of Judah, and in the forests he built fortresses and towers. 5 He also fought with the king of the Ammonites and defeated them. And the people of Ammon gave him in that year one hundred talents of silver, ten thousand kors of wheat, and ten thousand of barley. The people of Ammon paid this to him in the second and third years also. 6 So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God.

7 Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all his wars and his ways, indeed they *are* written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah. 8 He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. 9 So Jotham rested with his fathers, and they buried him in the City of David. Then Ahaz his son reigned in his place.

Ahaz Reigns in Judah

28 Ahaz *was* twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do *what was* right in the sight of the Lord, as his father David *had done*. 2 For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made molded images for the Baals. 3 He burned incense in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and burned his children in the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. 4 And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.

Syria and Israel Defeat Judah

5 Therefore the Lord his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria. They defeated him, and carried away a great multitude of them as captives, and brought *them* to Damascus. Then he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who defeated him with a great slaughter. 6 For Pekah the son of Remaliah killed one hundred and twenty thousand in Judah in one day, all valiant men, because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers. 7 Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, killed Maaseiah the king's son, Azrikam the officer over the house, and Elkanah *who was* second to the king. 8 And the children of Israel carried away captive of their brethren two hundred thousand women, sons, and daughters; and they also took away much spoil from them, and brought the spoil to Samaria.

27:1 [a] Spelled *Jerusha* in 2 Kings 15:33

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 27:1—28:27

SITUATION
Although King Jotham obeyed God, his subjects did not. It seems he never encouraged them to walk in God's way.

OBSERVATION
God places people around us who can benefit from our influence.

INSPIRATION
Seems that almost half the kings were crooks, half were embezzlers, and all but a handful worshiped an idol or two for good measure.

And so reads the list of Jesus' not-so-great grandparents. Seems like the only common bond between this lot was a promise. A promise from heaven that God would use them to send His Son.

Why did God use these people? Didn't have to. Could have just laid the Savior on a doorstep. Would have been simpler that way. And why does God tell us their stories? Why does God give us an entire testament of blunders and stumbles of His people?

Simple. He knew what you and I watched on the news last night. He knew you would fret. He knew I would worry. And He wants us to know that when the world goes wild, He stays calm.

Want proof? Read the last name on the list [in Matthew 1]. In spite of all the crooked halos and tasteless gambols of his people, the last name on the list is the first one promised—Jesus.

"Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom

was born Jesus who is called Christ" (Matthew 1:16).

Period. No more names are listed. No more are needed. As if God is announcing to a doubting world, "See, I did it. Just like I said I would. The plan succeeded."

The famine couldn't starve it.

Four hundred years of Egyptian slavery couldn't oppress it.

Wilderness wanderings couldn't lose it.

Babylonian captivity couldn't stop it.

Clay-footed pilgrims couldn't spoil it.

The promise of the Messiah threads its way through forty-two generations of rough-cut stones, forming a necklace fit for the King who came. Just as promised.

And the promise remains.

Those people who keep their faith until the end will be saved (Matthew 24:13), Joseph's child assures.

In this world you will have trouble, but be brave! I have defeated the world (John 16:33).

The engineer has not abandoned the train. Nuclear war is no threat to God. Yo-yo economies don't intimidate the heavens. Immoral leaders have never derailed the plan.

God keeps His promise.

See for yourself. In the manger. He's there.

See for yourself. In the tomb. He's gone. (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

You can encourage other believers today! You can help unbelievers find Christ! How? Look for the hurting. Look for the lost. Watch for needs. Opportunities are plentiful. Accept the challenge of an opportunity and pray that God will help you be successful.

Israel Returns the Captives

9 But a prophet of the Lord was there, whose name *was* Oded; and
he went out before the army that came to Samaria, and said to them:
"Look, because the Lord God of your fathers was angry with Judah,
He has delivered them into your hand; but you have killed them in a
rage *that* reaches up to heaven. 10 And now you propose to force the
children of Judah and Jerusalem to be your male and female slaves;
but are you not also guilty before the Lord your God? 11 Now hear me,
therefore, and return the captives, whom you have taken captive from
your brethren, for the fierce wrath of the Lord *is* upon you."
12 Then some of the heads of the children of Ephraim, Azariah the
son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah the son
of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against those who
came from the war, 13 and said to them, "You shall not bring the cap-
tives here, for we *already* have offended the Lord. You intend to add
to our sins and to our guilt; for our guilt is great, and *there is* fierce
wrath against Israel." 14 So the armed men left the captives and the
spoil before the leaders and all the assembly. 15 Then the men who
were designated by name rose up and took the captives, and from the
spoil they clothed all who were naked among them, dressed them and
gave them sandals, gave them food and drink, and anointed them;
and they let all the feeble ones ride on donkeys. So they brought them
to their brethren at Jericho, the city of palm trees. Then they returned
to Samaria.

Assyria Refuses to Help Judah

16 At the same time King Ahaz sent to the kings[a] of Assyria to help
him. 17 For again the Edomites had come, attacked Judah, and carried
away captives. 18 The Philistines also had invaded the cities of the low-
land and of the South of Judah, and had taken Beth Shemesh, Aijalon,
Gederoth, Sochoh with its villages, Timnah with its villages, and
Gimzo with its villages; and they dwelt there. 19 For the Lord brought
Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had encouraged moral
decline in Judah and had been continually unfaithful to the Lord.
20 Also Tiglath-Pileser[a] king of Assyria came to him and distressed
him, and did not assist him. 21 For Ahaz took part *of the treasures*
from the house of the Lord, from the house of the king, and from the
leaders, and he gave *it* to the king of Assyria; but he did not help him.

Apostasy and Death of Ahaz

22 Now in the time of his distress King Ahaz became increasingly
unfaithful to the Lord. This *is that* King Ahaz. 23 For he sacrificed to the
gods of Damascus which had defeated him, saying, "Because the gods
of the kings of Syria help them, I will sacrifice to them that they may
help me." But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel. 24 So Ahaz
gathered the articles of the house of God, cut in pieces the articles
of the house of God, shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and
made for himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem. 25 And in every

28:16 [a]Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *king* (compare verse 20).
28:20 [a]Hebrew *Tilgath-Pilneser*

single city of Judah he made high places to burn incense to other gods, and provoked to anger the Lord God of his fathers.

26 Now the rest of his acts and all his ways, from first to last, indeed they *are* written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 27 So Ahaz rested with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, in Jerusalem; but they did not bring him into the tombs of the kings of Israel. Then Hezekiah his son reigned in his place.

Hezekiah Reigns in Judah

29 Hezekiah became king *when he was* twenty-five years old, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name *was* Abijah[a] the daughter of Zechariah. 2 And he did *what was* right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done.

Hezekiah Cleanses the Temple

3 In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them. 4 Then he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them in the East Square, 5 and said to them: "Hear me, Levites! Now sanctify yourselves, sanctify the house of the Lord God of your fathers, and carry out the rubbish from the holy *place.* 6 For our fathers have trespassed and done evil in the eyes of the Lord our God; they have forsaken Him, have turned their faces away from the dwelling place of the Lord, and turned *their* backs *on Him.* 7 They have also shut up the doors of the vestibule, put out the lamps, and have not burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the holy *place* to the God of Israel. 8 Therefore the wrath of the Lord fell upon Judah and Jerusalem, and He has given them up to trouble, to desolation, and to jeering, as you see with your eyes. 9 For indeed, because of this our fathers have fallen by the sword; and our sons, our daughters, and our wives *are* in captivity.

10 "Now *it is* in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel, that His fierce wrath may turn away from us. 11 My sons, do not be negligent now, for the Lord has chosen you to stand before Him, to serve Him, and that you should minister to Him and burn incense."

12 Then these Levites arose: Mahath the son of Amasai and Joel the son of Azariah, of the sons of the Kohathites; of the sons of Merari, Kish the son of Abdi and Azariah the son of Jehallelel; of the Gershonites, Joah the son of Zimmah and Eden the son of Joah; 13 of the sons of Elizaphan, Shimri and Jeiel; of the sons of Asaph, Zechariah and Mattaniah; 14 of the sons of Heman, Jehiel and Shimei; and of the sons of Jeduthun, Shemaiah and Uzziel.

15 And they gathered their brethren, sanctified themselves, and went according to the commandment of the king, at the words of the Lord, to cleanse the house of the Lord. 16 Then the priests went into the inner part of the house of the Lord to cleanse *it,* and brought out all the debris that they found in the temple of the Lord to the court of the house of the Lord. And the Levites took *it* out and carried *it* to the Brook Kidron.

17 Now they began to sanctify on the first *day* of the first month, and on the eighth day of the month they came to the vestibule of the

29:1 [a]Spelled *Abi* in 2 Kings 18:2

EXPLORATION
Influence—Genesis 6:9; Matthew 5:13; Romans 1:5; 1 Peter 3:1, 2.

Life LESSONS

2 Chronicles 29:1—32:23

SITUATION
Kings who worshiped false gods ruled Judah. Hezekiah, however, followed God and desired to please Him. He destroyed the pagan temples and altars that had become common in Judah and reopened the temple in Jerusalem. He brought about a religious revival and sought to restore the nation to God.

OBSERVATION
God does not tolerate compromise with the pagans. The longer compromise goes unchecked, the harder it becomes to turn back.

INSPIRATION
Hezekiah, king of Israel, stirrer of religious revival in the land, calls upon the people to abandon false gods and return to the true God. He calls upon the people to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. But there are two problems.

One, it has been so long since the people partook of the Passover that no one is ceremonially clean. No one is prepared to partake. Even the priests have been worshiping idols and have failed to observe the necessary rituals for purity.

Two, God had commanded that the Passover be celebrated on the fourteenth day of the first month. By the time Hezekiah can assemble the people it is the second month.

So the Passover was kept a month late by impure participants.

Hezekiah prayed for

Lord. So they sanctified the house of the Lord in eight days, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished.

18 Then they went in to King Hezekiah and said, "We have cleansed all the house of the Lord, the altar of burnt offerings with all its articles, and the table of the showbread with all its articles. 19 Moreover all the articles which King Ahaz in his reign had cast aside in his transgression we have prepared and sanctified; and there they *are,* before the altar of the Lord."

Hezekiah Restores Temple Worship

20 Then King Hezekiah rose early, gathered the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of the Lord. 21 And they brought seven bulls, seven rams, seven lambs, and seven male goats for a sin offering for the kingdom, for the sanctuary, and for Judah. Then he commanded the priests, the sons of Aaron, to offer *them* on the altar of the Lord. 22 So they killed the bulls, and the priests received the blood and sprinkled *it* on the altar. Likewise they killed the rams and sprinkled the blood on the altar. They also killed the lambs and sprinkled the blood on the altar. 23 Then they brought out the male goats *for* the sin offering before the king and the assembly, and they laid their hands on them. 24 And the priests killed them; and they presented their blood on the altar as a sin offering to make an atonement for all Israel, for the king commanded *that* the burnt offering and the sin offering *be made* for all Israel.

25 And he stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for thus *was* the commandment of the Lord by His prophets. 26 The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. 27 Then Hezekiah commanded *them* to offer the burnt offering on the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord *also* began, with the trumpets and with the instruments of David king of Israel. 28 So all the assembly worshiped, the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded; all *this continued* until the burnt offering was finished. 29 And when they had finished offering, the king and all who were present with him bowed and worshiped. 30 Moreover King Hezekiah and the leaders commanded the Levites to sing praise to the Lord with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshiped.

31 Then Hezekiah answered and said, "Now *that* you have consecrated yourselves to the Lord, come near, and bring sacrifices and thank offerings into the house of the Lord." So the assembly brought in sacrifices and thank offerings, and as many as were of a willing heart *brought* burnt offerings. 32 And the number of the burnt offerings which the assembly brought was seventy bulls, one hundred rams, *and* two hundred lambs; all these *were* for a burnt offering to the Lord. 33 The consecrated things *were* six hundred bulls and three thousand sheep. 34 But the priests were too few, so that they could not skin all the burnt offerings; therefore their brethren the Levites helped them until the work was ended and until the *other* priests had sanctified themselves, for the Levites were more diligent in sanctifying

themselves than the priests. 35 Also the burnt offerings *were* in abundance, with the fat of the peace offerings and *with* the drink offerings for *every* burnt offering.

So the service of the house of the Lord was set in order. 36 Then Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced that God had prepared the people, since the events took place so suddenly.

Hezekiah Keeps the Passover

30 And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover to the Lord God of Israel. 2 For the king and his leaders and all the assembly in Jerusalem had agreed to keep the Passover in the second month. 3 For they could not keep it at the regular time,[a] because a sufficient number of priests had not consecrated themselves, nor had the people gathered together at Jerusalem. 4 And the matter pleased the king and all the assembly. 5 So they resolved to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that they should come to keep the Passover to the Lord God of Israel at Jerusalem, since they had not done *it* for a long *time* in the *prescribed* manner.

6 Then the runners went throughout all Israel and Judah with the letters from the king and his leaders, and spoke according to the command of the king: "Children of Israel, return to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel; then He will return to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. 7 And do not be like your fathers and your brethren, who trespassed against the Lord God of their fathers, so that He gave them up to desolation, as you see. 8 Now do not be stiff-necked, as your fathers *were, but* yield yourselves to the Lord; and enter His sanctuary, which He has sanctified forever, and serve the Lord your God, that the fierceness of His wrath may turn away from you. 9 For if you return to the Lord, your brethren and your children *will be treated* with compassion by those who lead them captive, so that they may come back to this land; for the Lord your God *is* gracious and merciful, and will not turn *His* face from you if you return to Him."

10 So the runners passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, as far as Zebulun; but they laughed at them and mocked them. 11 Nevertheless some from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. 12 Also the hand of God was on Judah to give them singleness of heart to obey the command of the king and the leaders, at the word of the Lord.

13 Now many people, a very great assembly, gathered at Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month. 14 They arose and took away the altars that *were* in Jerusalem, and they took away all the incense altars and cast *them* into the Brook Kidron. 15 Then they slaughtered the Passover *lambs* on the fourteenth *day* of the second month. The priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves, and brought the burnt offerings to the house of the Lord. 16 They stood in their place according to their custom, according to the Law of Moses the man of God; the priests sprinkled

30:3 [a] That is, the first month (compare Leviticus 23:5); literally *at that time*

them: "Lord, you are good. . . . Please forgive all those who try to obey you even if they did not make themselves clean as the rules of the Temple command."

Do you see the dilemma?

What does God do when the motive is pure but the method is poor?

"The Lord listened to Hezekiah's prayer, and He healed the people."

The right heart with the wrong ritual is better than the wrong heart with the right ritual. . . .

Some of you are scowling. "Wait a minute, Max. Are you saying that the method we use to approach God is immaterial? Are you saying that the only thing that matters is why we go to God and that how we approach Him is relative?"

No, that's not what I'm saying. . . . Ideally, we approach God with the right motive and the right method. And sometimes we do. Sometimes the words of our prayer are as beautiful as the motive behind the prayer. Sometimes the way we sing is as strong as the reason we sing.

But many times it isn't. Many times our words falter. Many times our music suffers. Many times our worship is less than what we want it to be. . . .

God didn't tell Hezekiah to shut down the celebration. . . . Hezekiah did the best [he] could with what [he] had—and that was enough.

"You will search for Me," God declared. "And when you search for Me with all your heart, you will find Me! I will let you find Me."

What a promise! (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Pray for national leaders today, local leaders

tomorrow, world leaders the next day. Keep your prayer habit strong.

EXPLORATION
Righteousness in Life and Prayer—Genesis 6:9; 2 Kings 19:1–7; Isaiah 26:7; James 5:16.

the blood *received* from the hand of the Levites. 17 For *there were* many in the assembly who had not sanctified themselves; therefore the Levites had charge of the slaughter of the Passover *lambs* for everyone *who was* not clean, to sanctify *them* to the Lord. 18 For a multitude of the people, many from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the Passover contrary to what was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the good Lord provide atonement for everyone 19 *who* prepares his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though *he is* not *cleansed* according to the purification of the sanctuary." 20 And the Lord listened to Hezekiah and healed the people.

21 So the children of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great gladness; and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, *singing* to the Lord, accompanied by loud instruments. 22 And Hezekiah gave encouragement to all the Levites who taught the good knowledge of the Lord; and they ate throughout the feast seven days, offering peace offerings and making confession to the Lord God of their fathers.

23 Then the whole assembly agreed to keep *the feast* another seven days, and they kept it *another* seven days with gladness. 24 For Hezekiah king of Judah gave to the assembly a thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep, and the leaders gave to the assembly a thousand bulls and ten thousand sheep; and a great number of priests sanctified themselves. 25 The whole assembly of Judah rejoiced, also the priests and Levites, all the assembly that came from Israel, the sojourners who came from the land of Israel, and those who dwelt in Judah. 26 So there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, *there had* been nothing like this in Jerusalem. 27 Then the priests, the Levites, arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard; and their prayer came *up* to His holy dwelling place, to heaven.

The Reforms of Hezekiah

31 Now when all this was finished, all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah and broke the *sacred* pillars in pieces, cut down the wooden images, and threw down the high places and the altars—from all Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh—until they had utterly destroyed them all. Then all the children of Israel returned to their own cities, every man to his possession.

2 And Hezekiah appointed the divisions of the priests and the Levites according to their divisions, each man according to his service, the priests and Levites for burnt offerings and peace offerings, to serve, to give thanks, and to praise in the gates of the camp[a] of the Lord. 3 The king also *appointed* a portion of his possessions for the burnt offerings: for the morning and evening burnt offerings, the burnt offerings for the Sabbaths and the New Moons and the set feasts, as *it is* written in the Law of the Lord.

4 Moreover he commanded the people who dwelt in Jerusalem to contribute support for the priests and the Levites, that they might devote themselves to the Law of the Lord.

31:2 [a] That is, the temple

5 As soon as the commandment was circulated, the children of Israel brought in abundance the firstfruits of grain and wine, oil and honey, and of all the produce of the field; and they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything. 6 And the children of Israel and Judah, who dwelt in the cities of Judah, brought the tithe of oxen and sheep; also the tithe of holy things which were consecrated to the Lord their God they laid in heaps.

7 In the third month they began laying them in heaps, and they finished in the seventh month. 8 And when Hezekiah and the leaders came and saw the heaps, they blessed the Lord and His people Israel. 9 Then Hezekiah questioned the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps. 10 And Azariah the chief priest, from the house of Zadok, answered him and said, "Since *the people* began to bring the offerings into the house of the Lord, we have had enough to eat and have plenty left, for the Lord has blessed His people; and what is left *is* this great abundance."

11 Now Hezekiah commanded *them* to prepare rooms in the house of the Lord, and they prepared them. 12 Then they faithfully brought in the offerings, the tithes, and the dedicated things; Cononiah the Levite had charge of them, and Shimei his brother *was* the next. 13 Jehiel, Azaziah, Nahath, Asahel, Jerimoth, Jozabad, Eliel, Ismachiah, Mahath, and Benaiah *were* overseers under the hand of Cononiah and Shimei his brother, at the commandment of Hezekiah the king and Azariah the ruler of the house of God. 14 Kore the son of Imnah the Levite, the keeper of the East Gate, *was* over the freewill offerings to God, to distribute the offerings of the Lord and the most holy things. 15 And under him *were* Eden, Miniamin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah, and Shecaniah, *his* faithful assistants in the cities of the priests, to distribute allotments to their brethren by divisions, to the great as well as the small.

16 Besides those males from three years old and up who were written in the genealogy, they distributed to everyone who entered the house of the Lord his daily portion for the work of his service, by his division, 17 and to the priests who were written in the genealogy according to their father's house, and to the Levites from twenty years old and up according to their work, by their divisions, 18 and to all who were written in the genealogy—their little ones and their wives, their sons and daughters, the whole company of them—for in their faithfulness they sanctified themselves in holiness.

19 Also for the sons of Aaron the priests, *who were* in the fields of the common-lands of their cities, in every single city, *there were* men who were designated by name to distribute portions to all the males among the priests and to all who were listed by genealogies among the Levites.

20 Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah, and he did what *was* good and right and true before the Lord his God. 21 And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, in the law and in the commandment, to seek his God, he did *it* with all his heart. So he prospered.

Sennacherib Boasts Against the Lord

32 After these deeds of faithfulness, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and entered Judah; he encamped against the fortified cities, thinking to win them over to himself. 2 And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come, and that his purpose was to make war against Jerusalem, 3 he consulted with his leaders and commanders[a] to stop the water from the springs which *were* outside the city; and they helped him. 4 Thus many people gathered together who stopped all the springs and the brook that ran through the land, saying, "Why should the kings[a] of Assyria come and find much water?" 5 And he strengthened himself, built up all the wall that was broken, raised *it* up to the towers, and *built* another wall outside; also he repaired the Millo[a] *in* the City of David, and made weapons and shields in abundance. 6 Then he set military captains over the people, gathered them together to him in the open square of the city gate, and gave them encouragement, saying, 7 "Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid

32:3 [a]Literally *mighty men* **32:4** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Arabic, Septuagint, and Syriac read *king*.
32:5 [a]Literally *The Landfill*

nor dismayed before the king of Assyria, nor before all the multitude that *is* with him; for *there are* more with us than with him. 8With him *is* an arm of flesh; but with us *is* the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles." And the people were strengthened by the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.

9After this Sennacherib king of Assyria sent his servants to Jerusalem (but he and all the forces with him *laid siege* against Lachish), to Hezekiah king of Judah, and to all Judah who *were* in Jerusalem, saying, 10"Thus says Sennacherib king of Assyria: 'In what do you trust, that you remain under siege in Jerusalem? 11Does not Hezekiah persuade you to give yourselves over to die by famine and by thirst, saying, "The Lord our God will deliver us from the hand of the king of Assyria"? 12Has not the same Hezekiah taken away His high places and His altars, and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, saying, "You shall worship before one altar and burn incense on it"? 13Do you not know what I and my fathers have done to all the peoples of *other* lands? Were the gods of the nations of those lands in any way able to deliver their lands out of my hand? 14Who *was there* among all the gods of those nations that my fathers utterly destroyed that could deliver his people from my hand, that your God should be able to deliver you from my hand? 15Now therefore, do not let Hezekiah deceive you or persuade you like this, and do not believe him; for no god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his people from my hand or the hand of my fathers. How much less will your God deliver you from my hand?' "

16Furthermore, his servants spoke against the Lord God and against His servant Hezekiah.

17He also wrote letters to revile the Lord God of Israel, and to speak against Him, saying, "As the gods of the nations of *other* lands have not delivered their people from my hand, so the God of Hezekiah will not deliver His people from my hand." 18Then they called out with a loud voice in Hebrew[a] to the people of Jerusalem who *were* on the wall, to frighten them and trouble them, that they might take the city. 19And they spoke against the God of Jerusalem, as against the gods of the people of the earth—the work of men's hands.

Sennacherib's Defeat and Death

20Now because of this King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, prayed and cried out to heaven. 21Then the Lord sent an angel who cut down every mighty man of valor, leader, and captain in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned shamefaced to his own land. And when he had gone into the temple of his god, some of his own offspring struck him down with the sword there.

22Thus the Lord saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all *others,* and guided them[a] on every side. 23And many brought gifts to the Lord at Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah, so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations thereafter.

32:18 [a]Literally *Judean* **32:22** [a]Septuagint reads *gave them rest;* Vulgate reads *gave them treasures.*

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 32:24—33:25

SITUATION
Hezekiah's son Manasseh succeeded him. Manasseh worshiped false gods as his ancestors had done. But God caused him to turn from his sin.

OBSERVATION
It was out of his great need that Manasseh turned to God. The Lord hears our prayers and shows great mercy.

INSPIRATION
You know the story of Peter, the first sailor. Let me tell you about the second, whose name was John.

He had served on the seas since he was eleven years old. His father, an English shipmaster in the Mediterranean, took him aboard and trained him well for a life in the Royal Navy.

Yet what John gained in experience, he lacked in discipline. He mocked authority. Ran with the wrong crowd. Indulged in the sinful ways of a sailor. Although his training would have qualified him to serve as an officer, his behavior caused him to be flogged and demoted.

In his early twenties, he made his way to Africa, where he became intrigued with the lucrative slave trade. At age twenty-one, he made his living on the *Greyhound,* a slave ship crossing the Atlantic Ocean.

John ridiculed the moral and poked fun at the religious. He even made jokes about a book that would eventually help reshape his life: *The Imitation of Christ.* In fact, he was degrading that book

Hezekiah Humbles Himself

24 In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death, and he prayed
to the Lord; and He spoke to him and gave him a sign. 25 But Hezekiah
did not repay according to the favor *shown* him, for his heart was
lifted up; therefore wrath was looming over him and over Judah and
Jerusalem. 26 Then Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his
heart, he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the
Lord did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah.

Hezekiah's Wealth and Honor

27 Hezekiah had very great riches and honor. And he made him-
self treasuries for silver, for gold, for precious stones, for spices, for
shields, and for all kinds of desirable items; 28 storehouses for the
harvest of grain, wine, and oil; and stalls for all kinds of livestock,
and folds for flocks.[a] 29 Moreover he provided cities for himself, and
possessions of flocks and herds in abundance; for God had given him
very much property. 30 This same Hezekiah also stopped the water
outlet of Upper Gihon, and brought the water by tunnel[a] to the west
side of the City of David. Hezekiah prospered in all his works.

31 However, *regarding* the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon,
whom they sent to him to inquire about the wonder that was *done* in
the land, God withdrew from him, in order to test him, that He might
know all *that was* in his heart.

Death of Hezekiah

32 Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his goodness, indeed
they *are* written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz,
and in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 33 So Hezekiah rested
with his fathers, and they buried him in the upper tombs of the sons
of David; and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem honored him
at his death. Then Manasseh his son reigned in his place.

Manasseh Reigns in Judah

33 Manasseh *was* twelve years old when he became king, and
he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. 2 But he did evil in the
sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom
the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. 3 For he rebuilt the
high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he raised
up altars for the Baals, and made wooden images; and he worshiped
all the host of heaven[a] and served them. 4 He also built altars in the
house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, "In Jerusalem shall My
name be forever." 5 And he built altars for all the host of heaven in
the two courts of the house of the Lord. 6 Also he caused his sons to
pass through the fire in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom; he practiced
soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums
and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke
Him to anger. 7 He even set a carved image, the idol which he had
made, in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Sol-

32:28 [a]Following Septuagint and Vulgate; Arabic and Syriac omit *folds for flocks;* Masoretic Text reads *flocks for sheepfolds*. **32:30** [a]Literally *brought it straight* (compare 2 Kings 20:20) **33:3** [a]The gods of the Assyrians

a few hours before his ship sailed into an angry storm.

That night the waves pummeled the *Greyhound,* spinning the ship one minute on the top of a wave. Plunging her the next into a watery valley.

John awakened to find his cabin filled with water. A side of the *Greyhound* had collapsed. Ordinarily such damage would have sent a ship to the bottom in a matter of minutes. The *Greyhound,* however, was carrying buoyant cargo and remained afloat.

John worked at the pumps all night. For nine hours, he and the other sailors struggled to keep the ship from sinking. But he knew that it was a losing cause. Finally, when his hopes were more battered than the vessel, he threw himself on the salt-water-soaked deck and pleaded, "If this will not do, then Lord have mercy on us all."

John didn't deserve mercy, but he received it. The *Greyhound* and her crew survived.

John never forgot God's mercy shown on that tempestuous day in the roaring Atlantic. He returned to England where he became a prolific composer. You've sung his songs, like this one:

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

This slave-trader-turned-songwriter was John Newton.

Along with his hymn writing, he also became a powerful pulpiteer. For nearly fifty years, he filled pulpits and churches with the story of the Savior who meets you and me in the

storm. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Take the troubles you face today—disease, alcohol, kids in trouble, cash flow—and wrap them in a prayer: "Lord, have mercy, and teach me to see your way through the storm."

EXPLORATION
God Hears Us—Psalm 18:6; Isaiah 41:10; Hebrews 13:6.

Life LESSONS

2 Chronicles 34:1–28

SITUATION
As Josiah became king at age eight, he followed in his ancestor David's footsteps and obeyed God. One of the first steps he took was to remove all idols in the kingdom.

OBSERVATION
Faithful Christians love and obey God and should remove idols from their own lives.

INSPIRATION
Josiah's grandfather, King Manasseh, was remembered as the king who "shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another" (2 Kings 21:16). His father, King Amon, died at the hands of his own officers. "He did evil in the sight of the Lord," reads his epitaph.

The citizens formed a posse and killed the assassins, and eight-year-old Josiah ascended the throne. Early in his reign Josiah made a brave choice. "He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left" (2 Kings 22:2).

omon his son, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever; 8 and I will not again remove the foot of Israel from the land which I have appointed for your fathers—only if they are careful to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses." 9 So Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel.

Manasseh Restored After Repentance

10 And the Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they would not listen. 11 Therefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh with hooks,[a] bound him with bronze *fetters,* and carried him off to Babylon. 12 Now when he was in affliction, he implored the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, 13 and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord *was* God.

14 After this he built a wall outside the City of David on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, as far as the entrance of the Fish Gate; and *it* enclosed Ophel, and he raised it to a very great height. Then he put military captains in all the fortified cities of Judah. 15 He took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord and in Jerusalem; and he cast *them* out of the city. 16 He also repaired the altar of the Lord, sacrificed peace offerings and thank offerings on it, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel. 17 Nevertheless the people still sacrificed on the high places, *but* only to the Lord their God.

Death of Manasseh

18 Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, his prayer to his God, and the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of the Lord God of Israel, indeed they *are written* in the book[a] of the kings of Israel. 19 Also his prayer and *how God* received his entreaty, and all his sin and trespass, and the sites where he built high places and set up wooden images and carved images, before he was humbled, indeed they *are* written among the sayings of Hozai.[a] 20 So Manasseh rested with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house. Then his son Amon reigned in his place.

Amon's Reign and Death

21 Amon *was* twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. 22 But he did evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father Manasseh had done; for Amon sacrificed to all the carved images which his father Manasseh had made, and served them. 23 And he did not humble himself before the Lord, as his father

33:11 [a]That is, nose hooks (compare 2 Kings 19:28) **33:18** [a]Literally *words*
33:19 [a]Septuagint reads *the seers.*

Manasseh had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more.

24 Then his servants conspired against him, and killed him in his
own house. 25 But the people of the land executed all those who had
conspired against King Amon. Then the people of the land made his
son Josiah king in his place.

Josiah Reigns in Judah

34 Josiah *was* eight years old when he became king, and he
reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. 2 And he did *what was*
right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his father
David; *he* did *not* turn aside to the right hand or to the left.

3 For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he
began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he
began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden
images, the carved images, and the molded images. 4 They broke
down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and the incense altars
which *were* above them he cut down; and the wooden images, the
carved images, and the molded images he broke in pieces, and
made dust of them and scattered *it* on the graves of those who had
sacrificed to them. 5 He also burned the bones of the priests on their
altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. 6 And *so he did* in the cities
of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, as far as Naphtali and all around,
with axes.[a] 7 When he had broken down the altars and the wooden
images, had beaten the carved images into powder, and cut down
all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel, he returned to
Jerusalem.

Hilkiah Finds the Book of the Law

8 In the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land
and the temple,[a] he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, Maaseiah the
governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair
the house of the Lord his God. 9 When they came to Hilkiah the high
priest, they delivered the money that was brought into the house of
God, which the Levites who kept the doors had gathered from the
hand of Manasseh and Ephraim, from all the remnant of Israel, from
all Judah and Benjamin, and *which* they had brought back to Jeru-
salem. 10 Then they put *it* in the hand of the foremen who had the
oversight of the house of the Lord; and they gave it to the workmen
who worked in the house of the Lord, to repair and restore the house.
11 They gave *it* to the craftsmen and builders to buy hewn stone and
timber for beams, and to floor the houses which the kings of Judah
had destroyed. 12 And the men did the work faithfully. Their over-
seers *were* Jahath and Obadiah the Levites, of the sons of Merari, and
Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to supervise.
Others of the Levites, all of whom were skillful with instruments of
music, 13 *were* over the burden bearers and *were* overseers of all who
did work in any kind of service. And *some* of the Levites *were* scribes,
officers, and gatekeepers.

14 Now when they brought out the money that was brought into

34:6 [a]Literally *swords* **34:8** [a]Literally *house*

He flipped through his family scrapbook until he found an ancestor worthy of emulation. Josiah skipped his dad's life and bypassed his grandpa's. He leapfrogged back in time until he found David and resolved, "I'm going to be like him."

The principle? We can't choose our parents, but we can choose our mentors.

And since Josiah chose David (who had chosen God), things began to happen.

The people tore down the altars for the Baal gods as Josiah directed.

Josiah cut down the incense altars.

Josiah . . . broke up the Asherah idols and . . . beat them into powder.

He burned the bones of the priests.

Josiah broke down the altars.

He cut down all the incense altars in all of Israel. (2 Chronicles 34:4–5, 7)

Not what you call a public relations tour. But, then again, Josiah was not out to make friends. He was out to make a statement: "What my fathers taught, I don't teach. What they embraced, I reject."

And he wasn't finished. Four years later, at the age of twenty-six, he turned his attention to the temple. It was in shambles. The people had allowed it to fall into disrepair. But Josiah was determined. Something had happened that fueled his passion to restore the temple. A baton had been passed. A torch had been received.

Early in his reign he'd resolved to serve the God of his ancestor David. Now he chose to serve the God of someone else. Note 2 Chronicles 34:8: "The eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the

land and the temple, he sent Shaphan . . . to repair the house of the Lord *his God"* (emphasis mine).

God was *his* God. David's faith was Josiah's faith. He had found the God of David and made him his own.

As the temple was being rebuilt, one of the workers happened upon a scroll. On the scroll were the words of God given to Moses nearly a thousand years earlier.

When Josiah heard the words, he was shocked. He wept that his people had drifted so far from God that His Word was not a part of their lives.

He sent word to a prophetess and asked her, "What will become of our people?"

She told Josiah that since he had repented when he heard the words, his nation would be spared the anger of God (see 2 Chronicles 34:27). Incredible. An entire generation received grace because of the integrity of one man.

Could it be that God placed him on earth for that reason?

Could it be that God has placed you on earth for the same? (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What or who are the "idols" that have been crowding out Jesus in your life? What has been keeping you from victory over sin? Have you really given your life to him? Let Him take over each area: your past, present, and future. Allow Him to direct your choice of school, job, and career. Who knows what God will do through you when you determine to be faithful to Him!

EXPLORATION

Worshiping Things Other Than God—Exodus 20:4;

the house of the Lord, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the Lord *given* by Moses. 15 Then Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord." And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan. 16 So Shaphan carried the book to the king, bringing the king word, saying, "All that was committed to your servants they are doing. 17 And they have gathered the money that was found in the house of the Lord, and have delivered it into the hand of the overseers and the workmen." 18 Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read it before the king.

19 Thus it happened, when the king heard the words of the Law, that he tore his clothes. 20 Then the king commanded Hilkiah, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Abdon[a] the son of Micah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king, saying, 21 "Go, inquire of the Lord for me, and for those who are left in Israel and Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found; for great *is* the wrath of the Lord that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do according to all that is written in this book."

22 So Hilkiah and those the king *had appointed* went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tokhath,[a] the son of Hasrah,[b] keeper of the wardrobe. (She dwelt in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter.) And they spoke to her to that *effect*.

23 Then she answered them, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel, 'Tell the man who sent you to Me, 24 "Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will bring calamity on this place and on its inhabitants, all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah, 25 because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands. Therefore My wrath will be poured out on this place, and not be quenched.'" ' 26 But as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, in this manner you shall speak to him, 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "*Concerning* the words which you have heard— 27 because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words against this place and against its inhabitants, and you humbled yourself before Me, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard *you,*" says the Lord. 28 "Surely I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place and its inhabitants."'" So they brought back word to the king.

Josiah Restores True Worship

29 Then the king sent and gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. 30 The king went up to the house of the Lord, with all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem—the priests and the Levites, and all the people, great and small. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the house of the Lord. 31 Then the king stood in his place and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord, and to keep

34:20 [a] *Achbor the son of Michaiah* in 2 Kings 22:12 **34:22** [a] Spelled *Tikvah* in 2 Kings 22:14 [b] Spelled *Harhas* in 2 Kings 22:14

His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book. 32And he made all who were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin take a stand. So the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. 33Thus Josiah removed all the abominations from all the country that *belonged* to the children of Israel, and made all who were present in Israel diligently serve the Lord their God. All his days they did not depart from following the Lord God of their fathers.

Josiah Keeps the Passover

35 Now Josiah kept a Passover to the Lord in Jerusalem, and they slaughtered the Passover *lambs* on the fourteenth *day* of the first month. 2And he set the priests in their duties and encouraged them for the service of the house of the Lord. 3Then he said to the Levites who taught all Israel, who were holy to the Lord: "Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, built. *It shall* no longer *be* a burden on *your* shoulders. Now serve the Lord your God and His people Israel. 4Prepare *yourselves* according to your fathers' houses, according to your divisions, following the written instruction of David king of Israel and the written instruction of Solomon his son. 5And stand in the holy *place* according to the divisions of the fathers' houses of your brethren the *lay* people, and *according to* the division of the father's house of the Levites. 6So slaughter the Passover *offerings,* consecrate yourselves, and prepare *them* for your brethren, that *they* may do according to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses."

7Then Josiah gave the *lay* people lambs and young goats from the flock, all for Passover *offerings* for all who were present, to the number of thirty thousand, as well as three thousand cattle; these *were* from the king's possessions. 8And his leaders gave willingly to the people, to the priests, and to the Levites. Hilkiah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, rulers of the house of God, gave to the priests for the Passover *offerings* two thousand six hundred *from the flock,* and three hundred cattle. 9Also Conaniah, his brothers Shemaiah and Nethanel, and Hashabiah and Jeiel and Jozabad, chief of the Levites, gave to the Levites for Passover *offerings* five thousand *from the flock* and five hundred cattle.

10So the service was prepared, and the priests stood in their places, and the Levites in their divisions, according to the king's command. 11And they slaughtered the Passover *offerings;* and the priests sprinkled *the blood* with their hands, while the Levites skinned *the animals.* 12Then they removed the burnt offerings that *they* might give them to the divisions of the fathers' houses of the *lay* people, to offer to the Lord, as *it is* written in the Book of Moses. And so *they did* with the cattle. 13Also they roasted the Passover *offerings* with fire according to the ordinance; but the *other* holy *offerings* they boiled in pots, in caldrons, and in pans, and divided *them* quickly among all the *lay* people. 14Then afterward they prepared portions for themselves and for the priests, because the priests, the sons of Aaron, *were busy* in offering burnt offerings and fat until night; therefore the Levites prepared portions for themselves and for the priests, the sons of Aaron. 15And the singers, the sons of Asaph, *were* in their places, according to the com-

Deuteronomy 11:16, 17; Psalm 115:2–8; Isaiah 42:8; Matthew 6:24; Romans 1:21–25.

Life Lessons

2 Chronicles 34:29—36:1

SITUATION
King Josiah led his people in committing their lives to God. He discovered the Mosaic law and celebrated the Passover on the plains of Megiddo.

OBSERVATION
Josiah, one of Judah's best kings, chose to focus on God. He "did what was right in the sight of the Lord . . . he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left" (34:2).

INSPIRATION
Maybe your past isn't much to brag about. Maybe you've seen raw evil. And now you, like Josiah, have to make a choice. Do you rise above the past and make a difference? Or do you remain controlled by the past and make excuses?

Many choose the latter.

Many choose the convalescent homes of the heart. Healthy bodies. Sharp minds. But retired dreams. Back and forth they rock in the chair of regret, repeating the terms of surrender. Lean closely and you will hear them: "If only." The white flag of the heart.

"If only . . ."

"If only I'd been born somewhere else . . ."

"If only I'd been treated fairly . . ."

"If only I'd had kinder parents, more money, greater opportunities . . ."

"If only I'd been potty-trained sooner, spanked

less, or taught to eat without slurping."

Maybe you've used those words. Maybe you have every right to use them. Perhaps you, like Josiah, were hearing the ten count before you even got into the ring. For you to find an ancestor worth imitating, you, like Josiah, have to flip way back in your family album.

If such is the case, let me show you where to turn. Put down the scrapbook and pick up your Bible. Go to John's Gospel and read Jesus' words: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6).

Think about that. Spiritual life comes from the Spirit! Your parents may have given you genes, but God gives you grace. Your parents may be responsible for your body, but God has taken charge of your soul. You may get your looks from your mother, but you get eternity from your Father, your heavenly Father.

By the way, He's not blind to your problems. In fact, God is willing to give you what your family didn't.

Didn't have a good father? He'll be your Father. "You are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Galatians 4:7).

Didn't have a good role model? Try God. "Be imitators of God as dear children" (Ephesians 5:1).

Never had a parent who wiped away your tears? Think again. God has noted each one. "You number my wanderings; put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book?" (Psalm 56:8).

God has not left you adrift on a sea of heredity. Just like Josiah, you cannot control the way your

mand of David, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun the king's seer. Also the gatekeepers were at each gate; they did not have to leave their position, because their brethren the Levites prepared portions for them.

16 So all the service of the Lord was prepared the same day, to keep the Passover and to offer burnt offerings on the altar of the Lord, according to the command of King Josiah. 17 And the children of Israel who were present kept the Passover at that time, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days. 18 There had been no Passover kept in Israel like that since the days of Samuel the prophet; and none of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as Josiah kept, with the priests and the Levites, all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 19 In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah this Passover was kept.

Josiah Dies in Battle

20 After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by the Euphrates; and Josiah went out against him. 21 But he sent messengers to him, saying, "What have I to do with you, king of Judah? *I have* not *come* against you this day, but against the house with which I have war; for God commanded me to make haste. Refrain *from meddling with* God, who *is* with me, lest He destroy you." 22 Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself so that he might fight with him, and did not heed the words of Necho from the mouth of God. So he came to fight in the Valley of Megiddo.

23 And the archers shot King Josiah; and the king said to his servants, "Take me away, for I am severely wounded." 24 His servants therefore took him out of that chariot and put him in the second chariot that he had, and they brought him to Jerusalem. So he died, and was buried in *one of* the tombs of his fathers. And all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah.

25 Jeremiah also lamented for Josiah. And to this day all the singing men and the singing women speak of Josiah in their lamentations. They made it a custom in Israel; and indeed they *are* written in the Laments.

26 Now the rest of the acts of Josiah and his goodness, according to *what was* written in the Law of the Lord, 27 and his deeds from first to last, indeed they *are* written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah.

The Reign and Captivity of Jehoahaz

36 Then the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and made him king in his father's place in Jerusalem. 2 Jehoahaz[a] *was* twenty-three years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. 3 Now the king of Egypt deposed him at Jerusalem; and he imposed on the land a tribute of one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. 4 Then the king of Egypt made *Jehoahaz's*[a] brother Eliakim king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. And Necho took Jehoahaz[b] his brother and carried him off to Egypt.

36:2 [a]Masoretic Text reads *Joahaz.* **36:4** [a]Literally *his* [b]Masoretic Text reads *Joahaz.*

The Reign and Captivity of Jehoiakim

5 Jehoiakim *was* twenty-five years old when he became king, and
he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And he did evil in the sight of
the Lord his God. 6 Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against
him, and bound him in bronze *fetters* to carry him off to Babylon.
7 Nebuchadnezzar also carried off *some* of the articles from the house
of the Lord to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon. 8 Now
the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, the abominations which he did, and
what was found against him, indeed they *are* written in the book of
the kings of Israel and Judah. Then Jehoiachin his son reigned in his
place.

The Reign and Captivity of Jehoiachin

9 Jehoiachin *was* eight[a] years old when he became king, and he
reigned in Jerusalem three months and ten days. And he did evil in the
sight of the Lord. 10 At the turn of the year King Nebuchadnezzar sum-
moned *him* and took him to Babylon, with the costly articles from the
house of the Lord, and made Zedekiah, *Jehoiakim's*[a] brother, king over
Judah and Jerusalem.

Zedekiah Reigns in Judah

11 Zedekiah *was* twenty-one years old when he became king,
and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. 12 He did evil in the sight
of the Lord his God, *and* did not humble himself before Jeremiah
the prophet, *who spoke* from the mouth of the Lord. 13 And he also
rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear *an
oath* by God; but he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against
turning to the Lord God of Israel. 14 Moreover all the leaders of the
priests and the people transgressed more and more, *according* to all
the abominations of the nations, and defiled the house of the Lord
which He had consecrated in Jerusalem.

The Fall of Jerusalem

15 And the Lord God of their fathers sent *warnings* to them by
His messengers, rising up early and sending *them,* because He had
compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. 16 But they
mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at
His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till
there was no remedy.

17 Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans,
who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanc-
tuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or
the weak; He gave *them* all into his hand. 18 And all the articles from
the house of God, great and small, the treasures of the house of the
Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all *these* he took
to Babylon. 19 Then they burned the house of God, broke down the
wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all
its precious possessions. 20 And those who escaped from the sword he
carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his

36:9 [a]Some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Syriac, and 2 Kings 24:8 read *eighteen.*
36:10 [a]Literally *his* (compare 2 Kings 24:17)

forefathers responded to God. But you can control the way you respond to Him. The past does not have to be your prison. You have a voice in your destiny. You have a say in your life. You have a choice in the path you take.

Choose well and someday—generations from now—your grandchildren and great-grandchildren will thank God for the seeds you sowed. (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
You have choices in life, decisions to make. What are you pursuing now—God or some other pleasure? Where do you find your satisfaction? Take time to review the activities and pursuits that occupy your time. Ask God to help you discern what changes you may need to make to live a life that is truly God-focused.

EXPLORATION
Pursuing God—Genesis 6:8, 9; Psalm 27:4; 42:1, 2; Philippians 3:7–14.

2 Chronicles 36:2–23

SITUATION
The final four evil kings of Judah reigned and fell into sin. Babylon conquered Jerusalem, looted, and burned the temple. They carried God's people into exile. But in the end, Judah returned from exile in Babylon, ready to rebuild.

OBSERVATION
God used the exile to cause the people to repent, and He used a pagan king to rebuild Jerusalem's temple.

sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia,
21 to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth
of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her
Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept
Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

The Proclamation of Cyrus

22 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of
Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth
of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred
up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he
made a proclamation throughout all his king-
dom, and also *put it* in writing, saying,

23 Thus says Cyrus king of Persia:
All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord
God of heaven has given me. And He has
commanded me to build Him a house
at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who *is*
among you of all His people? May the
Lord his God *be* with him, and let him
go up!

INSPIRATION

Dirt carpeted the floor. Rats scurried beneath the grated vent. Roaches roamed the walls and crawled over sleeping prisoners. The only source of light peeked through three holes near the fifteen-foot ceiling. The cell offered no bunk, no chair, no table, and no way out for . . . dozens of other soldiers in the Zoo, a POW camp in Hanoi.

Misery came standard issue. Solitary confinement, starvation, torture, and beatings were routine. Interrogators twisted broken legs, sliced skin with bayonets, crammed sticks up nostrils and paper in mouths. Screams echoed throughout the camp, chilling the blood of other prisoners. . . .

How do you survive seven and one-half years in such a hole? Cut off from family. No news from the United States. What do you do? Here is what [one man] did. He stared at a blade of grass. Several days into his incarceration he wrestled the grate off a floor vent, stretched out on his belly, lowered his head into the opening, and peered through a pencil-sized hole in the brick and mortar at a singular blade of grass. Aside from this stem, his world had no color. So he began his days with head in vent, heart in prayer, staring at the green blade of grass. . . .

Do you know the tint of a colorless world? If so, . . . go on a search. Crowbar the grate from your cell, and stick your head out. Fix your eyes on a color outside your cell.

What you see defines who you are. "Your eyes are windows into your body. If you open your eyes wide in wonder and belief, your body fills up with light. If you live squinty-eyed in greed and distrust, your body is a dank cellar. If you pull the blinds on your windows, what a dark life you will have!" (Matthew 6:22-23 MSG).

Jesus is discussing, not the eyes of your head, but the eyes of your heart—your attitude, your outlook, your vision, not of things, but of life. We . . . make daily decisions. Do we set our eyes on the gray harshness or search for the blade of a different color? (From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you feel as if you are in exile? Let disaster develop your character. Do not spend all your time seeking relief but reflect on what God wants to teach you. Ask Him to show you what is really important.

EXPLORATION

Restoration—2 Chronicles 7:13, 14; Psalm 23:3; Jeremiah 30:10, 11; Galatians 6:1, 2.

THE BOOK OF

EZRA

INTRODUCTION

Martin Luther you've heard of. Philipp Melanchthon, probably not. But Luther knew Melanchthon. And Luther was a better man as a result.

Melanchthon was the intellectual of the Reformation. He authored the Augsburg Confession. He was the first to put into writing an evangelical theology.

He was only eleven when his father died, only twelve when his grandfather presented him with a Bible and a Greek grammar. The next fifty years the three were inseparable. Melanchthon's one great love was to teach the Word of God.

He didn't just read the Bible, he devoured it. By the age of seventeen he was a faculty member at the University of Wittenberg. Though he was small of frame and frail of health, he was keen of mind.

And even more important, he was keen of purpose.

He lived to study and teach the Bible. He commanded the respect of Martin Luther. "I was born to fight," he said, "but Master Philipp, he comes along sowing with joy."

The prophet Ezra was the Philipp Melanchthon of his day.

Ezra was the second of three key leaders to leave Babylon for the reconstruction of Jerusalem. Zerubbabel was first. Then Ezra and then Nehemiah. Zerubbabel reconstructed the temple, Nehemiah rebuilt the walls, and Ezra restored the worship.

Any person who has tackled the task of presenting the Bible to people will find a friend in Ezra. He was a student. He was an interpreter. In fact, the clearest Old Testament reference to exposition is attributed to Ezra. He was the head of the Levites who "read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading" (Nehemiah 8:8).

Don't you appreciate that last phrase, "gave

About This Book

Author: Probably Ezra, the scribe

Date Written: 450–400 B.C.

Key Themes:

- When the Hebrews were allowed to return home their spiritual restoration was as important as their national restoration.
- Restoring the temple was a significant step in the spiritual restoration of the people.
- The idolatry of the Hebrews was rooted in foreign wives who continued to worship their false gods. This is why the men were asked to divorce their foreign wives.

Key Verse:

"Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:10).

Contents:

I. The First Restoration Begins 1:1—4:24

II. The Temple Is Rebuilt 5:1—6:22

III. The Second Restoration with Ezra 7:1—8:36

IV. Moral and Spiritual Reform 9:1—10:44

the sense, and helped them to understand . . ."? Don't you appreciate the person who can take the Word and reveal it for your life?

Perhaps you can do that. If so, stay faithful. There is no higher task.

Perhaps you have a teacher like that. If so, be grateful. There is no greater friend.

Life LESSONS

EZRA 1:1—2:70

SITUATION
Cyrus, King of Persia, allowed the captive Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Cyrus blessed the venture and subsidized the journey back to their homeland.

OBSERVATION
Although Cyrus was not Jewish, God used this Persian king to restore his people and to rebuild Jerusalem.

INSPIRATION
If you ever see a man walking on the side of the road carrying an empty gas can, remove your hat in respect. He's dying inside.

Women see the empty gas tank as an inconvenience. Men see it as the ultimate failure. Our first set of keys was handed to us with these words: "Make sure you buy some gas." From that moment on, the standard is set: take care of your machine.

All other measures of manhood pale in comparison. It matters not if you can transplant a heart or win the pentathlon. If you can't keep gas in your tank, you are of all men to be pitied. Even Schwarzenegger weeps at the sound of a chug, chug,

End of the Babylonian Captivity

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also *put it* in writing, saying,

2 Thus says Cyrus king of Persia:
All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which *is* in Judah. 3 Who *is* among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which *is* in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel (He *is* God), which *is* in Jerusalem. 4 And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which *is* in Jerusalem.

5 Then the heads of the fathers' *houses* of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the LORD which *is* in Jerusalem. 6 And all those who *were* around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with precious things, besides all *that* was willingly offered.

7 King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods; 8 and Cyrus king of Persia brought them out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. 9 This *is* the number of them: thirty gold platters, one thousand silver platters, twenty-nine knives, 10 thirty gold basins, four hundred and ten silver basins of a similar *kind, and* one thousand other articles. 11 All the articles of gold and silver *were* five thousand four hundred. All *these* Sheshbazzar took with the captives who were brought from Babylon to Jerusalem.

The Captives Who Returned to Jerusalem

2 Now[a] these *are* the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom

2:1 [a]Compare this chapter with Nehemiah 7:6–73.

Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon,
and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his *own* city.

2 *Those* who came with Zerubbabel *were* Jeshua, Nehemiah,
Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar,[a] Bigvai, Rehum,[b] *and*
Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel: 3 the people
of Parosh, two thousand one hundred and seventy-two; 4 the people
of Shephatiah, three hundred and seventy-two; 5 the people of Arah,
seven hundred and seventy-five; 6 the people of Pahath-Moab, of the
people of Jeshua *and* Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve;
7 the people of Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four; 8 the
people of Zattu, nine hundred and forty-five; 9 the people of Zaccai,
seven hundred and sixty; 10 the people of Bani,[a] six hundred and
forty-two; 11 the people of Bebai, six hundred and twenty-three; 12 the
people of Azgad, one thousand two hundred and twenty-two; 13 the
people of Adonikam, six hundred and sixty-six; 14 the people of Bigvai,
two thousand and fifty-six; 15 the people of Adin, four hundred and
fifty-four; 16 the people of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety-eight; 17 the people
of Bezai, three hundred and twenty-three; 18 the people of Jorah,[a]
one hundred and twelve; 19 the people of Hashum, two hundred and
twenty-three; 20 the people of Gibbar,[a] ninety-five; 21 the people of
Bethlehem, one hundred and twenty-three; 22 the men of Netophah,
fifty-six; 23 the men of Anathoth, one hundred and twenty-eight;
24 the people of Azmaveth,[a] forty-two; 25 the people of Kirjath Arim,[a]
Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty-three; 26 the people
of Ramah and Geba, six hundred and twenty-one; 27 the men of
Michmas, one hundred and twenty-two; 28 the men of Bethel and Ai,
two hundred and twenty-three; 29 the people of Nebo, fifty-two; 30 the
people of Magbish, one hundred and fifty-six; 31 the people of the
other Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four; 32 the people
of Harim, three hundred and twenty; 33 the people of Lod, Hadid, and
Ono, seven hundred and twenty-five; 34 the people of Jericho, three
hundred and forty-five; 35 the people of Senaah, three thousand six
hundred and thirty.

36 The priests: the sons of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine
hundred and seventy-three; 37 the sons of Immer, one thousand and
fifty-two; 38 the sons of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred and forty-
seven; 39 the sons of Harim, one thousand and seventeen.

40 The Levites: the sons of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the sons of
Hodaviah,[a] seventy-four.

41 The singers: the sons of Asaph, one hundred and twenty-eight.

42 The sons of the gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum, the sons of
Ater, the sons of Talmon, the sons of Akkub, the sons of Hatita, and
the sons of Shobai, one hundred and thirty-nine *in* all.

43 The Nethinim: the sons of Ziha, the sons of Hasupha, the sons of
Tabbaoth, 44 the sons of Keros, the sons of Siaha,[a] the sons of Padon,
45 the sons of Lebanah, the sons of Hagabah, the sons of Akkub, 46 the
sons of Hagab, the sons of Shalmai, the sons of Hanan, 47 the sons of

2:2 [a]Spelled *Mispereth* in Nehemiah 7:7 [b]Spelled *Nehum* in Nehemiah 7:7
2:10 [a]Spelled *Binnui* in Nehemiah 7:15 **2:18** [a]Called *Hariph* in Nehemiah 7:24
2:20 [a]Called *Gibeon* in Nehemiah 7:25 **2:24** [a]Called *Beth Azmaveth* in Nehemiah 7:28 **2:25** [a]Called *Kirjath Jearim* in Nehemiah 7:29 **2:40** [a]Spelled *Hodevah* in Nehemiah 7:43 **2:44** [a]Spelled *Sia* in Nehemiah 7:47

chug. Such moments are etched in the memory of the male mind.

They linger in mine. In the days before the Lucado girls had driver's licenses, I served as their morning chauffeur. We were pulling into the school parking lot one day when the car hiccupped. I looked down to see the gas needle resting on the wrong side of empty. Not wanting my daughters to see their father weep, I urged them to hurry on to class. It was one of my more noble gestures.

I then set about to solve the problem of the empty tank. I began by staring at the gauge, hoping it would move. Didn't work. Next I blamed my parents for potty training me too soon. Still no fuel. Denying the problem was my next approach. I put the car in gear and pressed the accelerator as if the tank were full. The car didn't budge.

Odd choices, you say? What do you do when you run out of gas? You don't exhaust your petroleum perhaps, but all of us run out of something. You need kindness, but the gauge is on empty. You need hope, but the needle is in the red. You want five gallons of solutions but can only muster a few drops. When you run out of steam before you run out of day, what do you do? Stare at the gauge? Blame your upbringing? Deny the problem?

No. Pity won't start the car. Complaints don't fuel an engine. Denial doesn't bump the needle. In the case of an empty tank, we've learned: get the car to a gas pump ASAP. . . .

My first thought when I ran out of fuel was *How can I get this car to a gas pump?* Your first thought when you have a problem should be

How can I get this problem to Jesus? . . .

Go first to Christ. You're going to run out of gas. We all do. Next time the needle sits on the wrong side of empty, remember: the one who fed the crowds is a prayer away. (From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Have you ever seen a good result come from something bad? Think of an episode in your life where God's will was revealed through an unlikely agent. Today, if you are buried under a set of problems, be encouraged that none of them is too complex for God to solve.

EXPLORATION

God's Will—Genesis 18:14; 20:6; 50:20; Exodus 3:12; Esther 4:13, 14; Matthew 1:1–17.

Giddel, the sons of Gahar, the sons of Reaiah, 48 the sons of Rezin, the sons of Nekoda, the sons of Gazzam, 49 the sons of Uzza, the sons of Paseah, the sons of Besai, 50 the sons of Asnah, the sons of Meunim, the sons of Nephusim,[a] 51 the sons of Bakbuk, the sons of Hakupha, the sons of Harhur, 52 the sons of Bazluth,[a] the sons of Mehida, the sons of Harsha, 53 the sons of Barkos, the sons of Sisera, the sons of Tamah, 54 the sons of Neziah, and the sons of Hatipha.

55 The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai, the sons of Sophereth, the sons of Peruda,[a] 56 the sons of Jaala, the sons of Darkon, the sons of Giddel, 57 the sons of Shephatiah, the sons of Hattil, the sons of Pochereth of Zebaim, and the sons of Ami.[a] 58 All the Nethinim and the children of Solomon's servants were three hundred and ninety-two.

59 And these *were* the ones who came up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Addan,[a] and Immer; but they could not identify their father's house or their genealogy,[b] whether they *were* of Israel: 60 the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, and the sons of Nekoda, six hundred and fifty-two; 61 and of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Koz,[a] and the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name. 62 These sought their listing *among* those who were registered by genealogy, but they were not found; therefore they *were excluded* from the priesthood as defiled. 63 And the governor[a] said to them that they should not eat of the most holy things till a priest could consult with the Urim and Thummim.

64 The whole assembly together *was* forty-two thousand three hundred *and* sixty, 65 besides their male and female servants, of whom *there were* seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven; and they had two hundred men and women singers. 66 Their horses *were* seven hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five, 67 their camels four hundred and thirty-five, and *their* donkeys six thousand seven hundred and twenty.

68 *Some* of the heads of the fathers' *houses,* when they came to the house of the Lord which *is* in Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God, to erect it in its place: 69 According to their ability, they gave to the treasury for the work sixty-one thousand gold drachmas, five thousand minas of silver, and one hundred priestly garments.

70 So the priests and the Levites, *some* of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

Worship Restored at Jerusalem

3 And when the seventh month had come, and the children of Israel *were* in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem. 2 Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak[a] and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brethren, arose and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as *it is* written in the Law of Moses the man of God. 3 Though fear *had*

2:50 [a]Spelled *Nephishesim* in Nehemiah 7:52 **2:52** [a]Spelled *Bazlith* in Nehemiah 7:54 **2:55** [a]Spelled *Perida* in Nehemiah 7:57 **2:57** [a]Spelled *Amon* in Nehemiah 7:59 **2:59** [a]Spelled *Addon* in Nehemiah 7:61 [b]Literally *seed* **2:61** [a]Or *Hakkoz* **2:63** [a]Hebrew *Tirshatha* **3:2** [a]Spelled *Jehozadak* in 1 Chronicles 6:14

come upon them because of the people of those countries, they set the altar on its bases; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, *both* the morning and evening burnt offerings. 4 They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles, as *it is* written, and *offered* the daily burnt offerings in the number required by ordinance for each day. 5 Afterwards *they offered* the regular burnt offering, and *those* for New Moons and for all the appointed feasts of the Lord that were consecrated, and *those* of everyone who willingly offered a freewill offering to the Lord. 6 From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord, although the foundation of the temple of the Lord had not been laid. 7 They also gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre to bring cedar logs from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the permission which they had from Cyrus king of Persia.

Restoration of the Temple Begins

8 Now in the second month of the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Jeshua the son of Jozadak,[a] and the rest of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began *work* and appointed the Levites from twenty years old and above to oversee the work of the house of the Lord. 9 Then Jeshua *with* his sons and brothers, Kadmiel *with* his sons, and the sons of Judah,[a] arose as one to oversee those working on the house of God: the sons of Henadad *with* their sons and their brethren the Levites.

10 When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests stood[a] in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel. 11 And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord:

"For *He is* good,
For His mercy *endures* forever toward Israel."[a]

Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

12 But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' *houses,* old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy, 13 so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off.

Resistance to Rebuilding the Temple

4 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the Lord God of Israel, 2 they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers'

3:8 [a]Spelled *Jehozadak* in 1 Chronicles 6:14 **3:9** [a]Or *Hodaviah* (compare 2:40)
3:10 [a]Following Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text reads *they stationed the priests.* **3:11** [a]Compare Psalm 136:1

Life Lessons

Ezra 3:1—4:24

SITUATION
Judah's jealous enemies to the north conspired to put an end to the rebuilding of Jerusalem. For several years, these enemies worked to hinder the Jews. Finally, they persuaded the Persian king, Artaxerxes, to stop the building.

OBSERVATION
When they had finished laying the foundation of the temple of the Lord, great rejoicing took place. They praised the Lord and wept with joy. They recognized what God had done for them in the past and would do for them in the future.

INSPIRATION
Gratitude comes from having the right perspective. It's being able to look at what you have and being thankful for that, rather than longing for what you don't have.

Do you know why you should feel grateful? You are a part of God's plan, you are touched by God's tenderness, and you are a victor in God's victory. What greater blessing could there be?

It's incredible that anyone could look at the kindness of God, the faithfulness of God, and the goodness of God and not feel any emotion of gratitude.

Remember the Lord. Remember who is in control. Remember his goodness in the past. Remember God's closeness in the present. Remember his power for the future. (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "Thankfulness")

APPLICATION
Do you rejoice over what

God has done in your life and what he will do for you in the future? Ask God to give you a daily heart of thanksgiving. List five things you are thankful for, and then give Him praise.

EXPLORATION
Thanksgiving—Nehemiah 11:17; Psalm 26:7; 100:4; Ephesians 5:20; Philippians 4:6–8; 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

houses, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you *do;* and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here." 3 But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' *houses* of Israel said to them, "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the Lord God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us." 4 Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, 5 and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Rebuilding of Jerusalem Opposed

6 In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

7 In the days of Artaxerxes also, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabel, and the rest of their companions wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the letter *was* written in Aramaic script, and translated into the Aramaic language. 8 Rehum[a] the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes in this fashion:

9 From[a] Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions—*representatives* of the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the people of Persia and Erech and Babylon and Shushan,[b] the Dehavites, the Elamites, 10 and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnapper took captive and settled in the cities of Samaria and the remainder beyond the River[a]—and so forth.[b]

11 (This *is* a copy of the letter that they sent him)

To King Artaxerxes from your servants, the men *of the region* beyond the River, and so forth:[a]

12 Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem, and are building the rebellious and evil city, and are finishing *its* walls and repairing the foundations. 13 Let it now be known to the king that, if this city is built and the walls completed, they will not pay tax, tribute, or custom, and the king's treasury will be diminished. 14 Now because we receive support from the palace, it was not proper for us to see the king's dishonor; therefore we have sent and informed the king, 15 that search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers. And you will find in the book of the records and know that this city *is* a rebellious city, harmful to kings and provinces, and that they have incited sedition within the city in former times, for which cause this city was destroyed.

16 We inform the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the result will be that you will have no dominion beyond the River.

4:8 [a]The original language of Ezra 4:8 through 6:18 is Aramaic. **4:9** [a]Literally *Then* [b]Or *Susa* **4:10** [a]That is, the Euphrates [b]Literally *and now* **4:11** [a]Literally *and now*

17 The king sent an answer:

To Rehum the commander, *to* Shimshai the scribe, *to* the rest of their companions who dwell in Samaria, and *to* the remainder beyond the River:

Peace, and so forth.[a]

18 The letter which you sent to us has been clearly read before
me. 19 And I gave the command, and a search has been made,
and it was found that this city in former times has revolted
against kings, and rebellion and sedition have been fostered
in it. 20 There have also been mighty kings over Jerusalem, who
have ruled over all *the region* beyond the River; and tax, tribute,
and custom were paid to them. 21 Now give the command to
make these men cease, that this city may not be built until the
command is given by me.

22 Take heed now that you do not fail to do this. Why should
damage increase to the hurt of the kings?

23 Now when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter *was* read before Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem against the Jews, and by force of arms made them cease. 24 Thus the work of the house of God which *is* at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Restoration of the Temple Resumed

5 Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who *were* in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, *who was* over them. 2 So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak[a] rose up and began to build the house of God which *is* in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God *were* with them, helping them.

3 At the same time Tattenai the governor of *the region* beyond the River[a] and Shethar-Boznai and their companions came to them and spoke thus to them: "Who has commanded you to build this temple and finish this wall?" 4 Then, accordingly, we told them the names of the men who were constructing this building. 5 But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, so that they could not make them cease till a report could go to Darius. Then a written answer was returned concerning this *matter.* 6 This is a copy of the letter that Tattenai sent:

The governor of *the region* beyond the River, and Shethar-Boznai, and his companions, the Persians who *were in the region* beyond the River, to Darius the king.

4:17 [a]Literally *and now* **5:2** [a]Spelled *Jehozadak* in 1 Chronicles 6:14 **5:3** [a]That is, the Euphrates

Life Lessons

Ezra 5:1—6:22

SITUATION
The Gentiles in the area of Judah and Jerusalem tried to block the rebuilding of the temple. But God used elders and prophets to secure permission to resume building.

OBSERVATION
Life can be very difficult. God never promised an easy life, but He did promise to always be with us. God's influence supersedes the actions of secular authorities to accomplish His desires.

INSPIRATION
May I gently but firmly remind you of something you know but may have forgotten? Life is not fair.

That's not pessimism; it's fact. That's not a complaint; it's just the way things are. I don't like it. Neither do you. We want life to be fair. Ever since the kid down the block got a bike and we didn't, we've been saying the same thing, "That's not fair."

But at some point someone needs to say to us, "Who ever told you life was going to be fair?"

God didn't. He didn't say, "*If* you fall into various trials" . . . he said, "*When* you fall into various trials . . ." (James 1:2). Troubles are part of the package. Betrayals are part of our troubles. Don't be surprised when betrayals come. Don't look for fairness here—look instead where Jesus looked.

Jesus looked to the future. Read his words: "In the future you will see the Son of Man . . . coming on the clouds of heaven." While going through hell, Jesus kept his eyes on

heaven. While surrounded by enemies he kept his mind on his father. While abandoned on earth, he kept his heart on home. "Hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64).

I took a snow skiing lesson some time back. My instructor said I had potential but poor perspective. He said I looked at my skis too much. I told him I had to. They kept going where I didn't want them to go. "Does it help?" he asked.

"I guess not," I confessed, "I still fall a lot."

He gestured toward the splendid mountains on the horizon. "Try looking out there as you ski. Keep your eyes on the mountains and you'll keep your balance." He was right. It worked.

The best way to keep your balance is to keep your focus on another horizon. That's what Jesus did.

"My kingdom is not of this world," Jesus told Pilate. "My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36).

. . .

Jesus took a long look into the homeland. Long enough to count his friends. "Do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53). And seeing them up there gave him strength down here.

By the way, his friends are your friends. The Father's loyalty to Jesus is the Father's loyalty to you. When you feel betrayed, remember that. When you see the torches and feel the betrayer's kiss, remember his words: "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

7 (They sent a letter to him, in which was written thus)

To Darius the king:

All peace.

8 Let it be known to the king that we went into the province of Judea, to the temple of the great God, which is being built with heavy stones, and timber is being laid in the walls; and this work goes on diligently and prospers in their hands.

9 Then we asked those elders, *and* spoke thus to them: "Who commanded you to build this temple and to finish these walls?" 10 We also asked them their names to inform you, that we might write the names of the men who *were* chief among them.

11 And thus they returned us an answer, saying: "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and completed. 12 But because our fathers provoked the God of heaven to wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, *who* destroyed this temple and carried the people away to Babylon. 13 However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to build this house of God. 14 Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple that *was* in Jerusalem and carried into the temple of Babylon—those King Cyrus took from the temple of Babylon, and they were given to one named Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor. 15 And he said to him, 'Take these articles; go, carry them to the temple *site* that *is* in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its former site.' 16 Then the same Sheshbazzar came *and* laid the foundation of the house of God which *is* in Jerusalem; but from that time even until now it has been under construction, and it is not finished."

17 Now therefore, if *it seems* good to the king, let a search be made in the king's treasure house, which *is* there in Babylon, whether it is *so* that a decree was issued by King Cyrus to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send us his pleasure concerning this *matter.*

The Decree of Darius

6 Then King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives,[a] where the treasures were stored in Babylon. 2 And at Achmetha,[a] in the palace that *is* in the province of Media, a scroll was found, and in it a record *was* written thus:

3 In the first year of King Cyrus, King Cyrus issued a decree *con-*

6:1 [a]Literally *house of the scrolls* **6:2** [a]Probably *Ecbatana,* the ancient capital of Media

cerning the house of God at Jerusalem: "Let the house be rebuilt, the place where they offered sacrifices; and let the foundations of it be firmly laid, its height sixty cubits *and* its width sixty cubits, 4 *with* three rows of heavy stones and one row of new timber. Let the expenses be paid from the king's treasury. 5 Also let the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple which *is* in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and taken back to the temple which *is* in Jerusalem, *each* to its place; and deposit *them* in the house of God"—

6 Now *therefore,* Tattenai, governor of *the region* beyond the River, and Shethar-Boznai, and your companions the Persians who *are* beyond the River, keep yourselves far from there. 7 Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God on its site.

8 Moreover I issue a decree *as to* what you shall do for the elders of these Jews, for the building of this house of God: Let the cost be paid at the king's expense from taxes *on the region* beyond the River; this is to be given immediately to these men, so that they are not hindered. 9 And whatever they need—young bulls, rams, and lambs for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the request of the priests who *are* in Jerusalem—let it be given them day by day without fail, 10 that they may offer sacrifices of sweet aroma to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his sons.

11 Also I issue a decree that whoever alters this edict, let a timber be pulled from his house and erected, and let him be hanged on it; and let his house be made a refuse heap because of this. 12 And may the God who causes His name to dwell there destroy any king or people who put their hand to alter it, or to destroy this house of God which is in Jerusalem. I Darius issue a decree; let it be done diligently.

The Temple Completed and Dedicated

13 Then Tattenai, governor of *the region* beyond the River, Shethar-Boznai, and their companions diligently did according to what King Darius had sent. 14 So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built and finished *it,* according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. 15 Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. 16 Then the children of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the descendants of the captivity, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. 17 And they offered sacrifices at the dedication of this house of God, one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. 18 They assigned the priests to their divisions and the Levites

When all of earth turns against you, all of heaven turns toward you. To keep your balance in a crooked world, look at the mountains. Think of home. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you facing a difficult time? Is the world treating you unfairly? God is the final authority. Remember too, that governmental leaders, whether or not they are Christians, need our support. Do you honor those in government? Don't be quick to cut them down. Pray regularly for those in positions of authority.

EXPLORATION

Opposition to God—Isaiah 14:13, 14; Acts 13:10; 26:17, 18; Romans 16:20; 1 Thessalonians 2:18.

Life LESSONS

Ezra 7:1—8:36

SITUATION
Sixty years elapsed between the events of Ezra 6 and 7. Although Ezra had previously remained in Babylon compiling a historical record, he obtained permission to return to Jerusalem. He led the Jews to a spiritual renewal.

OBSERVATION
Ezra's careful study of Scripture throughout his life enabled him to be an effective minister to those in need.

INSPIRATION
God longs to proclaim his greatness in all 6,909 languages that exist in the world today. He loves subcultures: the gypsies of Turkey, the hippies of California, the cowboys and rednecks of West Texas. He has a heart for bikers and hikers, tree huggers and academics. Single moms. Gray-flanneled executives. He loves all people groups and equips us to be his voice. He commissions common Galileans, Nebraskans, Brazilians, and Koreans to speak the languages of the peoples of the world. He teaches us the vocabulary of distant lands, the dialect of the discouraged neighbor, the vernacular of the lonely heart, and the idiom of the young student. God outfits his followers to cross cultures and touch hearts.

Pentecost makes this promise: if you are in Christ, God's Spirit will speak through you.

Let God unshell you. And when he does, "make a careful exploration of who

to their divisions, over the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses.

The Passover Celebrated

19 And the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the
fourteenth *day* of the first month. 20 For the priests and the Levites
had purified themselves; all of them *were ritually* clean. And they
slaughtered the Passover *lambs* for all the descendants of the cap-
tivity, for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. 21 Then the
children of Israel who had returned from the captivity ate together
with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations
of the land in order to seek the Lord God of Israel. 22 And they kept
the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the Lord made
them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them,
to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God
of Israel.

The Arrival of Ezra

7 Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia,
Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah,
2 the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, 3 the son
of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, 4 the son of
Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, 5 the son of Abishua,
the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief
priest— 6 this Ezra came up from Babylon; and he *was* a skilled scribe
in the Law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given. The king
granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God
upon him. 7 *Some* of the children of Israel, the priests, the Levites, the
singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethinim came up to Jerusalem in
the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. 8 And Ezra came to Jerusalem in
the fifth month, which *was* in the seventh year of the king. 9 On the
first *day* of the first month he began *his* journey from Babylon, and
on the first *day* of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according
to the good hand of his God upon him. 10 For Ezra had prepared his
heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do *it,* and to teach statutes
and ordinances in Israel.

The Letter of Artaxerxes to Ezra

11 This *is* a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave Ezra the
priest, the scribe, expert in the words of the commandments of the
Lord, and of His statutes to Israel:

12 Artaxerxes,[a] king of kings,

To Ezra the priest, a scribe of the Law of the God of heaven:

Perfect *peace,* and so forth.[b]

13 I issue a decree that all those of the people of Israel and the
priests and Levites in my realm, who volunteer to go up to Jeru-

7:12 [a]The original language of Ezra 7:12–26 is Aramaic. [b]Literally *and now*

salem, may go with you. 14 And whereas you are being sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, with regard to the Law of your God which *is* in your hand; 15 and *whereas you are* to carry the silver and gold which the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling *is* in Jerusalem; 16 and *whereas* all the silver and gold that you may find in all the province of Babylon, along with the freewill offering of the people and the priests, *are to be* freely offered for the house of their God in Jerusalem— 17 now therefore, be careful to buy with this money bulls, rams, and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them on the altar of the house of your God in Jerusalem.

18 And whatever seems good to you and your brethren to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, do it according to the will of your God. 19 Also the articles that are given to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver in full before the God of Jerusalem. 20 And whatever more may be needed for the house of your God, which you may have occasion to provide, pay *for it* from the king's treasury.

21 And I, *even* I, Artaxerxes the king, issue a decree to all the treasurers who *are in the region* beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, may require of you, let it be done diligently, 22 up to one hundred talents of silver, one hundred kors of wheat, one hundred baths of wine, one hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribed limit. 23 Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it diligently be done for the house of the God of heaven. For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?

24 Also we inform you that it shall not be lawful to impose tax, tribute, or custom on any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Nethinim, or servants of this house of God. 25 And you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who *are in the region* beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know *them.* 26 Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether *it be* death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment.

27 Blessed *be* the Lord God of our fathers, who has put *such a thing* as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which *is* in Jerusalem, 28 and has extended mercy to me before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty princes.

So I was encouraged, as the hand of the Lord my God *was* upon me; and I gathered leading men of Israel to go up with me.

Heads of Families Who Returned with Ezra

8 These *are* the heads of their fathers' *houses,* and *this is* the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylon, in the reign

you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourself into that" (Galatians 6:4 MSG). Don't miss the opportunity to discover your language.

With whom do you feel most fluent? Teenagers? Drug addicts? The elderly? You may be tongue-tied around children but eloquent with executives. This is how God designed you. We each have "differing according to the grace that is given to us" (Romans 12:6).

For whom do you feel most compassion? God doesn't burden us equally. "The Lord looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men . . . He fashions their hearts individually" (Psalm 33:13, 15). When does your heart break and pulse race? (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Ezra ministered to those in need—and God calls you to do the same. Answer the questions Max asks: (1) With whom do you feel most fluent? and (2) For whom do you feel most compassion? Where do you think God is guiding you to share yourself and your faith?

EXPLORATION

Excellence in Obedience—Leviticus 25:18, 19; Joshua 23:6; Psalm 1:1, 2; 18:21–23; 2 Corinthians 8:7; James 1:25.

of King Artaxerxes: 2of the sons of Phinehas, Gershom; of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel; of the sons of David, Hattush; 3of the sons of Shecaniah, of the sons of Parosh, Zechariah; and registered with him *were* one hundred and fifty males; 4of the sons of Pahath-Moab, Eliehoenai the son of Zerahiah, and with him two hundred males; 5of the sons of Shechaniah,[a] Ben-Jahaziel, and with him three hundred males; 6of the sons of Adin, Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males; 7of the sons of Elam, Jeshaiah the son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males; 8of the sons of Shephatiah, Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him eighty males; 9of the sons of Joab, Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred and eighteen males; 10of the sons of Shelomith,[a] Ben-Josiphiah, and with him one hundred and sixty males; 11of the sons of Bebai, Zechariah the son of Bebai, and with him twenty-eight males; 12of the sons of Azgad, Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him one hundred and ten males; 13of the last sons of Adonikam, whose names *are* these—Eliphelet, Jeiel, and Shemaiah—and with them sixty males; 14also of the sons of Bigvai, Uthai and Zabbud, and with them seventy males.

Servants for the Temple

15Now I gathered them by the river that flows to Ahava, and we camped there three days. And I looked among the people and the priests, and found none of the sons of Levi there. 16Then I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, leaders; also for Joiarib and Elnathan, men of understanding. 17And I gave them a command for Iddo the chief man at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say to Iddo *and* his brethren[a] the Nethinim at the place Casiphia—that they should bring us servants for the house of our God. 18Then, by the good hand of our God upon us, they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli the son of Levi, the son of Israel, namely Sherebiah, with his sons and brothers, eighteen men; 19and Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiah of the sons of Merari, his brothers and their sons, twenty men; 20also of the Nethinim, whom David and the leaders had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinim. All of them were designated by name.

Fasting and Prayer for Protection

21Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. 22For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, "The hand of our God *is* upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath *are* against all those who forsake Him." 23So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.

Gifts for the Temple

24And I separated twelve of the leaders of the priests—Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them— 25and weighed out to them the silver, the gold, and the articles, the offering for the house of our God which the king and his counselors and his princes, and all Israel *who were* present, had offered. 26I weighed into their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, silver articles *weighing* one hundred talents, one hundred talents of gold, 27twenty gold basins *worth* a thousand drachmas, and two vessels of fine polished bronze, precious as gold. 28And I said to them, "You *are* holy to the Lord; the articles *are* holy also; and the silver and the gold *are* a freewill offering to the Lord God of your fathers. 29Watch and keep *them* until you weigh *them* before the leaders of the priests and the Levites and heads of the fathers' *houses* of Israel in Jerusalem, *in* the chambers of the house of the Lord." 30So the priests and the Levites received the silver and the gold and the articles by weight, to bring *them* to Jerusalem to the house of our God.

8:5 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *the sons of Zatho, Shechaniah*. **8:10** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *the sons of Banni, Shelomith*. **8:17** [a]Following Vulgate; Masoretic Text reads *to Iddo his brother;* Septuagint reads *to their brethren*.

The Return to Jerusalem

31 Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth *day*
of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. And the hand of our God was
upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from
ambush along the road. 32 So we came to Jerusalem, and stayed there
three days.

33 Now on the fourth day the silver and the gold and the articles
were weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the
son of Uriah the priest, and with him *was* Eleazar the son of Phinehas;
with them *were* the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah
the son of Binnui, 34 with the number *and* weight of everything. All the
weight was written down at that time.

35 The children of those who had been carried away captive, who
had come from the captivity, offered burnt offerings to the God of
Israel: twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs,
and twelve male goats *as* a sin offering. All *this was* a burnt offering
to the Lord.

36 And they delivered the king's orders to the king's satraps and the
governors *in the region* beyond the River. So they gave support to the
people and the house of God.

Intermarriage with Pagans

9 When these things were done, the leaders came to me, saying,
"The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not
separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect
to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites,
the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the
Amorites. 2 For they have taken some of their daughters *as wives* for
themselves and their sons, so that the holy seed is mixed with the
peoples of *those* lands. Indeed, the hand of the leaders and rulers has
been foremost in this trespass." 3 So when I heard this thing, I tore my
garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head
and beard, and sat down astonished. 4 Then everyone who trembled
at the words of the God of Israel assembled to me, because of the
transgression of those who had been carried away captive, and I sat
astonished until the evening sacrifice.

5 At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn
my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my
hands to the Lord my God. 6 And I said: "O my God, I am too ashamed
and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities
have risen higher than *our* heads, and our guilt has grown up to the
heavens. 7 Since the days of our fathers to this day we *have been* very
guilty, and for our iniquities we, our kings, *and* our priests have been
delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to cap-
tivity, to plunder, and to humiliation, as *it is* this day. 8 And now for a
little while grace has been *shown* from the Lord our God, to leave us a
remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God
may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bond-
age. 9 For we *were* slaves. Yet our God did not forsake us in our bond-
age; but He extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia,
to revive us, to repair the house of our God, to rebuild its ruins, and
to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem. 10 And now, O our God, what

Life Lessons

Ezra 9:1—10:44

SITUATION
Israelite men intermarried with women from the surrounding pagan countries. This practice violated God's law (Exodus 34:11–16) and allowed idolatry to pollute the Israelites.

OBSERVATION
Ezra modeled how believers should hate sin and disobedience.

INSPIRATION
Do yourself a favor. Stand before him again. Or, better, allow him to stand before you. Go into your upper room and wait. Wait until he comes. And when he appears, don't leave. Run your fingers over his feet. Place your hand in the pierced side. And look into those eyes. Those same eyes that melted the gates of hell and sent the demons scurrying and Satan running. Look at them as they look at you. You'll never be the same.

A man is never the same after he simultaneously sees his utter despair and Christ's unbending grace. To see the despair without the grace is suicidal. To see the grace without the despair is upper-room futility. But to see them both is conversion. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Ask God to help you identify overlooked sin in your life. Pray and confess any sin you may need to repent of.

EXPLORATION
Confession to God—Leviticus 26:40–42; Numbers 5:5–7; Psalm

51:2–7; 130:3, 4; Lamentations 3:40–42; Daniel 9:20, 21; Acts 19:18; 1 John 1:9.

shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments,
11 which You commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, 'The land which you are entering to possess is an unclean land, with the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations which have filled it from one end to another with their impurity.
12 Now therefore, do not give your daughters as wives for their sons, nor take their daughters to your sons; and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave *it* as an inheritance to your children forever.' 13 And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You our God have punished us less than our iniquities *deserve,* and have given us *such* deliverance as this, 14 should we again break Your commandments, and join in marriage with the people *committing* these abominations? Would You not be angry with us until You had consumed *us,* so that *there would be* no remnant or survivor? 15 O Lord God of Israel, You *are* righteous, for we are left as a remnant, as *it is* this day. Here we *are* before You, in our guilt, though no one can stand before You because of this!"

Confession of Improper Marriages

10 Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly. 2 And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, *one* of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, "We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this.
3 Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, according to the advice of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. 4 Arise, for *this* matter *is* your *responsibility.* We also *are* with you. Be of good courage, and do *it.*"

5 Then Ezra arose, and made the leaders of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear an oath that they would do according to this word. So they swore an oath. 6 Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib; and *when* he came there, he ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those from the captivity.

7 And they issued a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the descendants of the captivity, that they must gather at Jerusalem, 8 and that whoever would not come within three days, according to the instructions of the leaders and elders, all his property would be confiscated, and he himself would be separated from the assembly of those from the captivity.

9 So all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered at Jerusalem within three days. It *was* the ninth month, on the twentieth of the month; and all the people sat in the open square of the house of God, trembling because of *this* matter and because of heavy rain. 10 Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have transgressed and have taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel. 11 Now therefore, make confession to the Lord God of your fathers, and do His will; sep-

arate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives."

12 Then all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, "Yes! As you have said, so we must do. 13 But *there are* many people; *it is* the season for heavy rain, and we are not able to stand outside. Nor *is this* the work of one or two days, for *there are* many of us who have transgressed in this matter. 14 Please, let the leaders of our entire assembly stand; and let all those in our cities who have taken pagan wives come at appointed times, together with the elders and judges of their cities, until the fierce wrath of our God is turned away from us in this matter." 15 Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite gave them support.

16 Then the descendants of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, *with* certain heads of the fathers' *households,* were set apart by the fathers' households, each of them by name; and they sat down on the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. 17 By the first day of the first month they finished *questioning* all the men who had taken pagan wives.

Pagan Wives Put Away

18 And among the sons of the priests who had taken pagan wives *the following* were found of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak,[a] and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. 19 And they gave their promise that they would put away their wives; and *being* guilty, *they presented* a ram of the flock as their trespass offering.

20 Also of the sons of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah; 21 of the sons of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uzziah; 22 of the sons of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah.

23 Also of the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (the same *is* Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.

24 Also of the singers: Eliashib; and of the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri.

25 And others of Israel: of the sons of Parosh: Ramiah, Jeziah, Malchiah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malchijah, and Benaiah; 26 of the sons of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Eliah; 27 of the sons of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza; 28 of the sons of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, *and* Athlai; 29 of the sons of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, *and* Ramoth;[a] 30 of the sons of Pahath-Moab: Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh; 31 *of* the sons of Harim: Eliezer, Ishijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, 32 Benjamin, Malluch, *and* Shemariah; 33 of the sons of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, *and* Shimei; 34 of the sons of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel, 35 Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluh,[a] 36 Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, 37 Mattaniah, Mattenai, Jaasai,[a] 38 Bani, Binnui, Shimei, 39 Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, 40 Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, 41 Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, 42 Shallum, Amariah, *and* Joseph; 43 of the sons of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai,[a] Joel, *and* Benaiah.

44 All these had taken pagan wives, and *some* of them had wives *by whom* they had children.

10:18 [a]Spelled *Jehozadak* in 1 Chronicles 6:14 **10:29** [a]Or *Jeremoth* **10:35** [a]Or *Cheluhi,* or *Cheluhu* **10:37** [a]Or *Jaasu* **10:43** [a]Or *Jaddu*

THE BOOK OF

NEHEMIAH

INTRODUCTION

You are about to meet the Abraham Lincoln of the Old Testament. A respected leader with a tender heart. You will see his tears in the oval office as he weeps for people oppressed and vulnerable.

You are about to meet the General George Patton of the Old Testament. A rugged leader. Intolerant of compromise. Relentless in demanding perfection. He punished those who were soft by pushing them down and cursing their names.

You are about to meet the Winston Churchill of the Old Testament. A statesman. Tested and tried. Resisting the enemies who seek to lure him away from the task. Rising above the squabbling factions who could distract him.

The tenderness of Lincoln. The fire of Patton. The savvy of Churchill. All found in the same man.

Nehemiah.

When we meet him he is wearing the robe of royalty. He is the king's cupbearer. But though he was in a position of power, his heart beat for people in Israel. He was a Hebrew in Persia. When word reached him that the Temple was being reconstructed, he grew anxious. He knew there was no wall to protect it.

Nehemiah invited God to use him to save the city. God answered his prayer by softening the heart of the Persian king. Artaxerxes gave not only his blessing, but also supplies to be used in the project.

Nehemiah exchanged the royal robe for coveralls and got to work. The project took twelve years and was uphill all the way. He was accused of everything from allowing faulty construction to being power-hungry. In spite of grumpy workers and lurking enemies, he made it. With the wall built and the enemy silent, the people rejoiced and Nehemiah went back to Persia.

After twelve years he returned. The walls were strong, but the people had gone to pot. Faith was forgotten and discipline was a bad word. So Nehemiah got busy again.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Probably Nehemiah, with perhaps some editing from Ezra

Date Written: 450–400 B.C.

Key Themes:

- Nehemiah was grieved that his homeland wasn't being resettled quickly.
- Nehemiah faced opposition in building the wall, but he overcame it through organization and the loyalty of his countrymen.
- Nehemiah dedicated the wall to the Lord before he returned to Babylon.

Key Verse:

"They read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading" (Nehemiah 8:8).

Contents:

I. The Wall Is Rebuilt 1:1—7:73

II. Spiritual Renewal 8:1—10:39

III. The People, Priests, and Levites 11:1—12:26

IV. Nehemiah Dedicates the Wall and Institutes Change 12:27—13:31

INTRODUCTION
THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

He went to his closet, hung up his royal robe, bypassed his coveralls, and dusted off his frock and set about the task of teaching the people a few things about morality. He didn't mince words. "I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair" (13:25). Not what you'd call a typical Bible class.

But Nehemiah wasn't what you'd call a typical fellow.

Nehemiah Prays for His People

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah.

It came to pass in the month of Chislev, *in* the twentieth year, as
I was in Shushan[a] the citadel, 2 that Hanani one of my brethren came
with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had
escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.
3 And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in
the province *are* there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jeru-
salem *is* also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire."

4 So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and
mourned *for many* days; I was fasting and praying before the God of
heaven.

5 And I said: "I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome
God, *You* who keep *Your* covenant and mercy with those who love
You[a] and observe Your[b] commandments, 6 please let Your ear be atten-
tive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant
which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel
Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we
have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned.
7 We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the
commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You com-
manded Your servant Moses. 8 Remember, I pray, the word that You
commanded Your servant Moses, saying, '*If* you are unfaithful, I will
scatter you among the nations;[a] 9 but *if* you return to Me, and keep
My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out
to the farthest part of the heavens, *yet* I will gather them from there,
and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My
name.'[a] 10 Now these *are* Your servants and Your people, whom You
have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. 11 O
Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your ser-
vant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name;
and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in
the sight of this man."

For I was the king's cupbearer.

1:1 [a]Or *Susa* **1:5** [a]Literally *Him* [b]Literally *His* **1:8** [a]Leviticus 26:33
1:9 [a]Deuteronomy 30:2–5

Life LESSONS

NEHEMIAH 1:1—2:10

SITUATION
Nehemiah, a Jew displaced by the Babylonian captivity, served in the king's court. When he heard of the decrepit condition of the gates and walls of Jerusalem, he wept and asked the king to send him to rebuild the walls.

OBSERVATION
When Nehemiah heard bad news, he prayed. He asked the Lord for success and kindness.

INSPIRATION
When God says to pray, he really means it. To pray is the most commonly mentioned command in Scripture. It is mentioned more than "love your neighbor," more than "go to church," and more than "evangelize." More than anything else, God calls us to pray.

We should be people of great prayer. We should be prayer warriors. We should be people who use the ministry of prayer to its fullest capacity. The highest and greatest calling of Christians is the ministry of prayer.

I would like to encourage you, admonish you to make a decision to pray

more and to set up some specific plans to support that decision. Will you determine in your heart to pray more? Will you start a prayer group in your home? Pray continually—live in a spirit of prayer. (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "Prayer")

APPLICATION
Many Christians feel that prayer is the weakest part of their Christian walk, yet it's vital for your relationship with the Lord. Set up a regular time each day to commune with the Lord. For many people, that's early in the morning before they become so busy. If you get tired easily, pray out loud. And establish regular prayer times with friends and family.

EXPLORATION
Prayer—Psalm 55:1; Matthew 21:22; Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:2.

Why listen to the mockers . . . when you can, with the same ear, listen to the voice of God?

—Max Lucado (Facing Your Giants)

Nehemiah Sent to Judah

2 And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, *when* wine *was* before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before. 2 Therefore the king said to me, "Why *is* your face sad, since you *are* not sick? This *is* nothing but sorrow of heart."

So I became dreadfully afraid, 3 and said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, *lies* waste, and its gates are burned with fire?"

4 Then the king said to me, "What do you request?"

So I prayed to the God of heaven. 5 And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it."

6 Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), "How long will your journey be? And when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.

7 Furthermore I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors *of the region* beyond the River,[a] that they must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah, 8 and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which *pertains* to the temple,[a] for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy." And the king granted *them* to me according to the good hand of my God upon me.

9 Then I went to the governors *in the region* beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me. 10 When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official[a] heard *of it,* they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.

Nehemiah Views the Wall of Jerusalem

11 So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. 12 Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem; nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode. 13 And I went out by night through the Valley Gate to the Serpent Well and the Refuse Gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were burned with fire. 14 Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but *there was* no room for the animal under me to pass. 15 So I went up in the night by the valley, and viewed the wall; then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. 16 And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work.

17 Then I said to them, "You see the distress that we *are* in, how Jerusalem *lies* waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach." 18 And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me.

2:7 [a]That is, the Euphrates, and so elsewhere in this book **2:8** [a]Literally *house*
2:10 [a]Literally *servant,* and so elsewhere in this book

So they said, "Let us rise up and build." Then they set their hands to *this* good *work*.

19 But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard *of it,* they laughed at us and despised us, and said, "What *is* this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?"

20 So I answered them, and said to them, "The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem."

Rebuilding the Wall

3 Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They built as far as the Tower of the Hundred,[a] *and* consecrated it, then as far as the Tower of Hananel. 2 Next to *Eliashib*[a] the men of Jericho built. And next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built.

3 Also the sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors with its bolts and bars. 4 And next to them Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz,[a] made repairs. Next to them Meshullam the son of Berechiah, the son of Meshezabel, made repairs. Next to them Zadok the son of Baana made repairs. 5 Next to them the Tekoites made repairs; but their nobles did not put their shoulders[a] to the work of their Lord.

6 Moreover Jehoiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors, with its bolts and bars. 7 And next to them Melatiah the Gibeonite, Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and Mizpah, repaired the residence[a] of the governor *of the region* beyond the River. 8 Next to him Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs. Also next to him Hananiah, one[a] of the perfumers, made repairs; and they fortified Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. 9 And next to them Rephaiah the son of Hur, leader of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs. 10 Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph made repairs in front of his house. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabniah made repairs.

11 Malchijah the son of Harim and Hashub the son of Pahath-Moab repaired another section, as well as the Tower of the Ovens. 12 And next to him was Shallum the son of Hallohesh, leader of half the district of Jerusalem; he and his daughters made repairs.

13 Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They built it, hung its doors with its bolts and bars, and *repaired* a thousand cubits of the wall as far as the Refuse Gate.

14 Malchijah the son of Rechab, leader of the district of Beth Haccerem, repaired the Refuse Gate; he built it and hung its doors with its bolts and bars.

15 Shallun the son of Col-Hozeh, leader of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate; he built it, covered it, hung its doors with its bolts and bars, and repaired the wall of the Pool of Shelah by the King's Garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the City of David.

3:1 [a]Hebrew *Hammeah,* also at 12:39 **3:2** [a]Literally *On his hand* **3:4** [a]Or *Hakkoz* **3:5** [a]Literally *necks* **3:7** [a]Literally *throne* **3:8** [a]Literally *the son*

Life Lessons

Nehemiah 2:11—3:32

SITUATION

The king gave Nehemiah permission to travel to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls of the city. In spite of opposition from the surrounding nations, Nehemiah led the people to complete the reconstruction.

OBSERVATION

God called Nehemiah to the task and then empowered him to do it. We can trust in God to help us accomplish His will.

INSPIRATION

Invitations are special. Some are casual such as asking for a date. Some are significant such as offering someone a job. Others are permanent, such as proposing marriage. But all are special.

Invitations. Words embossed on a letter: "You are invited to a gala celebrating the grand opening of . . ." Requests received in the mail: "Mr. and Mrs. John Smith request your presence at the wedding of their daughter . . ." Surprises over the phone: "Hey, Joe. I've got an extra ticket to the game. Interested?"

To receive an invitation is to be honored—to be held in high esteem. For that reason all invitations deserve a kind and thoughtful response.

But the most incredible invitations are not found in envelopes or fortune cookies, they are found in the Bible. You can't read about God without finding him issuing invitations. He invited Eve to marry Adam, the animals to enter the ark, David to be king, Israel to

leave bondage, Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem. God is an inviting God. He invited Mary to birth his son, the disciples to fish for men, the adulterous woman to start over, and Thomas to touch his wounds. God is the King who prepares the palace, sets the table, and invites his subjects to come in.

In fact, it seems his favorite word is *come*.

"*Come* now, and let us reason together, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18).

"Everyone who thirsts, *come* to the waters" (Isaiah 55:1).

"*Come* to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

"*Come* to the wedding" (Matthew 22:4).

"*Come* follow me, and I will make you fish for people" (Mark 1:17 NCV).

"Let anyone who is thirsty *come* to me and drink" (John 7:37).

God is a God who invites. God is a God who calls. God is a God who opens the door and waves his hand pointing pilgrims to a full table.

His invitation is not just for a meal, however, it is for life. An invitation to come into his kingdom and take up residence in a tearless, graveless, painless world. Who can come? Whoever wishes. The invitation is at once universal and personal. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What is God calling you to do? What task, or person, or responsibility is before you today? Thank Him for trusting you with the job and for being with you to help you accomplish it.

EXPLORATION

God's Protection—Psalm

16 After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, leader of half the district of
Beth Zur, made repairs as far as *the place* in front of the tombs[a] of
David, to the man-made pool, and as far as the House of the Mighty.
17 After him the Levites, *under* Rehum the son of Bani, made
repairs. Next to him Hashabiah, leader of half the district of Keilah,
made repairs for his district. 18 After him their brethren, *under* Bavai[a]
the son of Henadad, leader of the *other* half of the district of Keilah,
made repairs. 19 And next to him Ezer the son of Jeshua, the leader of
Mizpah, repaired another section in front of the Ascent to the Armory
at the buttress. 20 After him Baruch the son of Zabbai[a] carefully
repaired the other section, from the buttress to the door of the house
of Eliashib the high priest. 21 After him Meremoth the son of Urijah,
the son of Koz,[a] repaired another section, from the door of the house
of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib.
22 And after him the priests, the men of the plain, made repairs.
23 After him Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs opposite their
house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah,
made repairs by his house. 24 After him Binnui the son of Henadad
repaired another section, from the house of Azariah to the buttress,
even as far as the corner. 25 Palal the son of Uzai *made repairs* opposite
the buttress, and on the tower which projects from the king's upper
house that *was* by the court of the prison. After him Pedaiah the son
of Parosh *made repairs.*
26 Moreover the Nethinim who dwelt in Ophel *made repairs* as far
as *the place* in front of the Water Gate toward the east, and on the pro-
jecting tower. 27 After them the Tekoites repaired another section, next
to the great projecting tower, and as far as the wall of Ophel.
28 Beyond the Horse Gate the priests made repairs, each in front of
his *own* house. 29 After them Zadok the son of Immer made repairs in
front of his *own* house. After him Shemaiah the son of Shechaniah, the
keeper of the East Gate, made repairs. 30 After him Hananiah the son
of Shelemiah, and Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another
section. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah made repairs in
front of his dwelling. 31 After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths,
made repairs as far as the house of the Nethinim and of the mer-
chants, in front of the Miphkad[a] Gate, and as far as the upper room at
the corner. 32 And between the upper room at the corner, as far as the
Sheep Gate, the goldsmiths and the merchants made repairs.

The Wall Defended Against Enemies

4 But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding
the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the
Jews. 2 And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and
said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves?
Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they
revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish—*stones* that are burned?"
3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite *was* beside him, and he said, "What-

3:16 [a]Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *tomb*. **3:18** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, and Syriac read *Binnui* (compare verse 24). **3:20** [a]A few Hebrew manuscripts, Syriac, and Vulgate read *Zaccai*. **3:21** [a]Or *Hakkoz* **3:31** [a]Literally *Inspection* or *Recruiting*

ever they build, if even a fox goes up *on it,* he will break down their stone wall."

4 Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their reproach on their
own heads, and give them as plunder to a land of captivity! 5 Do not
cover their iniquity, and do not let their sin be blotted out from before
You; for they have provoked *You* to anger before the builders.

6 So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to
half its *height,* for the people had a mind to work.

7 Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the
Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem
were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that
they became very angry, 8 and all of them conspired together to come
and attack Jerusalem and create confusion. 9 Nevertheless we made
our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against
them day and night.

10 Then Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is failing, and *there
is* so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall."

11 And our adversaries said, "They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work
to cease."

12 So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they
told us ten times, "From whatever place you turn, *they will be* upon
us."

13 Therefore I positioned *men* behind the lower parts of the wall,
at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with
their swords, their spears, and their bows. 14 And I looked, and arose
and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people,
"Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome,
and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives,
and your houses."

15 And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known
to us, and *that* God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us
returned to the wall, everyone to his work. 16 So it was, from that time
on, *that* half of my servants worked at construction, while the other
half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and *wore* armor; and the
leaders *were* behind all the house of Judah. 17 Those who built on the
wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with
one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a
weapon. 18 Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side
as he built. And the one who sounded the trumpet *was* beside me.

19 Then I said to the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people,
"The work *is* great and extensive, and we are separated far from one
another on the wall. 20 Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet,
rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."

21 So we labored in the work, and half of *the men*[a] held the spears
from daybreak until the stars appeared. 22 At the same time I also said
to the people, "Let each man and his servant stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard by night and a working party by day."
23 So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard

4:21 [a] Literally *them*

4:8; Proverbs 18:10; Isaiah 41:10; John 17:11, 12; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; Hebrews 13:5, 6.

Life LESSONS

Nehemiah 4:1–23

SITUATION
Sanballat and Tobiah were leaders in surrounding cities who wanted to spread their influence into Jerusalem. When the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall continued, they responded with opposition.

OBSERVATION
Taunted, ridiculed, threatened. Instead of giving in, Nehemiah and the Israelites chose to find new strength and determination through their faith in God.

INSPIRATION
What would happen if we took our places and played our parts? If we played the music the Maestro gave us to play? If we made his song our highest priority?

Would we see a change in families? We'd certainly *hear* a change. Less "Here is what I want!" More "What do you suppose God wants?"

What if a businessman took that approach? Goals of money and name making, he'd shelve. God-reflecting would dominate.

And your body? Ptolemaic thinking says, "It's mine; I'm going to enjoy it." God-centered thinking acknowledges, "It's God's; I have to respect it."

We'd see our suffering differently. "My pain proves God's absence" would be replaced with "My pain expands God's purpose."

Talk about a Copernican shift. Talk about a healthy shift. Life makes sense when we accept our place.

who followed me took off our clothes, *except* that everyone took them off for washing.

Nehemiah Deals with Oppression

5 And there was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren. 2 For there were those who said, "We, our sons, and our daughters *are* many; therefore let us get grain, that we may eat and live."

3 There were also *some* who said, "We have mortgaged our lands and vineyards and houses, that we might buy grain because of the famine."

4 There were also those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax *on* our lands and vineyards. 5 Yet now our flesh *is* as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children; and indeed we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and *some* of our daughters have been brought into slavery. *It is* not in our power *to redeem them,* for other men have our lands and vineyards."

6 And I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. 7 After serious thought, I rebuked the nobles and rulers, and said to them, "Each of you is exacting usury from his brother." So I called a great assembly against them. 8 And I said to them, "According to our ability we have redeemed our Jewish brethren who were sold to the nations. Now indeed, will you even sell your brethren? Or should they be sold to us?"

Then they were silenced and found nothing *to say.* 9 Then I said, "What you are doing *is* not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies? 10 I also, *with* my brethren and my servants, am lending them money and grain. Please, let us stop this usury! 11 Restore now to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive groves, and their houses, also a hundredth of the money and the grain, the new wine and the oil, that you have charged them."

12 So they said, "We will restore *it,* and will require nothing from them; we will do as you say."

Then I called the priests, and required an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. 13 Then I shook out the fold of my garment[a] and said, "So may God shake out each man from his house, and from his property, who does not perform this promise. Even thus may he be shaken out and emptied."

And all the assembly said, "Amen!" and praised the Lord. Then the people did according to this promise.

The Generosity of Nehemiah

14 Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provisions. 15 But the former governors who *were* before me laid burdens on the people, and took from them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver. Yes, even their servants bore rule over the people, but I did not do so, because of the fear of God.

5:13 [a] Literally *my lap*

The gift of pleasures, the purpose of problems—all for him. The God-centered life works. And it rescues us from a life that doesn't.

But how do we make the shift? How can we be bumped off self-center? Attend a seminar, howl at the moon, read a Lucado book? None of these (though the author appreciates that last idea). We move from me-focus to God-focus by pondering him. Witnessing him. Following the counsel of the apostle Paul: "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, [we] are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18 KJV).

Beholding him changes us. Couldn't we use a change? Let's give it a go. Who knows? We might just discover our place in the universe. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

The Israelites teach us to regard God as our only source of confidence! When we let God show us what He has for us, when we make Him our highest priority, we find true fulfillment.

EXPLORATION

Confidence—Joshua 1:9; Jeremiah 29:11; James 1:2–4.

16 Indeed, I also continued the work on this wall, and we[a] did not buy
any land. All my servants *were* gathered there for the work.
17 And at my table *were* one hundred and fifty Jews and rulers,
besides those who came to us from the nations around us. 18 Now
that which was prepared daily *was* one ox *and* six choice sheep. Also
fowl were prepared for me, and once every ten days an abundance of
all kinds of wine. Yet in spite of this I did not demand the governor's
provisions, because the bondage was heavy on this people.
19 Remember me, my God, for good, *according to* all that I have
done for this people.

Conspiracy Against Nehemiah

6 Now it happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and
the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and *that*
there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the
doors in the gates), 2 that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying,
"Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono."
But they thought to do me harm.
3 So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I *am* doing a great work, so
that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it
and go down to you?"
4 But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them
in the same manner.
5 Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time,
with an open letter in his hand. 6 In it *was* written:

> It is reported among the nations, and Geshem[a] says, *that* you
> and the Jews plan to rebel; therefore, according to these rumors,
> you are rebuilding the wall, that you may be their king. 7 And you
> have also appointed prophets to proclaim concerning you at
> Jerusalem, saying, "*There is* a king in Judah!" Now these matters
> will be reported to the king. So come, therefore, and let us
> consult together.

8 Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say are being
done, but you invent them in your own heart."
9 For they all *were trying to* make us afraid, saying, "Their hands will
be weakened in the work, and it will not be done."
Now therefore, *O God,* strengthen my hands.
10 Afterward I came to the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah,
the son of Mehetabel, who *was* a secret informer; and he said, "Let
us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us
close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you; indeed,
at night they will come to kill you."
11 And I said, "Should such a man as I flee? And who *is there* such
as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!"
12 Then I perceived that God had not sent him at all, but that he pro-
nounced *this* prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had
hired him. 13 For this reason he *was* hired, that I should be afraid and

5:16 [a]Following Masoretic Text; Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *I.* **6:6** [a]Hebrew *Gashmu*

Life Lessons

Nehemiah 5:1–19

SITUATION
When some of the people began exploiting the poor, Nehemiah cried foul. He considered the poor to be valuable members of society, and he protected them.

OBSERVATION
God concerns Himself with poor and helpless people. People who have no power in society are not less important or less valuable but have great worth in God's eyes.

INSPIRATION
May I show you my new clamshell? It just arrived. My old one was thinning out. You know how worn they can get. Sheer as the wall of a cheap motel. Mine was so chipped I could see right through it. And noise? It couldn't block the sound of a baby's whimper.

So I bought this new model. Special ordered. Tailor-made. Top-of-the-line. I can stand up in it. Sit down in it. Sleep in the thing if I want to. Go ahead, take a look inside. See the flip-down ledge on the left? Cup holder! Check out the headphones. As if the shell's insulation wasn't enough, I can turn up the music and tune out the world. All I do is step in, grab the handle on the interior of the upper shell, and pull it closed.

Better than body armor, thick as an army tank. Think of it as a bunker for the soul. In here the world has no hunger or orphans. And poverty? This shell comes factory coated with a sadness screen. Racism? Injustice? They bounce

off my shell like rain off a turtle's back. . . .

What would we have done without our clamshells?

Don't know what I'd do without mine. When news reports describe Afghan refugees, into the shell I go. When a homeless person appears with a cardboard sign, I just close the lid. When missionaries describe multitudes of lost, lonely souls, I climb in. Why, just last week someone told me about regions of the world that have no clean water. Without my clamshell to protect me, who knows what I would have done. I might have written a check!

This is quite a shield. You probably have your own. Most of us have learned to insulate ourselves against the hurt of the hurting. Haven't we? *Mustn't* we? After all, what can we do about the famine in Sudan, the plight of the unemployed, or a pandemic of malaria?

Clamshells. We come by them honestly. We don't intend to retreat from the world or stick our heads in a hole. We want to help. But the problems are immense (Did you say one billion are poor?), complex (When is helping actually hurting?), and intense (I have enough problems of my own.).

That's true. We do have our own issues. Our sputtering marriages, fading ambitions, dwindling bank accounts, and stubborn hearts. How can we change the world when we can't even change our bad habits? We don't have what it takes to solve these problems. Best to climb in and shut the shell, right? (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What can you do in the next month to help the poor?

act that way and sin, so *that* they might have *cause* for an evil report, that they might reproach me.

14 My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid.

The Wall Completed

15 So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth *day* of Elul, in fifty-two days. 16 And it happened, when all our enemies heard *of it,* and all the nations around us saw *these things,* that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God.

17 Also in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and *the letters of* Tobiah came to them. 18 For many in Judah were pledged to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. 19 Also they reported his good deeds before me, and reported my words to him. Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.

7 Then it was, when the wall was built and I had hung the doors, when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, 2 that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he *was* a faithful man and feared God more than many.

3 And I said to them, "Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand *guard,* let them shut and bar the doors; and appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station and another in front of his own house."

The Captives Who Returned to Jerusalem

4 Now the city *was* large and spacious, but the people in it *were* few, and the houses *were* not rebuilt. 5 Then my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of those who had come up in the first *return,* and found written in it:

6 These[a] *are* the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his city.

7 Those who came with Zerubbabel *were* Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth,[a] Bigvai, Nehum, and Baanah.

The number of the men of the people of Israel: 8 the sons of Parosh, two thousand one hundred and seventy-two;
9 the sons of Shephatiah, three hundred and seventy-two;
10 the sons of Arah, six hundred and fifty-two;
11 the sons of Pahath-Moab, of the sons of Jeshua and Joab, two

7:6 [a]Compare verses 6–72 with Ezra 2:1–70 **7:7** [a]Spelled *Mispar* in Ezra 2:2

thousand eight hundred and eighteen;
12 the sons of Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four;
13 the sons of Zattu, eight hundred and forty-five;
14 the sons of Zaccai, seven hundred and sixty;
15 the sons of Binnui,[a] six hundred and forty-eight;
16 the sons of Bebai, six hundred and twenty-eight;
17 the sons of Azgad, two thousand three hundred and twenty-two;
18 the sons of Adonikam, six hundred and sixty-seven;
19 the sons of Bigvai, two thousand and sixty-seven;
20 the sons of Adin, six hundred and fifty-five;
21 the sons of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety-eight;
22 the sons of Hashum, three hundred and twenty-eight;
23 the sons of Bezai, three hundred and twenty-four;
24 the sons of Hariph,[a] one hundred and twelve;
25 the sons of Gibeon,[a] ninety-five;
26 the men of Bethlehem and Netophah, one hundred and eighty-eight;
27 the men of Anathoth, one hundred and twenty-eight;
28 the men of Beth Azmaveth,[a] forty-two;
29 the men of Kirjath Jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty-three;
30 the men of Ramah and Geba, six hundred and twenty-one;
31 the men of Michmas, one hundred and twenty-two;
32 the men of Bethel and Ai, one hundred and twenty-three;
33 the men of the other Nebo, fifty-two;
34 the sons of the other Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four;
35 the sons of Harim, three hundred and twenty;
36 the sons of Jericho, three hundred and forty-five;
37 the sons of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred and twenty-one;
38 the sons of Senaah, three thousand nine hundred and thirty.

39 The priests: the sons of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred and seventy-three;
40 the sons of Immer, one thousand and fifty-two;
41 the sons of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred and forty-seven;
42 the sons of Harim, one thousand and seventeen.

43 The Levites: the sons of Jeshua, of Kadmiel,
and of the sons of Hodevah,[a] seventy-four.

44 The singers: the sons of Asaph, one hundred and forty-eight.

45 The gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum,
the sons of Ater,

7:15 [a]Spelled *Bani* in Ezra 2:10 **7:24** [a]Called *Jorah* in Ezra 2:18 **7:25** [a]Called *Gibbar* in Ezra 2:20 **7:28** [a]Called *Azmaveth* in Ezra 2:24 **7:43** [a]Spelled *Hodaviah* in Ezra 2:40

Consider giving your time or money to help a friend, a relative, or even a stranger who needs something you can spare. Volunteer in a homeless shelter, give money to your church's benevolent fund, or help a friend or relative with a purchase they are struggling to make.

EXPLORATION
God and the Poor—Job

Life LESSONS

34:28; Psalm 9:18; 14:4–7; 40:17; Zechariah 7:10.

Nehemiah 6:1—7:73

SITUATION
Despite much opposition from Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, Nehemiah and the Israelites finished the wall of Jerusalem.

OBSERVATION
Satan tries to discourage us. But we can survive setbacks if we stay focused and fulfill God's purposes.

INSPIRATION
Strongholds mean nothing to [God]. Remember Paul's words? "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4).

You and I fight with toothpicks; God comes with battering rams and cannons. What he did for David, he can do for us. The question is, will we do what David did? The king models much [in 2 Samuel 5:6–9].

David turns a deaf ear to old voices. Those mockers strutting on the wall tops? David ignores them. He dismisses their words and goes about his work.

Nehemiah, on these same walls, took an identical

the sons of Talmon,
the sons of Akkub,
the sons of Hatita,
the sons of Shobai, one hundred and thirty-eight.

46 The Nethinim: the sons of Ziha,
the sons of Hasupha,
the sons of Tabbaoth,
47 the sons of Keros,
the sons of Sia,[a]
the sons of Padon,
48 the sons of Lebana,[a]
the sons of Hagaba,[b]
the sons of Salmai,[c]
49 the sons of Hanan,
the sons of Giddel,
the sons of Gahar,
50 the sons of Reaiah,
the sons of Rezin,
the sons of Nekoda,
51 the sons of Gazzam,
the sons of Uzza,
the sons of Paseah,
52 the sons of Besai,
the sons of Meunim,
the sons of Nephishesim,[a]
53 the sons of Bakbuk,
the sons of Hakupha,
the sons of Harhur,
54 the sons of Bazlith,[a]
the sons of Mehida,
the sons of Harsha,
55 the sons of Barkos,
the sons of Sisera,
the sons of Tamah,
56 the sons of Neziah,
and the sons of Hatipha.

57 The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai,
the sons of Sophereth,
the sons of Perida,[a]
58 the sons of Jaala,
the sons of Darkon,
the sons of Giddel,
59 the sons of Shephatiah,
the sons of Hattil,
the sons of Pochereth of Zebaim,
and the sons of Amon.[a]

7:47 [a]Spelled *Siaha* in Ezra 2:44 **7:48** [a]Masoretic Text reads *Lebanah.* [b]Masoretic Text reads *Hogabah.* [c]Or *Shalmai,* or *Shamlai* **7:52** [a]Spelled *Nephusim* in Ezra 2:50 **7:54** [a]Spelled *Bazluth* in Ezra 2:52 **7:57** [a]Spelled *Peruda* in Ezra 2:55 **7:59** [a]Spelled *Ami* in Ezra 2:57

approach. In his case, however, he was atop the stones, and the mockers stood at the base. Fast-forward five hundred years from David's time, and you will see that the bulwarks of Jerusalem are in ruins, and many of her people are in captivity. Nehemiah heads up a building program to restore the fortifications. Critics tell him to stop. They plan to interfere with his work. They list all the reasons the stones can't and shouldn't be restacked. But Nehemiah won't listen to them. "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?" (Nehemiah 6:3). Nehemiah knew how to press the mute button on his dissenters.

Jesus did too. He responded to Satan's temptations with three terse sentences and three Bible verses. He didn't dialogue with the devil. When Peter told Christ to sidestep the Cross, Jesus wouldn't entertain the thought. "Get behind Me, Satan!" (Matthew 16:23). A crowd of people ridiculed what He said about a young girl: "'Make room, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping.' And they ridiculed Him" (Matthew 9:24). You know what Jesus did with the naysayers? He silenced them. "After the crowd had been thrown out of the house, Jesus went into the girl's room and took hold of her hand, and she stood up" (9:25 NCV).

David, Nehemiah, and Jesus practiced selective listening. Can't we do the same? (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What crises threaten to discourage you? The next time you face a crisis, imitate the person who

60 All the Nethinim, and the sons of Solomon's servants, *were* three hundred and ninety-two.

61 And these *were* the ones who came up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Addon,[a] and Immer, but they could not identify their father's house nor their lineage, whether they *were* of Israel:
62 the sons of Delaiah,
the sons of Tobiah,
the sons of Nekoda, six hundred and forty-two;
63 and of the priests: the sons of Habaiah,
the sons of Koz,[a]
the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name.
64 These sought their listing *among* those who were registered by genealogy, but it was not found; therefore they were excluded from the priesthood as defiled. 65 And the governor[a] said to them that they should not eat of the most holy things till a priest could consult with the Urim and Thummim.

66 Altogether the whole assembly *was* forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, 67 besides their male and female servants, of whom *there were* seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven; and they had two hundred and forty-five men and women singers. 68 Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five, 69 *their* camels four hundred and thirty-five, *and* donkeys six thousand seven hundred and twenty.

70 And some of the heads of the fathers' *houses* gave to the work. The governor[a] gave to the treasury one thousand gold drachmas, fifty basins, and five hundred and thirty priestly garments.
71 Some of the heads of the fathers' *houses* gave to the treasury of the work twenty thousand gold drachmas, and two thousand two hundred silver minas. 72 And that which the rest of the people gave *was* twenty thousand gold drachmas, two thousand silver minas, and sixty-seven priestly garments.

73 So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, *some* of the people, the Nethinim, and all Israel dwelt in their cities.

Ezra Reads the Law

When the seventh month came, the children of Israel *were* in their cities.

8 Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that *was* in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded Israel. 2 So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who *could* hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. 3 Then he read from

7:61 [a]Spelled *Addan* in Ezra 2:59 **7:63** [a]Or *Hakkoz* **7:65** [a]Hebrew *Tirshatha*
7:70 [a]Hebrew *Tirshatha*

discovered how to stay focused on God: read, meditate, pray, act, and wait.

EXPLORATION
Examples of Faith—Job 13:15; 19:25; Psalm 13:5; Daniel 3; 6:7–23; Matthew 9:18–25; Luke 7:36–50; Romans 4:18–24; Hebrews 11.

Don't measure the size of the mountain; talk to the One who can move it. Instead of carrying the world on your shoulders, talk to the One who holds the universe on his.

—Max Lucado (Traveling Light)

it in the open square that *was* in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people *were attentive* to the Book of the Law.

4 So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, *and* Meshullam. 5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was *standing* above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. 6 And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God.

Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with *their* faces to the ground.

7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people *stood* in their place. 8 So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped *them* to understand the reading.

9 And Nehemiah, who *was* the governor,[a] Ezra the priest *and* scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day *is* holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn nor weep." For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law.

10 Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for *this* day *is* holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

11 So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day *is* holy; do not be grieved." 12 And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.

The Feast of Tabernacles

13 Now on the second day the heads of the fathers' *houses* of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law. 14 And they found written in the Law, which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, 15 and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths, as *it is* written."

16 Then the people went out and brought *them* and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim. 17 So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness. 18 Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the

8:9 [a] Hebrew *Tirshatha*

Life Lessons

Nehemiah 8:1–18

SITUATION
Nehemiah and Ezra assembled the people in Jerusalem to hear the law of Moses. Many wept when they realized how disobedient they had been. The assembly became a festive time when the people reclaimed their legacy as God's chosen people.

OBSERVATION
Nehemiah not only encouraged the people to consider the day sacred but also to rejoice in the Lord, their source of strength. They could seek God's holiness and be joyful at the same time.

INSPIRATION
Last night during family devotions, I called my daughters to the table and set a plate in front of each. In the center of the table I placed a collection of food: some fruit, some raw vegetables and some Oreo cookies. "Every day," I explained, "God prepares for us a plate of experiences. What kind of plate do you most enjoy?"

The answer was easy. Sara put three cookies on her plate. Some days are like that, aren't they? Some days are "three cookie days." Many are not. Sometimes our plate has nothing but vegetables—twenty-four hours of celery, carrots, and squash. Apparently God knows we need some strength, and though the portion may be hard to swallow, isn't it for our own good? Most days, however, have a bit of it all. Vegetables, which are healthy but dull. Fruit, which

feast seven days; and on the eighth day *there was* a sacred assembly, according to the *prescribed* manner.

The People Confess Their Sins

9 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads.[a] 2 Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. 3 And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God *for one*-fourth of the day; and *for another* fourth they confessed and worshiped the Lord their God.

4 Then Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, *and* Chenani stood on the stairs of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice to the Lord their God. 5 And the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, *and* Pethahiah, said:

"Stand up *and* bless the Lord your God
Forever and ever!

"Blessed be Your glorious name,
Which is exalted above all blessing and praise!
6 You alone *are* the Lord;
You have made heaven,
The heaven of heavens, with all their host,
The earth and everything on it,
The seas and all that is in them,
And You preserve them all.
The host of heaven worships You.

7 "You *are* the Lord God,
Who chose Abram,
And brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans,
And gave him the name Abraham;
8 You found his heart faithful before You,
And made a covenant with him
To give the land of the Canaanites,
The Hittites, the Amorites,
The Perizzites, the Jebusites,
And the Girgashites—
To give *it* to his descendants.
You have performed Your words,
For You *are* righteous.

9 "You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt,
And heard their cry by the Red Sea.
10 You showed signs and wonders against Pharaoh,
Against all his servants,
And against all the people of his land.
For You knew that they acted proudly against them.

9:1 [a] Literally *earth on them*

tastes better and we enjoy. And even an Oreo, which does little for our nutrition, but a lot for our attitude.

All are important and all are from God. "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). We, like Paul, must learn "both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:12, 13). (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Seek to be holy as God is holy, and there find true inner joy. Are you a joyful Christian or a grumpy one? If you are the latter, see if there is something that is keeping you from the joy that the Holy Spirit would like you to experience. Ask God for contentment and joy in the midst of life's experiences.

EXPLORATION
Joy—John 15:1–11; Romans 14:17; Galatians 5:22, 23; James 1:2, 3; 1 John 1:1–4.

Nehemiah 9:1—10:39

SITUATION
Nehemiah helped the people to learn God's law and to confess their sins. The people agreed to honor God in every aspect of their lives. They sought to eliminate relationships that would contaminate their culture and faith.

OBSERVATION
As the walls of Jerusalem were restored, the people renewed their devotion to God and His covenant.

So You made a name for Yourself, as *it is* this day.
11 And You divided the sea before them,
So that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land;
And their persecutors You threw into the deep,
As a stone into the mighty waters.
12 Moreover You led them by day with a cloudy pillar,
And by night with a pillar of fire,
To give them light on the road
Which they should travel.

13 "You came down also on Mount Sinai,
And spoke with them from heaven,
And gave them just ordinances and true laws,
Good statutes and commandments.
14 You made known to them Your holy Sabbath,
And commanded them precepts, statutes and laws,
By the hand of Moses Your servant.
15 You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger,
And brought them water out of the rock for their thirst,
And told them to go in to possess the land
Which You had sworn to give them.

16 "But they and our fathers acted proudly,
Hardened their necks,
And did not heed Your commandments.
17 They refused to obey,
And they were not mindful of Your wonders
That You did among them.
But they hardened their necks,
And in their rebellion[a]
They appointed a leader
To return to their bondage.
But You *are* God,
Ready to pardon,
Gracious and merciful,
Slow to anger,
Abundant in kindness,
And did not forsake them.

18 "Even when they made a molded calf for themselves,
And said, 'This *is* your god
That brought you up out of Egypt,'
And worked great provocations,
19 Yet in Your manifold mercies
You did not forsake them in the wilderness.
The pillar of the cloud did not depart from them by day,
To lead them on the road;
Nor the pillar of fire by night,
To show them light,
And the way they should go.

9:17 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *in Egypt*.

INSPIRATION

Nehemiah knew the value of honesty. Upon hearing of the crumbled walls in Jerusalem, did he fault God? Did he blame heaven? Hardly. Read his prayer: "[I] confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses" (Nehemiah 1:6, 7).

Here is the second most powerful man in the kingdom turning himself in, accepting responsibility for the downfall of his people. The scene of his personal confession, however, is nothing compared to the day the entire nation repented. "Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the Lord their God" (9:2, 3).

Can you picture the event? Hundreds of people spending hours in prayer, not making requests but making confessions. "I'm guilty God." "I've failed you, Father." . . .

Confession does for the soul what preparing the land does for the field. Before the farmer sows the seed he works the acreage, removing the rocks and pulling the stumps. He knows that seed grows better if the land is prepared. Confession is the act of inviting God to walk the acreage of our

20 You also gave Your good Spirit to instruct them,
And did not withhold Your manna from their mouth,
And gave them water for their thirst.
21 Forty years You sustained them in the wilderness;
They lacked nothing;
Their clothes did not wear out[a]
And their feet did not swell.

22 "Moreover You gave them kingdoms and nations,
And divided them into districts.[a]
So they took possession of the land of Sihon,
The land of[b] the king of Heshbon,
And the land of Og king of Bashan.
23 You also multiplied their children as the stars of heaven,
And brought them into the land
Which You had told their fathers
To go in and possess.
24 So the people went in
And possessed the land;
You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land,
The Canaanites,
And gave them into their hands,
With their kings
And the people of the land,
That they might do with them as they wished.
25 And they took strong cities and a rich land,
And possessed houses full of all goods,
Cisterns *already* dug, vineyards, olive groves,
And fruit trees in abundance.
So they ate and were filled and grew fat,
And delighted themselves in Your great goodness.

26 "Nevertheless they were disobedient
And rebelled against You,
Cast Your law behind their backs
And killed Your prophets, who testified against them
To turn them to Yourself;
And they worked great provocations.
27 Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their enemies,
Who oppressed them;
And in the time of their trouble,
When they cried to You,
You heard from heaven;
And according to Your abundant mercies
You gave them deliverers who saved them
From the hand of their enemies.

28 "But after they had rest,
They again did evil before You.

9:21 [a]Compare Deuteronomy 29:5 **9:22** [a]Literally *corners* [b]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Septuagint omits *The land of*.

hearts. "There is a rock of greed over here Father, I can't budge it. And that tree of guilt over near the fence? Its roots are long and deep. And may I show you some dry soil, too crusty for seed?" God's seed grows better if the soil of the heart is cleared.

And so the Father and the Son walk the field together; digging and pulling, preparing the heart for fruit. Confession invites the Father to work the soil of the soul. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God saves us without expecting any additional payment. Those who love God, however, want to obey Him. Confession and repentance are the first steps in placing our lives under His authority. What area of life do you want to turn over to God?

EXPLORATION

Covenant—Genesis 17:2–8; Deuteronomy 5:1–3; Isaiah 61:8; Matthew 26:28.

Therefore You left them in the hand of
their enemies,
So that they had dominion over them;
Yet when they returned and cried out to
You,
You heard from heaven;
And many times You delivered them
according to Your mercies,
29 And testified against them,
That You might bring them back to Your
law.
Yet they acted proudly,
And did not heed Your commandments,
But sinned against Your judgments,
'Which if a man does, he shall live by them.'[a]
And they shrugged their shoulders,
Stiffened their necks,
And would not hear.
30 Yet for many years You had patience with
them,
And testified against them by Your Spirit
in Your prophets.
Yet they would not listen;
Therefore You gave them into the hand of
the peoples of the lands.
31 Nevertheless in Your great mercy
You did not utterly consume them nor
forsake them;
For You *are* God, gracious and merciful.

32 "Now therefore, our God,
The great, the mighty, and awesome God,
Who keeps covenant and mercy:
Do not let all the trouble seem small
before You
That has come upon us,
Our kings and our princes,
Our priests and our prophets,
Our fathers and on all Your people,
From the days of the kings of Assyria until
this day.
33 However You *are* just in all that has
befallen us;
For You have dealt faithfully,
But we have done wickedly.
34 Neither our kings nor our princes,
Our priests nor our fathers,
Have kept Your law,
Nor heeded Your commandments and
Your testimonies,
With which You testified against them.
35 For they have not served You in their
kingdom,
Or in the many good *things* that You gave
them,
Or in the large and rich land which You
set before them;
Nor did they turn from their wicked
works.

36 "Here we *are,* servants today!
And the land that You gave to our
fathers,
To eat its fruit and its bounty,
Here we *are,* servants in it!
37 And it yields much increase to the kings
You have set over us,
Because of our sins;
Also they have dominion over our bodies
and our cattle
At their pleasure;
And we *are* in great distress.

38 "And because of all this,
We make a sure *covenant* and write *it;*
Our leaders, our Levites, *and* our priests
seal *it.*"

The People Who Sealed the Covenant

10 Now those who placed *their* seal on *the document were:*

Nehemiah the governor, the son of
Hacaliah, and Zedekiah, 2 Seraiah,
Azariah, Jeremiah, 3 Pashhur, Amariah,
Malchijah, 4 Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch,
5 Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, 6 Daniel,
Ginnethon, Baruch, 7 Meshullam, Abijah,
Mijamin, 8 Maaziah, Bilgai, *and* Shemaiah.
These *were* the priests.
9 The Levites: Jeshua the son of
Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad,
and Kadmiel.
10 Their brethren: Shebaniah, Hodijah,
Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, 11 Micha, Rehob,
Hashabiah, 12 Zaccur, Sherebiah,
Shebaniah, 13 Hodijah, Bani, *and* Beninu.
14 The leaders of the people: Parosh,
Pahath-Moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, 15 Bunni,

9:29 [a] Leviticus 18:5

Azgad, Bebai, [16] Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin,
[17] Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, [18] Hodijah,
Hashum, Bezai, [19] Hariph, Anathoth,
Nebai, [20] Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir,
[21] Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, [22] Pelatiah,
Hanan, Anaiah, [23] Hoshea, Hananiah,
Hasshub, [24] Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek,
[25] Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah,
[26] Ahijah, Hanan, Anan, [27] Malluch, Harim,
and Baanah.

The Covenant That Was Sealed

[28] Now the rest of the people—the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the Nethinim, and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, everyone who had knowledge and understanding— [29] these joined with their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes: [30] We would not give our daughters as wives to the peoples of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons; [31] *if* the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath, or on a holy day; and we would forego the seventh year's *produce* and the exacting of every debt.

[32] Also we made ordinances for ourselves, to exact from ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: [33] for the showbread, for the regular grain offering, for the regular burnt offering of the Sabbaths, the New Moons, and the set feasts; for the holy things, for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God. [34] We cast lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for bringing the wood offering into the house of our God, according to our fathers' houses, at the appointed times year by year, to burn on the altar of the Lord our God as *it is* written in the Law.

[35] And *we made ordinances* to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, to the house of the Lord; [36] to bring the firstborn of our sons and our cattle, as *it is* written in the Law, and the firstborn of our herds and our flocks, to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God; [37] to bring the firstfruits of our dough, our offerings, the fruit from all kinds of trees, *the* new wine and oil, to the priests, to the storerooms of the house of our God; and to bring the tithes of our land to the Levites, for the Levites should receive the tithes in all our farming communities. [38] And the priest, the descendant of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes; and the Levites shall bring up a tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the rooms of the storehouse.

[39] For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the grain, of the new wine and the oil, to the storerooms where the articles of the sanctuary *are, where* the priests who minister and the gatekeepers and the singers *are;* and we will not neglect the house of our God.

The People Dwelling in Jerusalem

11 Now the leaders of the people dwelt at Jerusalem; the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city, and nine-tenths *were to dwell* in *other* cities. [2] And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.

[3] These *are* the heads of the province who dwelt in Jerusalem. (But in the cities of Judah everyone dwelt in his own possession in their cities—Israelites, priests, Levites, Nethinim, and descendants of Solomon's servants.) [4] Also in Jerusalem dwelt *some* of the children of Judah and of the children of Benjamin.

The children of Judah: Athaiah the son of Uzziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalalel, of the children of Perez; [5] and Maaseiah the son of Baruch, the son of Col-Hozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of Shiloni. [6] All the sons of Perez who dwelt at Jerusalem *were* four hundred and sixty-eight valiant men.

[7] And these are the sons of Benjamin: Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiah; [8] and after him Gabbai *and* Sallai,

Tithing

You don't give for God's sake. You give for your sake. The purpose of tithing is "that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always" (Deuteronomy 14:23). How does tithing teach you? Consider the simple act of writing a check for the offering. First you enter the date. Already you are reminded that you are a time-bound creature and every possession you have will rust or burn. Best to give it while you can.

Then you enter the name of the one to whom you are giving the money. If the bank would cash it, you'd write God. But they won't, so you write the name of the church or group that has earned your trust.

Next comes the amount. Ahh, the moment of truth. You're more than a person with a checkbook. You're David, placing a stone in the sling. You're Peter, one foot on the boat, one foot on the lake. You're a little boy in a big crowd. A picnic lunch is all the Teacher needs, but it's all you have.

What will you do? Sling the Stone? Take the Step? Give the Meal?

Careful now, don't move too quickly. You aren't just entering an amount…you are making a confession. A confession that God owns it all anyway.

And then the line in the lower left-hand corner on which you write what the check is for. Hard to know what to put. It's for the light bills and literature. A little bit of outreach. A little bit of salary.

Better yet, its partial payment for what the church has done to help you raise your family . . . keep your own priorities sorted out . . . tune you in to his ever-nearness.

Or, perhaps, best yet, it's for you. It's a moment for you to clip yet another strand from the rope of earth so that when He returns you won't be tied up.

Study Guide

Nehemiah 10:28–39

- Describe a time when someone gave you the very best they had to offer.
- Why does God desire the first and best of people's resources?
- Explain the importance to you of tithing?
- What kinds of things make it difficult to tithe?
- What do we receive in return when we give money to the church?
- What is the connection between tithing and worship?
- In what ways can money enslave people?
- What steps can you take to loosen your grip on your financial resources?

nine hundred and twenty-eight. 9 Joel the son of Zichri *was* their overseer, and Judah the son of Senuah[a] *was* second over the city.

10 Of the priests: Jedaiah the son of Joiarib, and Jachin; 11 Seraiah the son of Hilkiah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, *was* the leader of the house of God. 12 Their brethren who did the work of the house *were* eight hundred and twenty-two; and Adaiah the son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malchijah, 13 and his brethren, heads of the fathers' *houses, were* two hundred and forty-two; and Amashai the son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer, 14 and their brethren, mighty men of valor, *were* one hundred and twenty-eight. Their overseer *was* Zabdiel the son of *one of* the great men.[a]

15 Also of the Levites: Shemaiah the son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni; 16 Shabbethai and Jozabad, of the heads of the Levites, *had* the oversight of the business outside of the house of God; 17 Mattaniah the son of Micha,[a] the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, the leader *who* began the thanksgiving with prayer; Bakbukiah, the second among his brethren; and Abda the son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun. 18 All the Levites in the holy city *were* two hundred and eighty-four.

19 Moreover the gatekeepers, Akkub, Talmon, and their brethren who kept the gates, *were* one hundred and seventy-two.

20 And the rest of Israel, of the priests *and* Levites, *were* in all the cities of Judah, everyone in his inheritance. 21 But the Nethinim dwelt in Ophel. And Ziha and Gishpa *were* over the Nethinim.

22 Also the overseer of the Levites at Jerusalem *was* Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micha, of the sons of Asaph, the singers in charge of the service of the house of God. 23 For *it was* the king's command concerning them that a certain portion should be for the singers, a quota day by day. 24 Pethahiah the son of Meshezabel, of the children of Zerah the son of Judah, *was* the king's deputy[a] in all matters concerning the people.

The People Dwelling Outside Jerusalem

25 And as for the villages with their fields, *some* of the children of Judah dwelt in Kirjath Arba and its villages, Dibon and its villages, Jekabzeel and its villages; 26 in Jeshua, Moladah, Beth Pelet, 27 Hazar Shual, and Beersheba and its villages; 28 in Ziklag and Meconah and its villages; 29 in En Rimmon, Zorah, Jarmuth, 30 Zanoah, Adullam, and their villages; in Lachish and its fields; in Azekah and its villages. They dwelt from Beersheba to the Valley of Hinnom.

31 Also the children of Benjamin from Geba *dwelt* in Michmash, Aija, and Bethel, and their villages; 32 in Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah; 33 in Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim; 34 in Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat; 35 in Lod, Ono, *and* the Valley of Craftsmen. 36 Some of the Judean divisions of Levites *were* in Benjamin.

11:9 [a]Or *Hassenuah* **11:14** [a]Or *the son of Haggedolim* **11:17** [a]Or *Michah*
11:24 [a]Literally *at the king's hand*

Life Lessons

Nehemiah 11:1—13:31

SITUATION
To resettle Jerusalem, Nehemiah required 10 percent of the people to move from their villages to the city. Many people disliked this plan because it forced them to move.

OBSERVATION
For the good of the whole community, Nehemiah required some people to sacrifice.

INSPIRATION
Born blind. A lifetime of darkness. Never saw a mother smile or a sunset fade. *Who did this?* the disciples wondered, anxious to blame someone. Such a bad plight can be traced back to a bad deed. Right?

Wrong, Jesus replied. Don't search the family tree. Don't request a copy of the man's rap sheet. Blame this blindness on a call from God. Why was the man sightless? So "that the works of God should be revealed in him" [John 9:3].

Odds are, he would have preferred another role in the human drama. Compared to others, his assignment held little glamour.

"Mary, be a mother to my son."

"Peter, you'll be my first preacher."

"Matthew, the first gospel? It's all yours."

Then God turns to this man, "And you?"

"Yes, Lord?"

"You'll be blind for my glory."

"I'll be blind?"

"Yes."

"For your glory?"

"Yes."

"But I don't understand."

"You'll see." . . .

Blindness displays the works of Christ? . . . How can this be?

I'm looking around my office for an answer. A frame displays my favorite picture of Denalyn. A metal stand displays an antique pot. My brother gave me a stained-glass window from a country church. It is displayed by virtue of two wires and two hooks. Picture frames and metal stands, wires and hooks—different tools, same job. They display treasures.

What these do for artifacts, the blind man did for Christ. He was the frame in which Jesus' power was seen, the stand upon which Jesus' miracle was placed. Born sightless to display heaven's strength. Do you suppose the sight of his sight showcased the work of Christ? . . .

And you? Now it gets a bit sticky. What about your struggles? Is there any chance, any possibility, that you have been selected to struggle for God's glory? Have you "been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29)? (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What are you willing to give up? Would you be willing to move? Change jobs? Face new challenges? Be flexible so that God can move you easily. Give Him control of your possessions.

EXPLORATION

Sacrifice—Leviticus 1:2; 1 Samuel 15:22; Psalm 4:5; Isaiah 1:10–17.

The Priests and Levites

12 Now these *are* the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, 2 Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, 3 Shechaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, 4 Iddo, Ginnethoi,[a] Abijah, 5 Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, 6 Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah, 7 Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah, *and* Jedaiah.

These *were* the heads of the priests and their brethren in the days of Jeshua.

8 Moreover the Levites *were* Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, *and* Mattaniah *who led* the thanksgiving *psalms,* he and his brethren. 9 Also Bakbukiah and Unni, their brethren, *stood* across from them in *their* duties.

10 Jeshua begot Joiakim, Joiakim begot Eliashib, Eliashib begot Joiada, 11 Joiada begot Jonathan, and Jonathan begot Jaddua.

12 Now in the days of Joiakim, the priests, the heads of the fathers' *houses were:* of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah; 13 of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan; 14 of Melichu,[a] Jonathan; of Shebaniah,[b] Joseph; 15 of Harim,[a] Adna; of Meraioth,[b] Helkai; 16 of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam; 17 of Abijah, Zichri; *the son* of Minjamin;[a] of Moadiah,[b] Piltai; 18 of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan; 19 of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi; 20 of Sallai,[a] Kallai; of Amok, Eber; 21 of Hilkiah, Hashabiah; *and* of Jedaiah, Nethanel.

22 During the reign of Darius the Persian, a record *was also kept* of the Levites and priests *who had been* heads of their fathers' *houses* in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jaddua. 23 The sons of Levi, the heads of the fathers' *houses* until the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib, *were* written in the book of the chronicles.

24 And the heads of the Levites *were* Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brothers across from them, to praise *and* give thanks, group alternating with group, according to the command of David the man of God. 25 Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub *were* gatekeepers keeping the watch at the storerooms of the gates. 26 These *lived* in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak,[a] and in the days of Nehemiah the governor, and of Ezra the priest, the scribe.

Nehemiah Dedicates the Wall

27 Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings and singing, *with* cymbals and stringed instruments and harps. 28 And the sons of the singers gathered together from the countryside around Jerusalem, from the villages of the Netophathites, 29 from the house of Gilgal, and from the fields of Geba and Azmaveth; for the singers had built themselves villages all around Jerusalem. 30 Then the priests and Levites

12:4 [a]Or *Ginnethon* (compare verse 16) **12:14** [a]Or *Malluch* (compare verse 2) [b]Or *Shechaniah* (compare verse 3) **12:15** [a]Or *Rehum* (compare verse 3) [b]Or *Meremoth* (compare verse 3) **12:17** [a]Or *Mijamin* (compare verse 5) [b]Or *Maadiah* (compare verse 5) **12:20** [a]Or *Sallu* (compare verse 7) **12:26** [a]Spelled *Jehozadak* in 1 Chronicles 6:14

purified themselves, and purified the people, the gates, and the wall.

31 So I brought the leaders of Judah up on the wall, and appointed two large thanksgiving choirs. *One* went to the right hand on the wall toward the Refuse Gate. 32 After them went Hoshaiah and half of the leaders of Judah, 33 and Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, 34 Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, 35 and some of the priests' sons with trumpets—Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Michaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph, 36 and his brethren, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, *and* Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God. And Ezra the scribe *went* before them. 37 By the Fountain Gate, in front of them, they went up the stairs of the City of David, on the stairway of the wall, beyond the house of David, as far as the Water Gate eastward.

38 The other thanksgiving choir went the opposite *way,* and I *was* behind them with half of the people on the wall, going past the Tower of the Ovens as far as the Broad Wall, 39 and above the Gate of Ephraim, above the Old Gate, above the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel, the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate; and they stopped by the Gate of the Prison.

40 So the two thanksgiving choirs stood in the house of God, likewise I and the half of the rulers with me; 41 and the priests, Eliakim, Maaseiah, Minjamin,[a] Michaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, *and* Hananiah, with trumpets; 42 also Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. The singers sang loudly with Jezrahiah the director.

43 Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and the children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.

Temple Responsibilities

44 And at the same time some were appointed over the rooms of the storehouse for the offerings, the firstfruits, and the tithes, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the portions specified by the Law for the priests and Levites; for Judah rejoiced over the priests and Levites who ministered. 45 Both the singers and the gatekeepers kept the charge of their God and the charge of the purification, according to the command of David *and* Solomon his son. 46 For in the days of David and Asaph of old *there were* chiefs of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. 47 In the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah all Israel gave the portions for the singers and the gatekeepers, a portion for each day. They also consecrated *holy things* for the Levites, and the Levites consecrated *them* for the children of Aaron.

Principles of Separation

13 On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people, and in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the assembly of God, 2 because they had not met the children of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing. 3 So it was, when they had heard the Law, that they separated all the mixed multitude from Israel.

The Reforms of Nehemiah

4 Now before this, Eliashib the priest, having authority over the storerooms of the house of our God, *was* allied with Tobiah. 5 And he had prepared for him a large room, where previously they had stored the grain offerings, the frankincense, the articles, the tithes of grain, the new wine and oil, which were commanded *to be given* to the Levites and singers and gatekeepers, and the offerings for the priests. 6 But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Then after certain days I obtained leave from the king, 7 and I came to Jerusalem and discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, in preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. 8 And it grieved me bitterly; therefore I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room. 9 Then I commanded them to cleanse the rooms; and I brought back

12:41 [a] Or *Mijamin* (compare verse 5)

into them the articles of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.

10 I also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given *them;* for each of the Levites and the singers who did the work had gone back to his field. 11 So I contended with the rulers, and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their place. 12 Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse. 13 And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouse Shelemiah the priest and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah; and next to them *was* Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered faithful, and their task *was* to distribute to their brethren.

14 Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services!

15 In those days I saw *people* in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all *kinds of* burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned *them* about the day on which they were selling provisions. 16 Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold *them* on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.

17 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, "What evil thing *is* this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day? 18 Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath."

19 So it was, at the gates of Jerusalem, as it began to be dark before the Sabbath, that I commanded the gates to be shut, and charged that they must not be opened till after the Sabbath. Then I posted *some* of my servants at the gates, *so that* no burdens would be brought in on the Sabbath day. 20 Now the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice.

21 Then I warned them, and said to them, "Why do you spend the night around the wall? If you do *so* again, I will lay hands on you!" From that time on they came no *more* on the Sabbath. 22 And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should go and guard the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day.

Remember me, O my God, *concerning* this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your mercy!

23 In those days I also saw Jews *who* had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, *and* Moab. 24 And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people.

25 So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, *saying,* "You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves. 26 Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin. 27 Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women?"

28 And *one* of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, *was* a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; therefore I drove him from me.

29 Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

30 Thus I cleansed them of everything pagan. I also assigned duties to the priests and the Levites, each to his service, 31 and *to bringing* the wood offering and the firstfruits at appointed times.

Remember me, O my God, for good!

THE BOOK OF

ESTHER

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Esther. Some things about it you love. Some things you admire. But there is one thing about it that leaves you scratching your head.

You love the story. A Jewish girl raised in Persia by a cousin named Mordecai. She becomes the wife of the king by winning the Miss Persia contest. Her husband is Xerxes. (Better known to some as Ahasuerus, which sounds like something you do when you have a bad cold.)

It's a rags-to-riches romance, though you've got to wonder how much romance could occur when you are married to a guy who would chop your head off if you popped into his office without an appointment. But that's what Esther did. She took the chance at the chance it would save her nation.

That is the part of Esther you admire. Aside from being a beauty, she was gutsy. Xerxes's right-hand man is Haman. (A name that, as you'll soon see, sounds curiously close to "hangman.") Haman was a raging Nazi. Nothing would suit him better than annihilation of the Jews. One day he got his chance. Mordecai, Esther's foster father, refused to bow before Haman. Haman was so mad he convinced Xerxes to let him do away with the whole nation.

That's where Esther comes in. Literally. She comes into the king's chambers uninvited but not unprepared. After getting the Jews to pray and fast for three days, she puts on her royal robes and stands at the door. Xerxes likes what he sees and invites her in. One invitation leads to another, and by the time she finishes, Xerxes not only agrees to call off the massacre but orders Haman to hang from the same gallows Haman had built for Mordecai.

Whew! Quite a lady, this Esther. You have to admire her courage. You have to love her story. But there is one thing that is tough to figure. God's name never appears in the entire book. His actions do. His thoughts do. His plan does. His fingerprints are on every page. But His name never appears. Could it be that God is more concerned about getting the job done than getting credit?

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Unknown, some say Mordecai

Date Written: 500–400 B.C.

Key Themes:

- Esther became queen even though she was an exile in the land.
- Because Esther was queen she was in a position to help when her people were endangered.
- Mordecai, Esther's cousin, helped her have the courage to stand up for her people even though it was dangerous.

Key Verse:

"Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14).

Contents:

I. Esther Becomes Queen 1:1—2:23
II. Haman's Plot 3:1—7:10
III. The Jews Are Delivered 8:1—10:3

Life LESSONS

Esther 1:1—2:23

SITUATION
Trouble brewed in Persia. Queen Vashti refused to obey King Xerxes. In anger, the king banished the queen and got a new one. Esther, an adopted Jewish orphan, became queen of Persia because of her beauty.

OBSERVATION
God uses unlikely people in unusual situations to preserve His people.

INSPIRATION
John Egglen had never preached a sermon in his life. Never.

Wasn't that he didn't want to, just never needed to. But then one morning he did. The snow left his town of Colchester, England, buried in white. When he awoke on that January Sunday in 1850, he thought of staying home. Who would go to church in such weather?

But he reconsidered. He was, after all, a deacon. And if the deacons didn't go, who would? So he put on his boots, hat, and coat and walked the six miles to the Methodist Church.

He wasn't the only member who considered staying home. In fact, he was one of the few who came. Only thirteen people were present. Twelve members and one visitor. Even the minister was snowed in. Someone suggested they go home. Egglen would hear none of that. They'd come this far; they would have a service. Besides, they had a visitor. A thirteen-year-old boy.

But who would preach?

The King Dethrones Queen Vashti

Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus[a] (this *was* the Ahasuerus who reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia), 2 in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which *was* in Shushan[a] the citadel, 3 *that* in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials and servants—the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces *being* before him— 4 when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days *in all.*

5 And when these days were completed, the king made a feast lasting seven days for all the people who were present in Shushan the citadel, from great to small, in the court of the garden of the king's palace. 6 *There were* white and blue linen *curtains* fastened with cords of fine linen and purple on silver rods and marble pillars; *and the* couches *were* of gold and silver on a *mosaic* pavement of alabaster, turquoise, and white and black marble. 7 And they served drinks in golden vessels, each vessel being different from the other, with royal wine in abundance, according to the generosity of the king. 8 In accordance with the law, the drinking was not compulsory; for so the king had ordered all the officers of his household, that they should do according to each man's pleasure.

9 Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women *in* the royal palace which *belonged* to King Ahasuerus.

10 On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, 11 to bring Queen Vashti before the king, *wearing* her royal crown, in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials, for she *was* beautiful to behold. 12 But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command *brought* by *his* eunuchs; therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned within him.

13 Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times (for this *was* the king's manner toward all who knew law and justice, 14 those closest to him *being* Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who had access to the king's presence, *and* who ranked highest in the kingdom): 15 "What *shall we* do to Queen Vashti, according to law, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus *brought to her* by the eunuchs?"

16 And Memucan answered before the king and the princes: "Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king, but also all the princes, and all the people who *are* in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. 17 For the queen's behavior will become known to all women, so that they will despise their husbands in their eyes, when they report, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in before him, but she did not come.' 18 This very day the *noble* ladies of Persia and Media will say to all the king's officials that they have heard of the behavior of the queen. Thus *there will be* excessive contempt and

1:1 [a]Generally identified with Xerxes I (485–464 B.C.) **1:2** [a]Or *Susa,* and so throughout this book

wrath. 19 If it pleases the king, let a royal decree go out from him,
and let it be recorded in the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so
that it will not be altered, that Vashti shall come no more before King
Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is
better than she. 20 When the king's decree which he will make is pro-
claimed throughout all his empire (for it is great), all wives will honor
their husbands, both great and small."

21 And the reply pleased the king and the princes, and the king
did according to the word of Memucan. 22 Then he sent letters to all
the king's provinces, to each province in its own script, and to every
people in their own language, that each man should be master in his
own house, and speak in the language of his own people.

Esther Becomes Queen

2 After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus subsided,
he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what had been
decreed against her. 2 Then the king's servants who attended him
said: "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king; 3 and let the
king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they
may gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan the citadel, into
the women's quarters, under the custody of Hegai[a] the king's eunuch,
custodian of the women. And let beauty preparations be given *them*.
4 Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead
of Vashti."

This thing pleased the king, and he did so.

5 In Shushan the citadel there was a certain Jew whose name
was Mordecai the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish,
a Benjamite. 6 *Kish*[a] had been carried away from Jerusalem with
the captives who had been captured with Jeconiah[b] king of Judah,
whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. 7 And
Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that *is,* Esther, his uncle's daugh-
ter, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman *was*
lovely and beautiful. When her father and mother died, Mordecai took
her as his own daughter.

8 So it was, when the king's command and decree were heard, and
when many young women were gathered at Shushan the citadel,
under the custody of Hegai, that Esther also was taken to the king's
palace, into the care of Hegai the custodian of the women. 9 Now the
young woman pleased him, and she obtained his favor; so he readily
gave beauty preparations to her, besides her allowance. Then seven
choice maidservants were provided for her from the king's palace, and
he moved her and her maidservants to the best *place* in the house of
the women.

10 Esther had not revealed her people or family, for Mordecai had
charged her not to reveal *it.* 11 And every day Mordecai paced in front
of the court of the women's quarters, to learn of Esther's welfare and
what was happening to her.

12 Each young woman's turn came to go in to King Ahasuerus after
she had completed twelve months' preparation, according to the

2:3 [a]Hebrew *Hege* **2:6** [a]Literally *Who* [b]Same as *Jehoiachin,* 2 Kings 24:6 and elsewhere

Egglen was the only deacon. It fell to him.

And so he did. His sermon lasted only ten minutes. It drifted and wandered and made no point in an effort to make several. But at the end, an uncharacteristic courage settled upon the man. He lifted his eyes and looked straight at the boy and challenged: "Young man, look to Jesus. Look! Look! Look!"

Did the challenge make a difference? Let the boy, now a man, answer. "I did look, and then and there the cloud on my heart lifted, the darkness rolled away, and at that moment I saw the sun."

The boy's name? Charles Haddon Spurgeon. England's prince of preachers. (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God raised Esther to a royal position to save her people. Look at your surroundings. How could God use you? Perhaps He has placed you in your job, school, or family to reach someone for Jesus. Be bold (but not brash). Share your faith. Encourage others to look to Jesus.

EXPLORATION

Respect Authority—Ephesians 5:21–26; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 3:1–7; 5:5, 6.

regulations for the women, for thus were the days of their preparation apportioned: six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying women. 13 Thus *prepared, each* young woman went to the king, and she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women's quarters to the king's palace. 14 In the evening she went, and in the morning she returned to the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who kept the concubines. She would not go in to the king again unless the king delighted in her and called for her by name.

15 Now when the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his daughter, to go in to the king, she requested nothing but what Hegai the king's eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her. 16 So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which *is* the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. 17 The king loved Esther more than all the *other* women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. 18 Then the king made a great feast, the Feast of Esther, for all his officials and servants; and he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces and gave gifts according to the generosity of a king.

Mordecai Discovers a Plot

19 When virgins were gathered together a second time, Mordecai sat within the king's gate. 20 *Now* Esther had not revealed her family and her people, just as Mordecai had charged her, for Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him.

21 In those days, while Mordecai sat within the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, doorkeepers, became furious and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. 22 So the matter became known to Mordecai, who told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name. 23 And when an inquiry was made into the matter, it was confirmed, and both were hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.

Haman's Conspiracy Against the Jews

3 After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who *were* with him. 2 And all the king's servants who *were* within the king's gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage. 3 Then the king's servants who *were* within the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?" 4 Now it happened, when they spoke to him daily and he would not listen to them, that they told *it* to Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would stand; for *Mordecai* had told them that he *was* a Jew. 5 When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay him homage, Haman was filled with wrath. 6 But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who *were* throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus—the people of Mordecai.

Life Lessons

Esther 3:1—4:17

SITUATION
Haman conspired to destroy all the Jews. Mordecai learned of Haman's plot and urged Esther to intercede on behalf of the Jews.

OBSERVATION
Esther resolved to carry out the wishes of Mordecai and go to the king even if it meant her death.

INSPIRATION
When Jesus told the story of the missing sheep, some of the people who were listening wiped away a tear because they knew how it feels to be lost among the crowd. Jesus wanted us to understand that we have a Father who sees and cares for each one of his children—that we are all equally valuable to him.

No one is useless to God. No one, at any point in his life, is useless to God—not a little child, not the unattractive, not the clumsy, not the tired, not the discouraged. God uses his children.

Our value is inherent—it's not based on the Ph.D. after our name or the amount of money in our bank account. We have value simply because we *are*. In the eyes of God, every human has value simply because he is the creation of the almighty God.

You belong to God's eternal dream. Now you may not feel motivated, you may not feel like you have a reason for living, but you must renew your mind with the immovable fact that you are part of a commissioned people—you have a reason to be alive.

There is an eternal

7 In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year
of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that *is,* the lot), before Haman to
determine the day and the month,[a] until *it fell on the* twelfth *month,*[b]
which *is* the month of Adar.
8 Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people
scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your
kingdom; their laws *are* different from all *other* people's, and they do
not keep the king's laws. Therefore it *is* not fitting for the king to let
them remain. 9 If it pleases the king, let *a decree* be written that they be
destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands
of those who do the work, to bring *it* into the king's treasuries."
10 So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to
Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.
11 And the king said to Haman, "The money and the people *are* given
to you, to do with them as seems good to you."
12 Then the king's scribes were called on the thirteenth day of the
first month, and *a decree* was written according to all that Haman
commanded—to the king's satraps, to the governors who *were* over
each province, to the officials of all people, to every province accord-
ing to its script, and to every people in their language. In the name of
King Ahasuerus it was written, and sealed with the king's signet ring.
13 And the letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces,
to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old,
little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth *day* of the
twelfth month, which *is* the month of Adar, and to plunder their pos-
sessions.[a] 14 A copy of the document was to be issued as law in every
province, being published for all people, that they should be ready for
that day. 15 The couriers went out, hastened by the king's command;
and the decree was proclaimed in Shushan the citadel. So the king
and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Shushan was perplexed.

Esther Agrees to Help the Jews

4 When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes
and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of
the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry. 2 He went as far as the
front of the king's gate, for no one *might* enter the king's gate clothed
with sackcloth. 3 And in every province where the king's command
and decree arrived, *there was* great mourning among the Jews, with
fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.
4 So Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her, and the queen
was deeply distressed. Then she sent garments to clothe Mordecai
and take his sackcloth away from him, but he would not accept *them.*
5 Then Esther called Hathach, *one* of the king's eunuchs whom he had
appointed to attend her, and she gave him a command concerning
Mordecai, to learn what and why this *was.* 6 So Hathach went out to
Mordecai in the city square that *was* in front of the king's gate. 7 And
Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the sum of
money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries to

3:7 [a]Septuagint adds *to destroy the people of Mordecai in one day;* Vulgate adds *the nation of the Jews should be destroyed.* [b]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *and the lot fell on the fourteenth of the month.* **3:13** [a]Septuagint adds the text of the letter here.

purpose. There is a great river of God's purpose that is moving toward an eternal home with him. You can't stop God's purpose. God's purpose is greater than you are, and if you are God's child, nothing is going to slow down God's purpose for your life. (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "You Are Worthwhile")

APPLICATION
Has someone harassed or persecuted you because you are a Christian? Stay loyal to God, even when it may be dangerous to do so. Acknowledge that He might put you in a particular situation to further His plans.

EXPLORATION
Choosing God—Joshua 24:15; 1 Samuel 7:3, 4; Matthew 6:24; 12:30.

The solution is not to avoid trouble but to change the way we see our troubles. God can correct your vision.

—Max Lucado (Just Like Jesus)

destroy the Jews. 8 He also gave him a copy of the written decree for their destruction, which was given at Shushan, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her, and that he might command her to go in to the king to make supplication to him and plead before him for her people. 9 So Hathach returned and told Esther the words of Mordecai.

10 Then Esther spoke to Hathach, and gave him a command for Mordecai: 11 "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, *he has* but one law: put *all* to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days." 12 So they told Mordecai Esther's words.

13 And Mordecai told *them* to answer Esther: "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. 14 For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?"

15 Then Esther told *them* to reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which *is* against the law; and if I perish, I perish!"

17 So Mordecai went his way and did according to all that Esther commanded him.[a]

Esther's Banquet

5 Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on *her* royal *robes* and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, across from the king's house, while the king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house.[a] 2 So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, *that* she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that *was* in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter.

3 And the king said to her, "What do you wish, Queen Esther? What *is* your request? It shall be given to you—up to half the kingdom!"

4 So Esther answered, "If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him."

5 Then the king said, "Bring Haman quickly, that he may do as Esther has said." So the king and Haman went to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

6 At the banquet of wine the king said to Esther, "What *is* your petition? It shall be granted you. What *is* your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!"

7 Then Esther answered and said, "My petition and request *is this:* 8 If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, then let the king

4:17 [a]Septuagint adds a prayer of Mordecai here. **5:1** [a]Septuagint adds many extra details in verses 1 and 2.

Life Lessons

Esther 5:1—6:14

SITUATION
Esther gained an audience with King Xerxes, but delayed her request. Meanwhile, Haman unwittingly orchestrated his own death.

OBSERVATION
Esther's discretion and courage contrasted with Haman's reckless conceit.

INSPIRATION
Real courage embraces the twin realities of current difficulty and ultimate triumph. Yes, life stinks. But it won't forever. As one of my friends likes to say, "Everything will work out in the end. If it's not working out, it's not the end."

Though the church is winnowed down like Gideon's army, though God's earth is buffeted by climate changes and bloodied by misfortune, though creation itself seems stranded on the Arctic seas, don't overreact. "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass" (Psalm 37:7).

Avoid Pollyanna optimism. We gain nothing by glossing over the brutality of human existence. This is a toxic world. But neither do we join the Chicken Little chorus of gloom and doom. "The sky is falling! The sky is falling!" Somewhere between Pollyanna and Chicken Little, between blind denial and blatant panic, stands the levelheaded, clear-thinking, still-believing follower of Christ. Wide eyed, yet unafraid. Unterrified by the

and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said."

Haman's Plot Against Mordecai

9 So Haman went out that day joyful and with a glad heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, and that he did not stand or tremble before him, he was filled with indignation against Mordecai. 10 Nevertheless Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and called for his friends and his wife Zeresh. 11 Then Haman told them of his great riches, the multitude of his children, everything in which the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and servants of the king.

12 Moreover Haman said, "Besides, Queen Esther invited no one but me to come in with the king to the banquet that she prepared; and tomorrow I am again invited by her, along with the king. 13 Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."

14 Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high, and in the morning suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it; then go merrily with the king to the banquet."

And the thing pleased Haman; so he had the gallows made.

The King Honors Mordecai

6 That night the king could not sleep. So one was commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. 2 And it was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, the doorkeepers who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. 3 Then the king said, "What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?"

And the king's servants who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him."

4 So the king said, "Who *is* in the court?" Now Haman had *just* entered the outer court of the king's palace to suggest that the king hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him.

5 The king's servants said to him, "Haman is there, standing in the court."

And the king said, "Let him come in."

6 So Haman came in, and the king asked him, "What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor?"

Now Haman thought in his heart, "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?" 7 And Haman answered the king, "*For* the man whom the king delights to honor, 8 let a royal robe be brought which the king has worn, and a horse on which the king has ridden, which has a royal crest placed on its head. 9 Then let this robe and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that he may array the man whom the king delights to honor. Then parade him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!' "

10 Then the king said to Haman, "Hurry, take the robe and the horse, as you have suggested, and do so for Mordecai the Jew who

terrifying. The calmest kid on the block, not for lack of bullies, but for faith in his older Brother. The old people of God knew this peace: "Though an army may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this I will be confident" (Psalm 27:3). (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Sometimes it takes nothing but raw courage to do the right thing—to stand up for the truth, to care about the downtrodden, to speak out when others are silent. Let Esther be an example to you that when you have God and courage, you need nothing more.

EXPLORATION

Self-Control—Proverbs 1:1–4; 21:23; Ecclesiastes 5:1, 2; Acts 24:25; Galatians 5:22, 23.

sits within the king's gate! Leave nothing undone of all that you have spoken."

11 So Haman took the robe and the horse, arrayed Mordecai and led him on horseback through the city square, and proclaimed before him, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!"

12 Afterward Mordecai went back to the king's gate. But Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered. 13 When Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him, his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him but will surely fall before him."

14 While they *were* still talking with him, the king's eunuchs came, and hastened to bring Haman to the banquet which Esther had prepared.

Haman Hanged Instead of Mordecai

7 So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther. 2 And on the second day, at the banquet of wine, the king again said to Esther, "What *is* your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what *is* your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!"

3 Then Queen Esther answered and said, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. 4 For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king's loss."

5 So King Ahasuerus answered and said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing?"

6 And Esther said, "The adversary and enemy *is* this wicked Haman!"

So Haman was terrified before the king and queen.

7 Then the king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine *and went* into the palace garden; but Haman stood before Queen Esther, pleading for his life, for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king. 8 When the king returned from the palace garden to the place of the banquet of wine, Haman had fallen across the couch where Esther *was*. Then the king said, "Will he also assault the queen while I *am* in the house?"

As the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. 9 Now Harbonah, one of the eunuchs, said to the king, "Look! The gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai, who spoke good on the king's behalf, is standing at the house of Haman."

Then the king said, "Hang him on it!"

10 So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's wrath subsided.

Esther Saves the Jews

8 On that day King Ahasuerus gave Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the

Life Lessons

Esther 7:1—8:17

SITUATION
Esther asked that her people be allowed to live. King Xerxes granted her request and had Haman hanged. The Jews were rescued.

OBSERVATION
God used individual people and governments to enact His will.

INSPIRATION
In our "bootstrap" society, where you tough it up and do it on your own and take pride in being a rugged individualist, the one thing that seems to escape us is being before God on our knees, being before God aware that we are helpless, and *allowing* him to assist us.

Can you say to Jesus, "This burden's too heavy for me. I want you to be my coworker. I want you to carry this burden with me. I cannot do it any longer." He says if you will come to him, if you'll allow him to carry that burden with you, his promise is that you will receive rest.

Surrendering our life to Christ means going to him and saying, "I'm yours; use me however you want to." Once you've done this, you can begin to seek his will for your life.

Once we're honest with ourselves about who we are, then God can begin to remold our hearts . . . in total surrender. (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "Surrender")

APPLICATION
Don't get so busy securing your rights or accomplishing your agenda that you miss the opportunity to serve. Surrender your life to God

king, for Esther had told how he *was related* to her. 2 So the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai; and Esther appointed Mordecai over the house of Haman.

3 Now Esther spoke again to the king, fell down at his feet, and implored him with tears to counteract the evil of Haman the Agagite, and the scheme which he had devised against the Jews. 4 And the king held out the golden scepter toward Esther. So Esther arose and stood before the king, 5 and said, "If it pleases the king, and if I have found favor in his sight and the thing *seems* right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to annihilate the Jews who *are* in all the king's provinces. 6 For how can I endure to see the evil that will come to my people? Or how can I endure to see the destruction of my countrymen?"

7 Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew, "Indeed, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows because he *tried to* lay his hand on the Jews. 8 You yourselves write *a decree* concerning the Jews, as you please, in the king's name, and seal *it* with the king's signet ring; for whatever is written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring no one can revoke."

9 So the king's scribes were called at that time, in the third month, which *is* the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third *day;* and it was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded, to the Jews, the satraps, the governors, and the princes of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces *in all,* to every province in its own script, to every people in their own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language. 10 And he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, sealed *it* with the king's signet ring, and sent letters by couriers on horseback, riding on royal horses bred from swift steeds.[a]

11 By these letters the king permitted the Jews who *were* in every city to gather together and protect their lives—to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them, *both* little children and women, and to plunder their possessions, 12 on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth *day* of the twelfth month, which *is* the month of Adar.[a] 13 A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province and published for all people, so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. 14 The couriers who rode on royal horses went out, hastened and pressed on by the king's command. And the decree was issued in Shushan the citadel.

15 So Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, with a great crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad. 16 The Jews had light and gladness, joy and honor. 17 And in every province and city, wherever the king's command and decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday. Then many of

8:10 [a]Literally *sons of the swift horses* **8:12** [a]Septuagint adds the text of the letter here.

so that He can use you to accomplish His goals, agenda, and will for your life.

EXPLORATION
Living Honorably—Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:10–12; James 4:7–10.

I only know his timing is always right. I can only say he will do what is best. God will always give what is right to his people who cry to him night and day, and he will not be slow to answer them.

—Max Lucado (A Gentle Thunder)

Life Lessons

Esther 9:1—10:3

SITUATION
Israel defeated its enemies and initiated the feast of Purim to commemorate its deliverance.

OBSERVATION
God is always faithful to His people.

INSPIRATION
I jogged through my neighborhood the other day under a cloud. Not a cloud of rain, but a cloud of self-doubt. The challenges of life seemed to outnumber the resources, and I questioned my ability. And, quite frankly, I questioned God's wisdom. *Are you sure I'm the right man for this job?* was the theme of my prayer.

Apparently God really wanted to give me an answer, because I heard one. From on high. From a deep, booming voice. "You're doing a good job!" I stopped dead in my Reeboks and looked up. Seeing nothing in the clouds, I shifted my attention to the roof of a house. There he waved at me—a painter dressed in white and leaning against a dormer. I waved back. And I wondered and almost asked, "How did you know I needed to hear that?"

Did I have a brush with an angel? Did I see an angel with a brush? Was the worker sunstruck? This much I know. A painter spots a middle-aged guy with a bald spot puffing through the streets and thinks, *The guy could use a good word.* So he gives it. "You're doing a good job!"

Am I stretching theology a bit when I suggest that God put the man there,

the people of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews fell upon them.

The Jews Destroy Their Tormentors

9 Now in the twelfth month, that *is,* the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day, *the time* came for the king's command and his decree to be executed. On the day that the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, the opposite occurred, in that the Jews themselves overpowered those who hated them. 2 The Jews gathered together in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could withstand them, because fear of them fell upon all people. 3 And all the officials of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and all those doing the king's work, helped the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them. 4 For Mordecai *was* great in the king's palace, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces; for this man Mordecai became increasingly prominent. 5 Thus the Jews defeated all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, with slaughter and destruction, and did what they pleased with those who hated them.

6 And in Shushan the citadel the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men. 7 Also Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, 8 Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, 9 Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vajezatha— 10 the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews—they killed; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder.

11 On that day the number of those who were killed in Shushan the citadel was brought to the king. 12 And the king said to Queen Esther, "The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the citadel, and the ten sons of Haman. What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? Now what *is* your petition? It shall be granted to you. Or what *is* your further request? It shall be done."

13 Then Esther said, "If it pleases the king, let it be granted to the Jews who *are* in Shushan to do again tomorrow according to today's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows."

14 So the king commanded this to be done; the decree was issued in Shushan, and they hanged Haman's ten sons.

15 And the Jews who *were* in Shushan gathered together again on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and killed three hundred men at Shushan; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder.

16 The remainder of the Jews in the king's provinces gathered together and protected their lives, had rest from their enemies, and killed seventy-five thousand of their enemies; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder. 17 *This was* on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar. And on the fourteenth of *the month*[a] they rested and made it a day of feasting and gladness.

The Feast of Purim

18 But the Jews who *were* at Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth *day,* as well as on the fourteenth; and on the fifteenth of *the month*[a] they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. 19 Therefore the Jews of the villages who dwelt in the unwalled towns

9:17 [a]Literally *it* **9:18** [a]Literally *it*

celebrated the fourteenth day of the month of Adar *with* gladness and feasting, as a holiday, and for sending presents to one another.

20 And Mordecai wrote these things and sent letters to all the Jews, near and far, who *were* in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, 21 to establish among them that they should celebrate yearly the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar, 22 as the days on which the Jews had rest from their enemies, as the month which was turned from sorrow to joy for them, and from mourning to a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and joy, of sending presents to one another and gifts to the poor. 23 So the Jews accepted the custom which they had begun, as Mordecai had written to them, 24 because Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to annihilate them, and had cast Pur (that *is,* the lot), to consume them and destroy them; 25 but when *Esther*[a] came before the king, he commanded by letter that this[b] wicked plot which *Haman* had devised against the Jews should return on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows.

26 So they called these days Purim, after the name Pur. Therefore, because of all the words of this letter, what they had seen concerning this matter, and what had happened to them, 27 the Jews established and imposed it upon themselves and their descendants and all who would join them, that without fail they should celebrate these two days every year, according to the written *instructions* and according to the *prescribed* time, 28 *that* these days *should be* remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city, that these days of Purim should not fail *to be observed* among the Jews, and *that* the memory of them should not perish among their descendants.

29 Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter about Purim. 30 And *Mordecai* sent letters to all the Jews, to the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, *with* words of peace and truth, 31 to confirm these days of Purim at their *appointed* time, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had prescribed for them, and as they had decreed for themselves and their descendants concerning matters of their fasting and lamenting. 32 So the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim, and it was written in the book.

Mordecai's Advancement

10 And King Ahasuerus imposed tribute on the land and *on* the islands of the sea. 2 Now all the acts of his power and his might, and the account of the greatness of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? 3 For Mordecai the Jew *was* second to King Ahasuerus, and was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his countrymen.[a]

9:25 [a]Literally *she* or *it* [b]Literally *his* **10:3** [a]Literally *seed*. Septuagint and Vulgate add a dream of Mordecai here; Vulgate adds six more chapters.

at least in part, for me? Long before time had time, God saw each moment in time, including that one. He saw a minister in need of a word. He saw a fellow with a skill for painting and a heart for encouragement. He put one on the street and the other on the roof so the second could encourage the first. Multiply that tiny event by billions, and behold the way God sustains his world. "God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies" (Philippians 4:9 MSG). (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What causes you to feel anxious, fearful, or discouraged? Remember that God faithfully loves you, faithfully cares for you, and faithfully provides for you. God is faithful in everything. Celebrate!

EXPLORATION

God's Faithfulness—Psalm 73:25, 26; 139; Isaiah 54:10; Lamentations 3:22–24; Zephaniah 3:17; 1 Corinthians 1:8, 9.

THE BOOK OF

JOB

INTRODUCTION

It's easy to thank God when He does what we want. But God doesn't always do what we want. Ask Job.

His empire collapsed, his children were killed, and what was a healthy body became a rage of boils. From whence came this torrent? From whence will come any help?

Not from his wife. You can't blame her for telling Job to curse God. But to curse God and die?

Then come his friends. They mean well, but they comfort poorly. They tell him he must have been pretty bad to get it so bad.

"With friends like you guys . . . ," Job says and then tells them to take their theology back to the dime store where they bought it. Getting no comfort from family or friend, he goes straight to God and pleads his case. His head hurts. His body hurts. His heart hurts. And he can't tolerate any more half-baked answers. "Why is this happening to me?" he demands.

And God answers. Not with answers but with questions. An ocean of questions. Space doesn't permit their listing, but one or two will convey the point. "Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, that an abundance of water may cover you? Can you send out lightnings, that they may go, and say to you, 'Here we are!'?" (38:34, 35).

After several dozen of these, Job is left on the beach drenched and wide-eyed, knowing he will never argue with the ocean again. He lifts his hand and cries, "Enough." He has gotten the point. What is it?

God owes no one anything. No reasons. No explanations. Nothing. If He gave them, we couldn't understand them.

Which makes the conclusion of the book all the more moving. Even though God owed Job nothing, He gave him everything. New health, new business, new family. And most of all, new insight.

God is God. He knows what He is doing. When you can't trace His hand, trust His heart.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Unknown, some say Job, some say Moses

Date Written: Unknown

Key Themes:

- Satan accused Job of having faith only because his life was easy so God let Satan attack Job.
- Job lost everything, yet did not curse God.
- Job's friends tried to reason out why such misfortune had fallen on him, assuming it must be something Job had done.
- In the end, Job acknowledged God's wisdom and discretion as he had at the beginning.

Key Verse:

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. Even so, I will defend my own ways before Him" (Job 13:15).

Contents:

I. Background and Prologue 1:1—2:13

II. Speeches of Job, His Friends, and God 3:1—42:6

III. Job's Life Restored 42:7–17

Job and His Family in Uz

1 There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name *was* Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil. 2 And seven sons and three daughters were born to him. 3 Also, his possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East.

4 And his sons would go and feast *in their* houses, each on his *appointed* day, and would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. 5 So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings *according to* the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed[a] God in their hearts." Thus Job did regularly.

Satan Attacks Job's Character

6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan[a] also came among them. 7 And the Lord said to Satan, "From where do you come?"

So Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it."

8 Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that *there is* none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?"

9 So Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? 10 Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11 But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"

12 And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has *is* in your power; only do not lay a hand on his *person*."

So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

Job Loses His Property and Children

13 Now there was a day when his sons and daughters *were* eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house; 14 and a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, 15 when the Sabeans[a] raided *them* and took them away—indeed they have killed the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

16 While he *was* still speaking, another also came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

17 While he *was* still speaking, another also came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three bands, raided the camels and took them

1:5 [a] Literally *blessed,* but used here in the evil sense, and so in verse 11 and 2:5, 9
1:6 [a] Literally *the Adversary,* and so throughout this book **1:15** [a] Literally *Sheba* (compare 6:19)

Life Lessons

Job 1:1—2:13

SITUATION
Satan hoped to convince God that Job was righteous only because of his comfortable life. God allowed Satan to bring disaster upon Job, but Job stayed loyal to God.

OBSERVATION
Suffering, of course, is one of the great subjects of this book. However, it also shows how a righteous man needed to repent.

INSPIRATION
Folks, if you're expecting to be given a fair shake in your life, forget it! You won't be. You're going to face illness. And your body is going to wear out. You may be the victim of someone else's mistake. But you can get through those tough times if you prepare your heart now, living to know and serve the Savior who loves you and died so that you might have an eternal home free of pain and sorrow.

The struggles that you're going through now—don't discard them. Listen to God as He teaches you so that you can teach others. You see, a time of suffering teaches us something we never knew before and may prepare us for a time of counsel that we will give someone years from now.

God is with you. God is with you! The same God that guided His Son through death and back to life said He will never leave us or forsake us. He is right there with you, perhaps even more in times of crisis than any other time. (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "Suffering")

APPLICATION
Trying to avoid suffering in this life is like trying to avoid breathing. It can't be done. As a matter of fact, the Bible says that those who desire to live a godly lifestyle will suffer. Ask God how your suffering can bring you closer to Him. Then thank Him that He is a good God no matter what you're going through.

EXPLORATION
Suffering—Psalm 34:10; 2 Timothy 2:3; James 5:13; 1 Peter 4:12–16.

Before he heard God, Job couldn't speak enough. After he heard God, he couldn't speak at all.

—Max Lucado (The Great House of God)

away, yes, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

18 While he *was* still speaking, another also came and said, "Your sons and daughters *were* eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, 19 and suddenly a great wind came from across[a] the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; and I alone have escaped to tell you!"

20 Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. 21 And he said:

"Naked I came from my mother's womb,
And naked shall I return there.
The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away;
Blessed be the name of the Lord."

22 In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.

Satan Attacks Job's Health

2 Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord. 2 And the Lord said to Satan, "From where do you come?"

Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it."

3 Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that *there is* none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause."

4 So Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. 5 But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"

6 And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, he *is* in your hand, but spare his life."

7 So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. 8 And he took for himself a potsherd with which to scrape himself while he sat in the midst of the ashes.

9 Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!"

10 But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Job's Three Friends

11 Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, each one came from his own place—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. For they

1:19 [a] Septuagint omits *across*.

had made an appointment together to come and mourn with him,
and to comfort him. 12 And when they raised their eyes from afar, and
did not recognize him, they lifted their voices and wept; and each one
tore his robe and sprinkled dust on his head toward heaven. 13 So they
sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and
no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that *his* grief was very great.

Job Deplores His Birth

3 After this Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his *birth.*
2 And Job spoke, and said:

3 "May the day perish on which I was born,
And the night *in which* it was said,
'A male child is conceived.'
4 May that day be darkness;
May God above not seek it,
Nor the light shine upon it.
5 May darkness and the shadow of death claim it;
May a cloud settle on it;
May the blackness of the day terrify it.
6 *As for* that night, may darkness seize it;
May it not rejoice[a] among the days of the year,
May it not come into the number of the months.
7 Oh, may that night be barren!
May no joyful shout come into it!
8 May those curse it who curse the day,
Those who are ready to arouse Leviathan.
9 May the stars of its morning be dark;
May it look for light, but *have* none,
And not see the dawning of the day;
10 Because it did not shut up the doors of my *mother's* womb,
Nor hide sorrow from my eyes.

11 "Why did I not die at birth?
Why did I *not* perish when I came from the womb?
12 Why did the knees receive me?
Or why the breasts, that I should nurse?
13 For now I would have lain still and been quiet,
I would have been asleep;
Then I would have been at rest
14 With kings and counselors of the earth,
Who built ruins for themselves,
15 Or with princes who had gold,
Who filled their houses *with* silver;
16 Or *why* was I not hidden like a stillborn child,
Like infants who never saw light?
17 There the wicked cease *from* troubling,
And there the weary are at rest.
18 *There* the prisoners rest together;
They do not hear the voice of the oppressor.

3:6 [a] Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate read *be joined.*

Life Lessons

Job 3:1–26

SITUATION
His wealth, gone. Children, dead. Health, failed. Despite these disasters, Job still held firmly to his faith. Friends came to visit and exhort him. Before they spoke, Job cursed the day he was born.

OBSERVATION
No matter how powerfully troubles crush, God's hold is more powerful.

INSPIRATION
God grants glimpses of this future state. He designed an oculus in this pantheon. Through it we see gold-drenched sunsets. Diamond-studded night skies. Rainbows so arched in splendor we have to stop and sigh. Appetizers of heaven. Nothing compares with God's crowning jewel: the New Jerusalem. Christ will descend in a city unlike any the earth has ever seen. "I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming" (Revelation 21:2). Scripture reveals its jaw-dropping dimensions: an exact square of 1,400 miles (v. 16). Large enough to contain all the land mass from the Appalachians to the California coast—Canada to Mexico. Forty times the size of England, ten times the size of France, and larger than India. And that's just the ground floor.

The city stands as tall as it does wide. Supposing God stacks floors in His metropolis as an architect would in a building, the city would have over 600,000 stories, ample space for billions of people to come and go.

Come and go they will. The gates are never closed

(v. 25). Why shut them? The enemies of God will be banished! The wicked will be quarantined, leaving only a perfect place of perfected people.

You will be you at your best forever. Even now you have your good moments. Occasional glimpses of your heavenly self. When you change your baby's diaper, forgive your boss's temper, tolerate your spouse's moodiness, you display traces of saintliness. It's the other moments that sour life. Tongue, sharp as a razor. Moods as unpredictable as Mount Saint Helens. This part wearies you.

But God impounds imperfections at His gate. His light silences the wolfman within. "There shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie" (v. 27). Pause and let this promise drench you. Can you envision your sinless existence?

Just think what Satan has taken from you, even in the last few hours. You worried about a decision and envied someone's success, dreaded a conversation and resented an interruption. He's been prowling your environs all day, pick pocketing peace, joy, belly laughs, and honest love. Rotten freebooter.

But his days are numbered. Unlike he did in the Garden of Eden, Satan will not lurk in heaven's gardens. "There shall be no more curse" (22:3). He will not tempt; hence, you will not stumble. "The world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:17).

You will be you at your best forever! (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Place your hope in God's

19 The small and great are there,
And the servant *is* free from his master.

20 "Why is light given to him who is in misery,
And life to the bitter of soul,
21 Who long for death, but it does not *come,*
And search for it more than hidden treasures;
22 Who rejoice exceedingly,
And are glad when they can find the grave?
23 *Why is light given* to a man whose way is hidden,
And whom God has hedged in?
24 For my sighing comes before I eat,[a]
And my groanings pour out like water.
25 For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me,
And what I dreaded has happened to me.
26 I am not at ease, nor am I quiet;
I have no rest, for trouble comes."

Eliphaz: Job Has Sinned

4 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said:

2 "If one attempts a word with you, will you become weary?
But who can withhold himself from speaking?
3 Surely you have instructed many,
And you have strengthened weak hands.
4 Your words have upheld him who was stumbling,
And you have strengthened the feeble knees;
5 But now it comes upon you, and you are weary;
It touches you, and you are troubled.
6 *Is* not your reverence your confidence?
And the integrity of your ways your hope?

7 "Remember now, who *ever* perished being innocent?
Or where were the upright *ever* cut off?
8 Even as I have seen,
Those who plow iniquity
And sow trouble reap the same.
9 By the blast of God they perish,
And by the breath of His anger they are consumed.
10 The roaring of the lion,
The voice of the fierce lion,
And the teeth of the young lions are broken.
11 The old lion perishes for lack of prey,
And the cubs of the lioness are scattered.

12 "Now a word was secretly brought to me,
And my ear received a whisper of it.
13 In disquieting thoughts from the visions of the night,
When deep sleep falls on men,
14 Fear came upon me, and trembling,

3:24 [a]Literally *my bread*

Which made all my bones shake.
15 Then a spirit passed before my face;
The hair on my body stood up.
16 It stood still,
But I could not discern its appearance.
A form *was* before my eyes;
There was silence;
Then I heard a voice *saying:*
17 'Can a mortal be more righteous than God?
Can a man be more pure than his Maker?
18 If He puts no trust in His servants,
If He charges His angels with error,
19 How much more those who dwell in houses of clay,
Whose foundation is in the dust,
Who are crushed before a moth?
20 They are broken in pieces from morning till evening;
They perish forever, with no one regarding.
21 Does not their own excellence go away?
They die, even without wisdom.'

Eliphaz: Job Is Chastened by God

5 "Call out now;
Is there anyone who will answer you?
And to which of the holy ones will you turn?
2 For wrath kills a foolish man,
And envy slays a simple one.
3 I have seen the foolish taking root,
But suddenly I cursed his dwelling place.
4 His sons are far from safety,
They are crushed in the gate,
And *there is* no deliverer.
5 Because the hungry eat up his harvest,
Taking it even from the thorns,[a]
And a snare snatches their substance.[b]
6 For affliction does not come from the dust,
Nor does trouble spring from the ground;
7 Yet man is born to trouble,
As the sparks fly upward.

8 "But as for me, I would seek God,
And to God I would commit my cause—
9 Who does great things, and unsearchable,
Marvelous things without number.
10 He gives rain on the earth,
And sends waters on the fields.
11 He sets on high those who are lowly,
And those who mourn are lifted to safety.
12 He frustrates the devices of the crafty,

5:5 [a]Septuagint reads *They shall not be taken from evil men;* Vulgate reads *And the armed man shall take him by violence.* [b]Septuagint reads *The might shall draw them off;* Vulgate reads *And the thirsty shall drink up their riches.*

eternal home, not heaven-on-earth. Read Hebrews 11:32–40 and Revelation 21:1—22:21 several times, and thank God for eternal rewards.

EXPLORATION
God's Power—Psalm 8; Matthew 19:26; James 1:16–18.

Life LESSONS

Job 4:1—7:21

SITUATION
Job's friends failed to understand his situation and wrongly accused him of bringing his troubles upon himself through sin. Job defended himself against these accusations.

OBSERVATION
Be careful in your assumptions. Don't judge too quickly, because only God knows all the details of every situation. And be careful in seeking revenge when you've been hurt. It will only eat away at you.

INSPIRATION
It's one thing to give grace to friends, but to give grace to those who give us grief? Could you? . . .

Perhaps you could. Some people seem graced with mercy glands. They secrete forgiveness, never harboring grudges or reciting their hurts. Others of us (most of us?) find it hard to forgive our Sauls.

We forgive the one-time offenders, mind you. We dismiss the parking-place takers, date-breakers, and even the purse snatchers.

We can move past the misdemeanors, but the felonies? The repeat offenders? The Sauls who take our youth, retirement, or health? . . .

Could you forgive the scum who hurt you?

Failure to do so could be fatal. "Wrath kills a foolish man, and envy slays a simple one" (Job 5:2).

Vengeance fixes your attention at life's ugliest moments. Score-settling freezes your stare at cruel events in your past. Is this where you want to look? Will rehearsing and reliving your hurts make you a better person? By no means. It will destroy you. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

When you've been unfairly treated and hurt, the natural response is to desire revenge. But that only ends up hurting you. What can you do to give those hurts to God?

EXPLORATION

Trust in God—Psalm 37:3–7; Proverbs 3:5, 6; Matthew 10:16–39; Romans 11:33.

So that their hands cannot carry out their plans.
13 He catches the wise in their own craftiness,
And the counsel of the cunning comes quickly upon them.
14 They meet with darkness in the daytime,
And grope at noontime as in the night.
15 But He saves the needy from the sword,
From the mouth of the mighty,
And from their hand.
16 So the poor have hope,
And injustice shuts her mouth.

17 "Behold, happy *is* the man whom God corrects;
Therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty.
18 For He bruises, but He binds up;
He wounds, but His hands make whole.
19 He shall deliver you in six troubles,
Yes, in seven no evil shall touch you.
20 In famine He shall redeem you from death,
And in war from the power of the sword.
21 You shall be hidden from the scourge of the tongue,
And you shall not be afraid of destruction when it comes.
22 You shall laugh at destruction and famine,
And you shall not be afraid of the beasts of the earth.
23 For you shall have a covenant with the stones of the field,
And the beasts of the field shall be at peace with you.
24 You shall know that your tent *is* in peace;
You shall visit your dwelling and find nothing amiss.
25 You shall also know that your descendants *shall be* many,
And your offspring like the grass of the earth.
26 You shall come to the grave at a full age,
As a sheaf of grain ripens in its season.
27 Behold, this we have searched out;
It *is* true.
Hear it, and know for yourself."

Job: My Complaint Is Just

6 Then Job answered and said:

2 "Oh, that my grief were fully weighed,
And my calamity laid with it on the scales!
3 For then it would be heavier than the sand of the sea—
Therefore my words have been rash.
4 For the arrows of the Almighty *are* within me;
My spirit drinks in their poison;
The terrors of God are arrayed against me.
5 Does the wild donkey bray when it has grass,
Or does the ox low over its fodder?
6 Can flavorless food be eaten without salt?
Or is there *any* taste in the white of an egg?
7 My soul refuses to touch them;
They *are* as loathsome food to me.

8 "Oh, that I might have my request,
That God would grant *me* the thing that I long for!
9 That it would please God to crush me,
That He would loose His hand and cut me off!
10 Then I would still have comfort;
Though in anguish I would exult,
He will not spare;
For I have not concealed the words of the Holy One.

11 "What strength do I have, that I should hope?
And what *is* my end, that I should prolong my life?
12 *Is* my strength the strength of stones?
Or is my flesh bronze?
13 *Is* my help not within me?
And is success driven from me?

14 "To him who is afflicted, kindness *should be shown* by his friend,
Even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty.
15 My brothers have dealt deceitfully like a brook,
Like the streams of the brooks that pass away,
16 Which are dark because of the ice,
And into which the snow vanishes.
17 When it is warm, they cease to flow;
When it is hot, they vanish from their place.
18 The paths of their way turn aside,
They go nowhere and perish.
19 The caravans of Tema look,
The travelers of Sheba hope for them.
20 They are disappointed because they were confident;
They come there and are confused.
21 For now you are nothing,
You see terror and are afraid.
22 Did I ever say, 'Bring *something* to me'?
Or, 'Offer a bribe for me from your wealth'?
23 Or, 'Deliver me from the enemy's hand'?
Or, 'Redeem me from the hand of oppressors'?

24 "Teach me, and I will hold my tongue;
Cause me to understand wherein I have erred.
25 How forceful are right words!
But what does your arguing prove?
26 Do you intend to rebuke *my* words,
And the speeches of a desperate one, *which are* as wind?
27 Yes, you overwhelm the fatherless,
And you undermine your friend.
28 Now therefore, be pleased to look at me;
For I would never lie to your face.
29 Yield now, let there be no injustice!
Yes, concede, my righteousness still stands!
30 Is there injustice on my tongue?
Cannot my taste discern the unsavory?

Job: My Suffering Is Comfortless

7 "*Is there* not a time of hard service for man on earth?
Are not his days also like the days of a hired man?
2 Like a servant who earnestly desires the shade,
And like a hired man who eagerly looks for his wages,
3 So I have been allotted months of futility,
And wearisome nights have been appointed to me.
4 When I lie down, I say, 'When shall I arise,
And the night be ended?'
For I have had my fill of tossing till dawn.
5 My flesh is caked with worms and dust,
My skin is cracked and breaks out afresh.

6 "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle,
And are spent without hope.
7 Oh, remember that my life *is* a breath!
My eye will never again see good.
8 The eye of him who sees me will see me no *more;*
While your eyes *are* upon me, I shall no longer *be.*
9 *As* the cloud disappears and vanishes away,
So he who goes down to the grave does not come up.
10 He shall never return to his house,
Nor shall his place know him anymore.

11 "Therefore I will not restrain my mouth;
I will speak in the anguish of my spirit;

I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.
12 *Am* I a sea, or a sea serpent,
That You set a guard over me?
13 When I say, 'My bed will comfort me,
My couch will ease my complaint,'
14 Then You scare me with dreams
And terrify me with visions,
15 So that my soul chooses strangling
And death rather than my body.[a]
16 I loathe *my life;*
I would not live forever.
Let me alone,
For my days *are but* a breath.

17 "What *is* man, that You should exalt him,
That You should set Your heart on him,
18 That You should visit him every morning,
And test him every moment?
19 How long?
Will You not look away from me,
And let me alone till I swallow my saliva?
20 Have I sinned?
What have I done to You, O watcher of men?
Why have You set me as Your target,
So that I am a burden to myself?[a]
21 Why then do You not pardon my transgression,
And take away my iniquity?
For now I will lie down in the dust,
And You will seek me diligently,
But I *will* no longer *be.*"

Bildad: Job Should Repent

8 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said:

2 "How long will you speak these *things,*
And the words of your mouth *be like* a strong wind?
3 Does God subvert judgment?
Or does the Almighty pervert justice?
4 If your sons have sinned against Him,
He has cast them away for their transgression.
5 If you would earnestly seek God
And make your supplication to the Almighty,
6 If you *were* pure and upright,
Surely now He would awake for you,
And prosper your rightful dwelling place.
7 Though your beginning was small,
Yet your latter end would increase abundantly.

8 "For inquire, please, of the former age,
And consider the things discovered by their fathers;

7:15 [a]Literally *my bones* **7:20** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint and Jewish tradition read *to You.*

Life Lessons

Job 8:1—10:22

SITUATION
Bildad told Job that his children had died because they sinned against God. Bildad believed that if Job repented, God would restore his wealth.

OBSERVATION
Bildad's ignorance proved that not all advice is worth heeding. Be careful to choose counselors who can listen as well as advise.

INSPIRATION
Some time ago Denalyn [my wife] was gone for a couple of days and left me alone with the girls. Though the time was not without the typical children's quarrels and occasional misbehavior, it went fine.

"How were the girls?" Denalyn asked when she got home.

"Good. No problem at all."

Jenna overheard my response. "We weren't good, Daddy," she objected. "We fought once, we didn't do what you said once. We weren't good. How can you say we were good?"

Jenna and I had different perceptions of what pleases a father. She thought it depended upon what she did. It didn't. We think the same about God. We think His love rises and falls with our performance. It doesn't. I don't love Jenna for what she does. I love her for whose she is. She is mine.

God loves you for the same reason. He loves you for whose you are, you are His child. It was this love that pursued the Israelites. It was this love that sent the prophets. It was this love which wrapped itself in

9 For we *were born* yesterday, and know nothing,
Because our days on earth *are* a shadow.
10 Will they not teach you and tell you,
And utter words from their heart?

11 "Can the papyrus grow up without a marsh?
Can the reeds flourish without water?
12 While it *is* yet green *and* not cut down,
It withers before any *other* plant.
13 So *are* the paths of all who forget God;
And the hope of the hypocrite shall perish,
14 Whose confidence shall be cut off,
And whose trust *is* a spider's web.
15 He leans on his house, but it does not stand.
He holds it fast, but it does not endure.
16 He grows green in the sun,
And his branches spread out in his garden.
17 His roots wrap around the rock heap,
And look for a place in the stones.
18 If he is destroyed from his place,
Then *it* will deny him, *saying,* 'I have not seen you.'

19 "Behold, this is the joy of His way,
And out of the earth others will grow.
20 Behold, God will not cast away the blameless,
Nor will He uphold the evildoers.
21 He will yet fill your mouth with laughing,
And your lips with rejoicing.
22 Those who hate you will be clothed with shame,
And the dwelling place of the wicked will come to nothing."[a]

Job: There Is No Mediator

9 Then Job answered and said:

2 "Truly I know *it is* so,
But how can a man be righteous before God?
3 If one wished to contend with Him,
He could not answer Him one time out of a thousand.
4 *God is* wise in heart and mighty in strength.
Who has hardened *himself* against Him and prospered?
5 He removes the mountains, and they do not know
When He overturns them in His anger;
6 He shakes the earth out of its place,
And its pillars tremble;
7 He commands the sun, and it does not rise;
He seals off the stars;
8 He alone spreads out the heavens,
And treads on the waves of the sea;
9 He made the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades,
And the chambers of the south;

8:22 [a]Literally *will not be*

human flesh and descended the birth canal of Mary. It was this love which walked the hard trails of Galilee and spoke to the hard hearts of the religious.

"This is not normal, Lord God," David exclaimed as he considered God's love. You are right, David. God's love is not normal love. It's not normal to love a murderer and adulterer, but God did when He loved David. It isn't normal to love a man who takes his eyes off you, but such was God's love for Solomon. It isn't normal to love people who love stone idols more than they love you, but God did when He refused to give up on Israel. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you wonder if God really cares? Do you feel like He has left you to face your problems alone? Trust God to work in your life day by day. Let God be your source of security.

EXPLORATION

God's Faithfulness—2 Kings 13:23; Isaiah 42:16; Hosea 2:19.

10 He does great things past finding out,
Yes, wonders without number.
11 If He goes by me, I do not see *Him;*
If He moves past, I do not perceive Him;
12 If He takes away, who can hinder Him?
Who can say to Him, 'What are You doing?'
13 God will not withdraw His anger,
The allies of the proud[a] lie prostrate beneath Him.

14 "How then can I answer Him,
And choose my words *to reason* with Him?
15 For though I were righteous, I could not answer Him;
I would beg mercy of my Judge.
16 If I called and He answered me,
I would not believe that He was listening to my voice.
17 For He crushes me with a tempest,
And multiplies my wounds without cause.
18 He will not allow me to catch my breath,
But fills me with bitterness.
19 If *it is a matter* of strength, indeed *He is* strong;
And if of justice, who will appoint my day *in court?*
20 Though I were righteous, my own mouth would condemn me;
Though I *were* blameless, it would prove me perverse.

21 "I am blameless, yet I do not know myself;
I despise my life.
22 It *is* all one *thing;*
Therefore I say, 'He destroys the blameless and the wicked.'
23 If the scourge slays suddenly,

9:13 [a]Hebrew *rahab*

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: Mediator Between God and Men

No one but the high priest entered the Holy of Holies. No one. To do so meant death. Two of Aaron's sons died when they entered the Holy of Holies in order to offer sacrifices to the Lord (Leviticus 16:1, 2). In no uncertain terms, the curtain declared: "This far and no farther!"

What did fifteen hundred years of a curtain-draped Holy of Holies communicate? Simple. God is holy . . . separate from us and unapproachable. Even Moses was told, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live" (Exodus 33:20). God is holy, and we are sinners, and there is a distance between us.

Isn't this our problem? We know God is good. We know we are not, and we feel far from God. The ancient words of Job are ours, "I wish there were someone to make peace between us" (Job 9:33 NCV).

Oh, but there is! Jesus hasn't left us with an unapproachable God. Yes, God is holy. Yes, we are sinful. But, yes, yes, yes, Jesus is our mediator. . . . Is not a mediator one who "goes between"? Wasn't Jesus the curtain between us and God? And wasn't His flesh torn?

What appeared to be the cruelty of man was actually the sovereignty of God. . . .

We are welcome to enter into God's presence—any day, any time. God has removed the barrier that separates us from Him. The barrier of sin? Down. He has removed the curtain. (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 716.

He laughs at the plight of the innocent.
24 The earth is given into the hand of the wicked.
He covers the faces of its judges.
If it is not *He,* who else could it be?

25 "Now my days are swifter than a runner;
They flee away, they see no good.
26 They pass by like swift ships,
Like an eagle swooping on its prey.
27 If I say, 'I will forget my complaint,
I will put off my sad face and wear a smile,'
28 I am afraid of all my sufferings;
I know that You will not hold me innocent.
29 *If* I am condemned,
Why then do I labor in vain?
30 If I wash myself with snow water,
And cleanse my hands with soap,
31 Yet You will plunge me into the pit,
And my own clothes will abhor me.

32 "For *He is* not a man, as I *am,*
That I may answer Him,
And that we should go to court together.
33 Nor is there any mediator between us,
Who may lay his hand on us both.
34 Let Him take His rod away from me,
And do not let dread of Him terrify me.
35 *Then* I would speak and not fear Him,
But it is not so with me.

Job: I Would Plead with God

10 "My soul loathes my life;
I will give free course to my complaint,
I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.
2 I will say to God, 'Do not condemn me;
Show me why You contend with me.
3 *Does it* seem good to You that You should oppress,
That You should despise the work of Your hands,
And smile on the counsel of the wicked?
4 Do You have eyes of flesh?
Or do You see as man sees?
5 *Are* Your days like the days of a mortal man?
Are Your years like the days of a mighty man,
6 That You should seek for my iniquity
And search out my sin,
7 Although You know that I am not wicked,
And *there is* no one who can deliver from Your hand?

8 'Your hands have made me and fashioned me,
An intricate unity;
Yet You would destroy me.
9 Remember, I pray, that You have made me like clay.
And will You turn me into dust again?
10 Did You not pour me out like milk,
And curdle me like cheese,
11 Clothe me with skin and flesh,
And knit me together with bones and sinews?
12 You have granted me life and favor,
And Your care has preserved my spirit.

13 'And these *things* You have hidden in Your heart;
I know that this *was* with You:
14 If I sin, then You mark me,
And will not acquit me of my iniquity.
15 If I am wicked, woe to me;
Even *if* I am righteous, I cannot lift up my head.
I am full of disgrace;
See my misery!
16 If *my head* is exalted,
You hunt me like a fierce lion,
And again You show Yourself awesome against me.
17 You renew Your witnesses against me,
And increase Your indignation toward me;
Changes and war are *ever* with me.

18 'Why then have You brought me out of the womb?
Oh, that I had perished and no eye had seen me!
19 I would have been as though I had not been.
I would have been carried from the womb to the grave.
20 Are not my days few?
Cease! Leave me alone, that I may take a little comfort,
21 Before I go *to the place from which* I shall not return,

To the land of darkness and the shadow of death,
22 A land as dark as darkness *itself,*
As the shadow of death, without any order,
Where even the light *is* like darkness.' "

Zophar Urges Job to Repent

11 Then Zophar the Naamathite answered and said:

2 "Should not the multitude of words be answered?
And should a man full of talk be vindicated?
3 Should your empty talk make men hold their peace?
And when you mock, should no one rebuke you?
4 For you have said,
'My doctrine *is* pure,
And I am clean in your eyes.'
5 But oh, that God would speak,
And open His lips against you,
6 That He would show you the secrets of wisdom!
For *they would* double *your* prudence.
Know therefore that God exacts from you
Less than your iniquity *deserves.*

7 "Can you search out the deep things of God?
Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?
8 *They are* higher than heaven— what can you do?
Deeper than Sheol— what can you know?
9 Their measure *is* longer than the earth
And broader than the sea.

10 "If He passes by, imprisons, and gathers *to judgment,*
Then who can hinder Him?
11 For He knows deceitful men;
He sees wickedness also.
Will He not then consider *it?*
12 For an empty-headed man will be wise,
When a wild donkey's colt is born a man.

13 "If you would prepare your heart,
And stretch out your hands toward Him;
14 If iniquity *were* in your hand, *and you* put it far away,
And would not let wickedness dwell in your tents;
15 Then surely you could lift up your face without spot;
Yes, you could be steadfast, and not fear;
16 Because you would forget *your* misery,
And remember *it* as waters *that have* passed away,
17 And *your* life would be brighter than noonday.
Though you were dark, you would be like the morning.
18 And you would be secure, because there is hope;
Yes, you would dig *around you, and* take your rest in safety.
19 You would also lie down, and no one would make *you* afraid;
Yes, many would court your favor.
20 But the eyes of the wicked will fail,

Life Lessons

Job 11:1—14:22

SITUATION
Unsympathetic, Zophar tried to convince Job that his troubles stemmed from a hidden sin. Zophar believed that God was punishing Job for this sin.

OBSERVATION
No one can claim complete understanding of God's ways.

INSPIRATION
Once there was an old man who lived in a tiny village. Although poor, he was envied by all, for he owned a beautiful white horse. Even the king coveted his treasure. A horse like this had never been seen before—such was its splendor, its majesty, its strength.

People offered fabulous prices for the steed, but the old man always refused. "This horse is not a horse to me," he would tell them. "It is a person. How could you sell a person? He is a friend, not a possession. How could you sell a friend?" The man was poor and the temptation was great. But he never sold the horse.

One morning he found that the horse was not in the stable. All the village came to see him. "You old fool," they scoffed, "we told you that someone would steal your horse. We warned you that you would be robbed. You are so poor. How could you ever hope to protect such a valuable animal? It would have been better to have sold him. You could have gotten whatever price you wanted. No amount would have been too high. Now the horse

And they shall not escape,
And their hope—loss of life!"

Job Answers His Critics

12 Then Job answered and said:

2 "No doubt you *are* the people,
And wisdom will die with you!
3 But I have understanding as well as you;
I *am* not inferior to you.
Indeed, who does not *know* such things as these?

4 "I am one mocked by his friends,
Who called on God, and He answered him,
The just and blameless *who is* ridiculed.
5 A lamp[a] is despised in the thought of one who is at ease;
It is made ready for those whose feet slip.
6 The tents of robbers prosper,
And those who provoke God are secure—
In what God provides by His hand.

7 "But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you;
And the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
8 Or speak to the earth, and it will teach you;
And the fish of the sea will explain to you.
9 Who among all these does not know
That the hand of the Lord has done this,
10 In whose hand *is* the life of every living thing,
And the breath of all mankind?
11 Does not the ear test words
And the mouth taste its food?
12 Wisdom *is* with aged men,
And with length of days, understanding.

13 "With Him *are* wisdom and strength,
He has counsel and understanding.
14 If He breaks *a thing* down, it cannot be rebuilt;
If He imprisons a man, there can be no release.
15 If He withholds the waters, they dry up;
If He sends them out, they overwhelm the earth.
16 With Him *are* strength and prudence.
The deceived and the deceiver *are* His.
17 He leads counselors away plundered,
And makes fools of the judges.
18 He loosens the bonds of kings,
And binds their waist with a belt.
19 He leads princes[a] away plundered,
And overthrows the mighty.
20 He deprives the trusted ones of speech,
And takes away the discernment of the elders.

12:5 [a]Or *disaster* **12:19** [a]Literally *priests,* but not in a technical sense

is gone, and you've been cursed with misfortune."

The old man responded, "Don't speak too quickly. Say only that the horse is not in the stable. That is all we know; the rest is judgment. If I've been cursed or not, how can you know? How can you judge?"

The people contested, "Don't make us out to be fools! We may not be philosophers, but great philosophy is not needed. The simple fact that your horse is gone is a curse."

The old man spoke again. "All I know is that the stable is empty, and the horse is gone. The rest I don't know. Whether it be a curse or a blessing, I can't say. All we can see is a fragment. Who can say what will come next?"

The people of the village laughed. They thought that the man was crazy. They had always thought he was a fool; if he wasn't, he would have sold the horse and lived off the money. But instead, he was a poor woodcutter, an old man still cutting firewood and dragging it out of the forest and selling it. He lived hand to mouth in the misery of poverty. Now he had proven that he was, indeed, a fool.

After fifteen days, the horse returned. He hadn't been stolen; he had run away into the forest. Not only had he returned, he had brought a dozen wild horses with him. Once again the village people gathered around the woodcutter and spoke. "Old man, you were right and we were wrong. What we thought was a curse was a blessing. Please forgive us."

The man responded, "Once again, you go too far. Say only that the horse is back. State only that a dozen horses returned

with him, but don't judge. How do you know if this is a blessing or not? You see only a fragment. Unless you know the whole story, how can you judge? You read only one page of a book. Can you judge the whole book? You read only one word of a phrase. Can you understand the entire phrase?

"Life is so vast, yet you judge all of life with one page or one word. All you have is a fragment! Don't say that this is a blessing. No one knows. I am content with what I know. I am not perturbed by what I don't."

"Maybe the old man is right," they said to one another. So they said little. But down deep, they knew he was wrong. They knew it was a blessing. Twelve wild horses had returned with one horse. With a little bit of work, the animals could be broken and trained and sold for much money.

The old man had a son, an only son. The young man began to break the wild horses. After a few days, he fell from one of the horses and broke both legs. Once again the villagers gathered around the old man and cast their judgments.

"You were right," they said. "You proved you were right. The dozen horses were not a blessing. They were a curse. Your only son has broken his legs, and now in your old age you have no one to help you. Now you are poorer than ever."

The old man spoke again. "You people are obsessed with judging. Don't go so far. Say only that my son broke his legs. Who knows if it is a blessing or a curse? No one knows. We only have a fragment. Life comes in fragments."

It so happened that a few weeks later the country

21 He pours contempt on princes,
And disarms the mighty.
22 He uncovers deep things out of darkness,
And brings the shadow of death to light.
23 He makes nations great, and destroys them;
He enlarges nations, and guides them.
24 He takes away the understanding[a] of the chiefs of the people of the earth,
And makes them wander in a pathless wilderness.
25 They grope in the dark without light,
And He makes them stagger like a drunken *man.*

13 "Behold, my eye has seen all *this,*
My ear has heard and understood it.
2 What you know, I also know;
I *am* not inferior to you.
3 But I would speak to the Almighty,
And I desire to reason with God.
4 But you forgers of lies,
You *are* all worthless physicians.
5 Oh, that you would be silent,
And it would be your wisdom!
6 Now hear my reasoning,
And heed the pleadings of my lips.
7 Will you speak wickedly for God,
And talk deceitfully for Him?
8 Will you show partiality for Him?
Will you contend for God?
9 Will it be well when He searches you out?
Or can you mock Him as one mocks a man?
10 He will surely rebuke you
If you secretly show partiality.
11 Will not His excellence make you afraid,
And the dread of Him fall upon you?
12 Your platitudes *are* proverbs of ashes,
Your defenses are defenses of clay.

13 "Hold your peace with me, and let me speak,
Then let come on me what *may!*
14 Why do I take my flesh in my teeth,
And put my life in my hands?
15 Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.
Even so, I will defend my own ways before Him.
16 He also *shall* be my salvation,
For a hypocrite could not come before Him.
17 Listen carefully to my speech,
And to my declaration with your ears.
18 See now, I have prepared *my* case,
I know that I shall be vindicated.
19 Who *is* he *who* will contend with me?
If now I hold my tongue, I perish.

12:24 [a]Literally *heart*

Job's Despondent Prayer

20 "Only two *things* do not do to me,
Then I will not hide myself from You:
21 Withdraw Your hand far from me,
And let not the dread of You make me afraid.
22 Then call, and I will answer;
Or let me speak, then You respond to me.
23 How many *are* my iniquities and sins?
Make me know my transgression and my sin.
24 Why do You hide Your face,
And regard me as Your enemy?
25 Will You frighten a leaf driven to and fro?
And will You pursue dry stubble?
26 For You write bitter things against me,
And make me inherit the iniquities of my youth.
27 You put my feet in the stocks,
And watch closely all my paths.
You set a limit[a] for the soles of my feet.

28 "*Man*[a] decays like a rotten thing,
Like a garment that is moth-eaten.

14 "Man *who is* born of woman
Is of few days and full of trouble.
2 He comes forth like a flower and fades away;
He flees like a shadow and does not continue.
3 And do You open Your eyes on such a one,
And bring me[a] to judgment with Yourself?
4 Who can bring a clean *thing* out of an unclean?
No one!
5 Since his days *are* determined,
The number of his months *is* with You;
You have appointed his limits, so that he cannot pass.
6 Look away from him that he may rest,
Till like a hired man he finishes his day.

7 "For there is hope for a tree,
If it is cut down, that it will sprout again,
And that its tender shoots will not cease.
8 Though its root may grow old in the earth,
And its stump may die in the ground,
9 *Yet* at the scent of water it will bud
And bring forth branches like a plant.
10 But man dies and is laid away;
Indeed he breathes his last
And where *is* he?
11 *As* water disappears from the sea,
And a river becomes parched and dries up,
12 So man lies down and does not rise.

13:27 [a]Literally *inscribe a print* **13:28** [a]Literally *He* **14:3** [a]Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *him.*

engaged in war against a neighboring country. All the young men of the village were required to join the army. Only the son of the old man was excluded, because he was injured. Once again the people gathered around the old man, crying and screaming because their sons had been taken. There was little chance that they would return. The enemy was strong, and the war would be a losing struggle. They would never see their sons again.

"You were right, old man," they wept. "God knows you were right. This proves it. Your son's accident was a blessing. His legs may be broken, but at least he is with you. Our sons are gone forever."

The old man spoke again. "It is impossible to talk with you. You always draw conclusions. No one knows. Say only this. Your sons had to go to war, and mine did not. No one knows if it is a blessing or a curse. No one is wise enough to know. Only God knows." (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

When someone else suffers, ask God for wisdom to be an instrument of healing. Remember that no matter what you feel, God is always good!

EXPLORATION

God Is Incomprehensible—Deuteronomy 29:29; Proverbs 25:2; Ecclesiastes 3:11; Isaiah 40:12–14; 55:8, 9; 1 Corinthians 2:16. God Is Compassionate—Exodus 22:27; 34:6; Psalm 65:3; 78:38; 103:3; 106:1.

Till the heavens *are* no more,
They will not awake
Nor be roused from their sleep.

13 "Oh, that You would hide me in the grave,
That You would conceal me until Your wrath is past,
That You would appoint me a set time, and remember me!
14 If a man dies, shall he live *again?*
All the days of my hard service I will wait,
Till my change comes.
15 You shall call, and I will answer You;
You shall desire the work of Your hands.
16 For now You number my steps,
But do not watch over my sin.
17 My transgression *is* sealed up in a bag,
And You cover[a] my iniquity.

18 "But *as* a mountain falls *and* crumbles away,
And *as* a rock is moved from its place;
19 *As* water wears away stones,
And as torrents wash away the soil of the earth;
So You destroy the hope of man.
20 You prevail forever against him, and he passes on;
You change his countenance and send him away.
21 His sons come to honor, and he does not know *it;*
They are brought low, and he does not perceive *it.*
22 But his flesh will be in pain over it,
And his soul will mourn over it."

Eliphaz Accuses Job of Folly

15 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said:
2 "Should a wise man answer with empty knowledge,
And fill himself with the east wind?
3 Should he reason with unprofitable talk,
Or by speeches with which he can do no good?
4 Yes, you cast off fear,
And restrain prayer before God.
5 For your iniquity teaches your mouth,
And you choose the tongue of the crafty.
6 Your own mouth condemns you, and not I;
Yes, your own lips testify against you.

7 "*Are* you the first man *who* was born?
Or were you made before the hills?
8 Have you heard the counsel of God?
Do you limit wisdom to yourself?
9 What do you know that we do not know?
What do you understand that *is* not in us?
10 Both the gray-haired and the aged *are* among us,

14:17 [a]Literally *plaster over*

Life Lessons

Job 15:1—17:16

SITUATION
Job's four friends gave their opinions concerning the reason for his troubles. Eliphaz argued that suffering resulted from sin. Job answered, hurt and grieved by his friend's harsh words.

OBSERVATION
Suffering is never easy to understand. Because he assumed that suffering resulted from sin, Eliphaz could not comfort his friend.

INSPIRATION
When God looks at the center of the universe, He doesn't look at you. When heaven's stagehands direct the spotlight toward the star of the show, I need no sunglasses. No light falls on me.

Lesser orbs, that's us. Appreciated. Valued. Loved dearly. But central? Essential? Pivotal? Nope. Sorry. Contrary to the Ptolemy within us, the world does not revolve around us. Our comfort is not God's priority. If it is, something's gone awry. If we are the marquee event, how do we explain flat-earth challenges like death, disease, slumping economies, or rumbling earthquakes? If God exists to please us, then shouldn't we always be pleased?

Could a Copernican shift be in order? Perhaps our place is not at the center of the universe. God does not exist to make a big deal out of us. We exist to make a big deal out of Him. It's not about you. It's not about me. It's all about Him.

The moon models our role.

What does the moon

Much older than your father.
11 *Are* the consolations of God too small for you,
And the word *spoken* gently[a] with you?
12 Why does your heart carry you away,
And what do your eyes wink at,
13 That you turn your spirit against God,
And let *such* words go out of your mouth?

14 "What *is* man, that he could be pure?
And *he who is* born of a woman, that he could be righteous?
15 If *God* puts no trust in His saints,
And the heavens are not pure in His sight,
16 How much less man, *who is* abominable and filthy,
Who drinks iniquity like water!

17 "I will tell you, hear me;
What I have seen I will declare,
18 What wise men have told,
Not hiding *anything received* from their fathers,
19 To whom alone the land was given,
And no alien passed among them:
20 The wicked man writhes with pain all *his* days,
And the number of years is hidden from the oppressor.
21 Dreadful sounds *are* in his ears;
In prosperity the destroyer comes upon him.
22 He does not believe that he will return from darkness,
For a sword is waiting for him.
23 He wanders about for bread, *saying,* 'Where *is it?*'
He knows that a day of darkness is ready at his hand.
24 Trouble and anguish make him afraid;
They overpower him, like a king ready for battle.
25 For he stretches out his hand against God,
And acts defiantly against the Almighty,
26 Running stubbornly against Him
With his strong, embossed shield.

27 "Though he has covered his face with his fatness,
And made *his* waist heavy with fat,
28 He dwells in desolate cities,
In houses which no one inhabits,
Which are destined to become ruins.
29 He will not be rich,
Nor will his wealth continue,
Nor will his possessions overspread the earth.
30 He will not depart from darkness;
The flame will dry out his branches,
And by the breath of His mouth he will go away.
31 Let him not trust in futile *things,* deceiving himself,
For futility will be his reward.
32 It will be accomplished before his time,

15:11 [a]Septuagint reads *a secret thing.*

do? She generates no light. Contrary to the lyrics of the song, this harvest moon cannot shine on. Apart from the sun, the moon is nothing more than a pitch-black, pockmarked rock. But properly positioned, the moon beams. Let her do what she was made to do, and a clod of dirt becomes a source of inspiration, yea, verily, romance. The moon reflects the greater light.

And she's happy to do so! You never hear the moon complaining. She makes no waves about making waves. Let the cow jump over her or astronauts step on her; she never objects. Even though sunning is accepted while mooning is the butt of bad jokes, you won't hear ol' Cheeseface grumble. The moon is at peace in her place. And because she is, soft light touches a dark earth.

What would happen if we accepted our place as Son reflectors? (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Suffering, as difficult as it is, needs to be regarded from God's perspective. He allows certain situations in our lives for reasons beyond our understanding. Our job is to continue to reflect His life—even through our suffering—in a weary world.

EXPLORATION

Suffering—John 9:2, 3; Romans 8:18; Philippians 1:29; Hebrews 2:18; 1 Peter 5:10.

And his branch will not be green.
33 He will shake off his unripe grape like a vine,
And cast off his blossom like an olive tree.
34 For the company of hypocrites *will be* barren,
And fire will consume the tents of bribery.
35 They conceive trouble and bring forth futility;
Their womb prepares deceit."

Job Reproaches His Pitiless Friends

16 Then Job answered and said:
2 "I have heard many such things;
Miserable comforters *are* you all!
3 Shall words of wind have an end?
Or what provokes you that you answer?
4 I also could speak as you *do,*
If your soul were in my soul's place.
I could heap up words against you,
And shake my head at you;
5 *But* I would strengthen you with my mouth,
And the comfort of my lips would relieve *your grief.*

6 "Though I speak, my grief is not relieved;
And *if* I remain silent, how am I eased?
7 But now He has worn me out;
You have made desolate all my company.
8 You have shriveled me up,
And it is a witness *against me;*
My leanness rises up against me
And bears witness to my face.
9 He tears *me* in His wrath, and hates me;
He gnashes at me with His teeth;
My adversary sharpens His gaze on me.
10 They gape at me with their mouth,
They strike me reproachfully on the cheek,
They gather together against me.
11 God has delivered me to the ungodly,
And turned me over to the hands of the wicked.
12 I was at ease, but He has shattered me;
He also has taken *me* by my neck, and shaken me to pieces;
He has set me up for His target,
13 His archers surround me.
He pierces my heart[a] and does not pity;
He pours out my gall on the ground.
14 He breaks me with wound upon wound;
He runs at me like a warrior.[a]

15 "I have sewn sackcloth over my skin,
And laid my head[a] in the dust.
16 My face is flushed from weeping,
And on my eyelids *is* the shadow of death;
17 Although no violence *is* in my hands,
And my prayer *is* pure.

18 "O earth, do not cover my blood,
And let my cry have no *resting* place!
19 Surely even now my witness *is* in heaven,
And my evidence *is* on high.
20 My friends scorn me;
My eyes pour out *tears* to God.
21 Oh, that one might plead for a man with God,
As a man *pleads* for his neighbor!
22 For when a few years are finished,
I shall go the way of no return.

Job Prays for Relief

17 "My spirit is broken,
My days are extinguished,
The grave *is ready* for me.
2 *Are* not mockers with me?
And does not my eye dwell on their provocation?

3 "Now put down a pledge for me with Yourself.
Who *is* he *who* will shake hands with me?
4 For You have hidden their heart from understanding;
Therefore You will not exalt *them.*
5 He who speaks flattery to *his* friends,
Even the eyes of his children will fail.

6 "But He has made me a byword of the people,
And I have become one in whose face men spit.
7 My eye has also grown dim because of sorrow,
And all my members *are* like shadows.
8 Upright *men* are astonished at this,

16:13 [a]Literally *kidneys* **16:14** [a]Vulgate reads *giant.* **16:15** [a]Literally *horn*

And the innocent stirs himself up against the hypocrite.
9 Yet the righteous will hold to his way,
And he who has clean hands will be stronger and stronger.

10 "But please, come back again, all of you,[a]
For I shall not find *one* wise *man* among you.
11 My days are past,
My purposes are broken off,
Even the thoughts of my heart.
12 They change the night into day;
'The light *is* near,' *they say,* in the face of darkness.
13 If I wait *for* the grave *as* my house,
If I make my bed in the darkness,
14 If I say to corruption, 'You *are* my father,'
And to the worm, 'You *are* my mother and my sister,'
15 Where then *is* my hope?
As for my hope, who can see it?
16 *Will* they go down to the gates of Sheol?
Shall *we have* rest together in the dust?"

Bildad: The Wicked Are Punished

18 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said:
2 "How long *till* you put an end to words?
Gain understanding, and afterward we will speak.
3 Why are we counted as beasts,
And regarded as stupid in your sight?
4 You who tear yourself in anger,
Shall the earth be forsaken for you?
Or shall the rock be removed from its place?

5 "The light of the wicked indeed goes out,
And the flame of his fire does not shine.
6 The light is dark in his tent,
And his lamp beside him is put out.
7 The steps of his strength are shortened,
And his own counsel casts him down.
8 For he is cast into a net by his own feet,
And he walks into a snare.
9 The net takes *him* by the heel,
And a snare lays hold of him.
10 A noose *is* hidden for him on the ground,
And a trap for him in the road.
11 Terrors frighten him on every side,
And drive him to his feet.
12 His strength is starved,
And destruction *is* ready at his side.
13 It devours patches of his skin;
The firstborn of death devours his limbs.

17:10 [a]Following some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text and Targum read *all of them*.

Life Lessons

Job 18:1—19:29

SITUATION
Because Job rejected his advice, Bildad grew frustrated. In an effort to convince Job, he told of the horrible fate of sinners. Job firmly believed that in the end God would vindicate him because of his innocence.

OBSERVATION
Job listened to Bildad, even though he knew Bildad was incorrect. Only when Bildad was finished speaking did Job answer. Job complained but he also gave one of the most beautiful statements of faith in all of the Old Testament: "For I know that my Redeemer lives . . . this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God" (19:25, 26).

INSPIRATION
Some hopes fail to deliver. Some expectations sputter and flop like an untied balloon. Remember the shining-armor boyfriend who became the heartbreaking two-timer? The fast-track promotion that landed you in the forgotten basement cubicle? The cross-country move you made to "find yourself"? You found yourself, all right. You found yourself with higher rent and fewer friends.

"If only" dreams lurk in each biography. "If only I could find a mate . . . a career . . . a bright red, affordable '65 Mustang."

The only barrier between you and bliss is an "if only." Sometimes you cross it. You find the mate or the career or the Mustang and . . . .

Life has letdowns. And how do you know Christ won't be one of them?

Honestly. Dare you believe that He gives what He promises to give? Life. Eternal life. "Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). . . .

Beer companies offer you life in their hops. Perfume makers promise new life for your romance. But don't confuse costume jewelry with God's sapphire . . . .Jesus offers *zoe*. . . . *Whereas bios, its sibling term, is life extensive, zoe is life intensive*. Jesus talks less about life's duration and more about its quality, vitality, energy, and fulfillment. What the new mate, sports car, or unexpected check could never do, Christ says, "I can." You'll love how He achieves it. He reconnects your soul with God. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Life doesn't make much sense this side of eternity. Pain and suffering are inescapable. Like Job, however, we can have faith that our Redeemer lives and we will one day see Him face to face.

EXPLORATION

Criticism—Job 6:24; 19:3–5; Proverbs 10:17; 27:6.

14 He is uprooted from the shelter of his tent,
And they parade him before the king of terrors.
15 They dwell in his tent *who are* none of his;
Brimstone is scattered on his dwelling.
16 His roots are dried out below,
And his branch withers above.
17 The memory of him perishes from the earth,
And he has no name among the renowned.[a]
18 He is driven from light into darkness,
And chased out of the world.
19 He has neither son nor posterity among his people,
Nor any remaining in his dwellings.
20 Those in the west are astonished at his day,
As those in the east are frightened.
21 Surely such *are* the dwellings of the wicked,
And this *is* the place *of him who* does not know God."

Job Trusts in His Redeemer

19 Then Job answered and said:

2 "How long will you torment my soul,
And break me in pieces with words?
3 These ten times you have reproached me;
You are not ashamed *that* you have wronged me.[a]
4 And if indeed I have erred,
My error remains with me.
5 If indeed you exalt *yourselves* against me,
And plead my disgrace against me,
6 Know then that God has wronged me,
And has surrounded me with His net.

7 "If I cry out concerning wrong, I am not heard.
If I cry aloud, *there is* no justice.
8 He has fenced up my way, so that I cannot pass;
And He has set darkness in my paths.
9 He has stripped me of my glory,
And taken the crown *from* my head.
10 He breaks me down on every side,
And I am gone;
My hope He has uprooted like a tree.
11 He has also kindled His wrath against me,
And He counts me as *one of* His enemies.
12 His troops come together
And build up their road against me;
They encamp all around my tent.

13 "He has removed my brothers far from me,
And my acquaintances are completely estranged from me.
14 My relatives have failed,

18:17 [a]Literally *before the outside,* meaning distinguished, famous **19:3** [a]A Jewish tradition reads *make yourselves strange to me.*

And my close friends have forgotten me.
15 Those who dwell in my house, and my maidservants,
Count me as a stranger;
I am an alien in their sight.
16 I call my servant, but he gives no answer;
I beg him with my mouth.
17 My breath is offensive to my wife,
And I am repulsive to the children of my own body.
18 Even young children despise me;
I arise, and they speak against me.
19 All my close friends abhor me,
And those whom I love have turned against me.
20 My bone clings to my skin and to my flesh,
And I have escaped by the skin of my teeth.

21 "Have pity on me, have pity on me, O you my friends,
For the hand of God has struck me!
22 Why do you persecute me as God *does,*
And are not satisfied with my flesh?

23 "Oh, that my words were written!
Oh, that they were inscribed in a book!
24 That they were engraved on a rock
With an iron pen and lead, forever!
25 For I know *that* my Redeemer lives,
And He shall stand at last on the earth;
26 And after my skin is destroyed, this *I know,*
That in my flesh I shall see God,
27 Whom I shall see for myself,
And my eyes shall behold, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!
28 If you should say, 'How shall we persecute him?'—
Since the root of the matter is found in me,
29 Be afraid of the sword for yourselves;
For wrath *brings* the punishment of the sword,
That you may know *there is* a judgment."

Zophar's Sermon on the Wicked Man

20 Then Zophar the Naamathite answered and said:

2 "Therefore my anxious thoughts make me answer,
Because of the turmoil within me.
3 I have heard the rebuke that reproaches me,
And the spirit of my understanding causes me to answer.

4 "Do you *not* know this of old,
Since man was placed on earth,
5 That the triumphing of the wicked is short,
And the joy of the hypocrite is *but* for a moment?
6 Though his haughtiness mounts up to the heavens,
And his head reaches to the clouds,
7 *Yet* he will perish forever like his own refuse;

Life Lessons

Job 20:1—21:34

SITUATION
Zophar joined Bildad in telling about the fate of the wicked. He assumed Job was a hypocrite.

OBSERVATION
God may allow one person to live in prosperity and health and another to die unhappy and with a bitter heart. In death, however, both are alike. We can't guess their character based on their wealth or health.

INSPIRATION
The key to forgiving others is to quit focusing on what they did to you and start focusing on what God did for you.

But, Max, that's not fair! Somebody has to pay for what he did.

I agree. Someone must pay, and Someone already has.

You don't understand, Max, this guy doesn't deserve grace. He doesn't deserve mercy. He's not worthy of forgiveness.

I'm not saying he is. But are you?

Besides, what other choice do you have? Hatred? The alternative is not appealing. Look what happens when we refuse to forgive, "His master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him" (Matthew 18:34).

Unforgiving servants always end up in prison. Prisons of anger, guilt, and depression. God doesn't have to put us in a jail; we create our own. . . .

Oh, the gradual grasp of hatred. Its damage begins like the crack in my windshield. Thanks

to a speeding truck on a gravel road, my window was chipped. With time the nick became a crack, and the crack became a winding tributary. Soon the windshield was a spider web of fragments. I couldn't drive my car without thinking of the jerk who drove too fast. Though I've never seen him, I could describe him. He is some deadbeat bum who cheats on his wife, drives with a six-pack on the seat, and keeps the television so loud the neighbors can't sleep. His carelessness blocked my vision. (Didn't do much for my view out the windshield either.)

Ever heard the expression "blind rage"?

Let me be very clear. Hatred will sour your outlook and break your back. The load of bitterness is simply too heavy. Your knees will buckle under the strain, and your heart will break beneath the weight. The mountain before you is steep enough without the heaviness of hatred on your back. The wisest choice—the only choice—is for you to drop the anger. You will never be called upon to give anyone more grace than God has already given you.

During World War I, a German soldier plunged into an out-of-the-way shell hole. There he found a wounded enemy. The fallen soldier was soaked with blood and only minutes from death. Touched by the plight of the man, the German soldier offered him water. Through this small kindness a bond was developed. The dying man pointed to his shirt pocket; the German soldier took from it a wallet and removed some family pictures. He held them so the wounded man could gaze at his loved ones one

Those who have seen him will say, 'Where is he?'
8 He will fly away like a dream, and not be found;
Yes, he will be chased away like a vision of the night.
9 The eye *that* saw him will *see him* no more,
Nor will his place behold him anymore.
10 His children will seek the favor of the poor,
And his hands will restore his wealth.
11 His bones are full of his youthful vigor,
But it will lie down with him in the dust.

12 "Though evil is sweet in his mouth,
And he hides it under his tongue,
13 *Though* he spares it and does not forsake it,
But still keeps it in his mouth,
14 *Yet* his food in his stomach turns sour;
It becomes cobra venom within him.
15 He swallows down riches
And vomits them up again;
God casts them out of his belly.
16 He will suck the poison of cobras;
The viper's tongue will slay him.
17 He will not see the streams,
The rivers flowing with honey and cream.
18 He will restore that for which he labored,
And will not swallow *it* down;
From the proceeds of business
He will get no enjoyment.
19 For he has oppressed *and* forsaken the poor,
He has violently seized a house which he did not build.

20 "Because he knows no quietness in his heart,[a]
He will not save anything he desires.
21 Nothing is left for him to eat;
Therefore his well-being will not last.
22 In his self-sufficiency he will be in distress;
Every hand of misery will come against him.
23 *When* he is about to fill his stomach,
God will cast on him the fury of His wrath,
And will rain *it* on him while he is eating.
24 He will flee from the iron weapon;
A bronze bow will pierce him through.
25 It is drawn, and comes out of the body;
Yes, the glittering *point comes* out of his gall.
Terrors *come* upon him;
26 Total darkness *is* reserved for his treasures.
An unfanned fire will consume him;
It shall go ill with him who is left in his tent.
27 The heavens will reveal his iniquity,
And the earth will rise up against him.
28 The increase of his house will depart,

20:20 [a]Literally *belly*

And his goods will flow away in the day of His wrath.
29 This *is* the portion from God for a wicked man,
The heritage appointed to him by God."

Job's Discourse on the Wicked

21 Then Job answered and said:

2 "Listen carefully to my speech,
And let this be your consolation.
3 Bear with me that I may speak,
And after I have spoken, keep mocking.

4 "As for me, *is* my complaint against man?
And if *it were,* why should I not be impatient?
5 Look at me and be astonished;
Put *your* hand over *your* mouth.
6 Even when I remember I am terrified,
And trembling takes hold of my flesh.
7 Why do the wicked live *and* become old,
Yes, become mighty in power?
8 Their descendants are established with them in their sight,
And their offspring before their eyes.
9 Their houses *are* safe from fear,
Neither *is* the rod of God upon them.
10 Their bull breeds without failure;
Their cow calves without miscarriage.
11 They send forth their little ones like a flock,
And their children dance.
12 They sing to the tambourine and harp,
And rejoice to the sound of the flute.
13 They spend their days in wealth,
And in a moment go down to the grave.[a]
14 Yet they say to God, 'Depart from us,
For we do not desire the knowledge of Your ways.
15 Who *is* the Almighty, that we should serve Him?
And what profit do we have if we pray to Him?'
16 Indeed their prosperity *is* not in their hand;
The counsel of the wicked is far from me.

17 "How often is the lamp of the wicked put out?
How often does their destruction come upon them,
The sorrows *God* distributes in His anger?
18 They are like straw before the wind,
And like chaff that a storm carries away.
19 *They say,* 'God lays up one's[a] iniquity for his children';
Let Him recompense him, that he may know *it.*
20 Let his eyes see his destruction,
And let him drink of the wrath of the Almighty.
21 For what does he care about his household after him,
When the number of his months is cut in half?

21:13 [a]Or *Sheol* **21:19** [a]Literally *his*

final time. With bullets raging over them and war all around them, these two enemies were, but for a few moments, friends.

What happened in that shell hole? Did all evil cease? Were all wrongs made right? No. What happened was simply this: Two enemies saw each other as humans in need of help. This is forgiveness. Forgiveness begins by rising above the war, looking beyond the uniform, and choosing to see the other, not as a foe or even as a friend, but simply as a fellow fighter longing to make it home safely. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you harboring bitterness toward a friend, relative, or church member? Don't allow bitterness to spring up and destroy you (cf. Hebrews 12:15). Not only will the bitterness eat you alive, it will also negatively impact your spiritual life. Ask God to give you the ability to remove any bitterness you may be feeling.

EXPLORATION

Bitterness—Proverbs 14:10; 17:25; Isaiah 38:15; Ephesians 4:31.

Life Lessons

Job 22:1—24:25

SITUATION
Eliphaz exhorted Job to admit that his sufferings resulted from sin. Job disagreed. He began to question whether or not God had treated him fairly.

OBSERVATION
Job knew he was righteous before God. Job wondered why he had been afflicted and if God cared for him.

INSPIRATION
Jesus' survival weapon of choice is Scripture. If the Bible was enough for His wilderness, shouldn't it be enough for ours? Don't miss the point here. Everything you and I need for desert survival is in the Book. We simply need to heed it.

On a trip to the United Kingdom, our family visited a castle. In the center of the garden sat a maze. Row after row of shoulder-high hedges, leading to one dead end after another. Successfully navigate the labyrinth, and discover the door to a tall tower in the center of the garden. Were you to look at our family pictures of the trip, you'd see four of our five family members standing on the top of the tower. Hmmm, someone is still on the ground. Guess who? I was stuck in the foliage. I just couldn't figure out which way to go.

Ah, but then I heard a voice from above. "Hey, Dad." I looked up to see Sara, peering through the turret at the top. "You're going the wrong way," she explained. "Back up and turn right."

Do you think I trusted her? I didn't have to. I

22 "Can *anyone* teach God knowledge,
Since He judges those on high?
23 One dies in his full strength,
Being wholly at ease and secure;
24 His pails[a] are full of milk,
And the marrow of his bones is moist.
25 Another man dies in the bitterness of his soul,
Never having eaten with pleasure.
26 They lie down alike in the dust,
And worms cover them.

27 "Look, I know your thoughts,
And the schemes *with which* you would wrong me.
28 For you say,
'Where *is* the house of the prince?
And where *is* the tent,[a]
The dwelling place of the wicked?'
29 Have you not asked those who travel the road?
And do you not know their signs?
30 For the wicked are reserved for the day of doom;
They shall be brought out on the day of wrath.
31 Who condemns his way to his face?
And who repays him *for what* he has done?
32 Yet he shall be brought to the grave,
And a vigil kept over the tomb.
33 The clods of the valley shall be sweet to him;
Everyone shall follow him,
As countless *have gone* before him.
34 How then can you comfort me with empty words,
Since falsehood remains in your answers?"

Eliphaz Accuses Job of Wickedness

22 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said:

2 "Can a man be profitable to God,
Though he who is wise may be profitable to himself?
3 *Is it* any pleasure to the Almighty that you are righteous?
Or *is it* gain *to Him* that you make your ways blameless?

4 "Is it because of your fear of Him that He corrects you,
And enters into judgment with you?
5 *Is* not your wickedness great,
And your iniquity without end?
6 For you have taken pledges from your brother for no reason,
And stripped the naked of their clothing.
7 You have not given the weary water to drink,
And you have withheld bread from the hungry.
8 But the mighty man possessed the land,

21:24 [a]Septuagint and Vulgate read *bowels;* Syriac reads *sides;* Targum reads *breasts*. **21:28** [a]Vulgate omits *the tent.*

And the honorable man dwelt in it.
9 You have sent widows away empty,
And the strength of the fatherless was crushed.
10 Therefore snares *are* all around you,
And sudden fear troubles you,
11 Or darkness *so that* you cannot see;
And an abundance of water covers you.

12 "Is not God in the height of heaven?
And see the highest stars, how lofty they are!
13 And you say, 'What does God know?
Can He judge through the deep darkness?
14 Thick clouds cover Him, so that He cannot see,
And He walks above the circle of heaven.'
15 Will you keep to the old way
Which wicked men have trod,
16 Who were cut down before their time,
Whose foundations were swept away by a flood?
17 They said to God, 'Depart from us!
What can the Almighty do to them?'[a]
18 Yet He filled their houses with good *things;*
But the counsel of the wicked is far from me.

19 "The righteous see *it* and are glad,
And the innocent laugh at them:
20 'Surely our adversaries[a] are cut down,
And the fire consumes their remnant.'

21 "Now acquaint yourself with Him, and be at peace;
Thereby good will come to you.
22 Receive, please, instruction from His mouth,
And lay up His words in your heart.
23 If you return to the Almighty, you will be built up;
You will remove iniquity far from your tents.
24 Then you will lay your gold in the dust,
And the *gold* of Ophir among the stones of the brooks.
25 Yes, the Almighty will be your gold[a]
And your precious silver;
26 For then you will have your delight in the Almighty,
And lift up your face to God.
27 You will make your prayer to Him,
He will hear you,
And you will pay your vows.
28 You will also declare a thing,
And it will be established for you;
So light will shine on your ways.
29 When they cast *you* down, and you say, 'Exaltation *will come!*'
Then He will save the humble *person.*
30 He will *even* deliver one who is not innocent;
Yes, he will be delivered by the purity of your hands."

22:17 [a]Septuagint and Syriac read *us.* **22:20** [a]Septuagint reads *substance.*
22:25 [a]The ancient versions suggest *defense;* Hebrew reads *gold* as in verse 24.

could have trusted my own instincts, consulted other confused tourists, sat and pouted and wondered why God would let this happen to me. But do you know what I did? I listened. Her vantage point was better than mine. She was above the maze. She could see what I couldn't.

Don't you think we should do the same with God? "Is not God in the height of heaven?" (Job 22:12). "The Lord is high above all nations" (Psalm 113:4). Can He not see what eludes us? Doesn't He want to get us out and bring us home? Then we should do what Jesus did.

Rely on Scripture. Doubt your doubts before you doubt your beliefs. Jesus told Satan, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). The verb *proceeds* is literally "pouring out." Its tense suggests that God is constantly and aggressively communicating with the world through His Word. God is speaking still!

Hang in there. Your time in the desert will pass. Jesus' did. "Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him" (Matthew 4:11). Till angels come to you:

Trust His Word. Just like me in the maze, you need a voice to lead you out. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

It is easy to question God in times of struggle. When you feel afflicted turn toward God, not away from Him. Seek the counsel of Christian friends and remain active in your church. And above all, study His Word—the Bible.

EXPLORATION

Suffering Has a Purpose—

Mark 8:31, 32; Luke 24:46, 47; Romans 8:17, 18; 1 Peter 2:21; 4:12, 13.

God's love can't be legislated, but it can be chosen. Choose it, won't you? For the sake of your heart.

—Max Lucado (Come Thirsty)

Job Proclaims God's Righteous Judgments

23 Then Job answered and said:

2 "Even today my complaint is bitter;
My[a] hand is listless because of my groaning.
3 Oh, that I knew where I might find Him,
That I might come to His seat!
4 I would present *my* case before Him,
And fill my mouth with arguments.
5 I would know the words *which* He would answer me,
And understand what He would say to me.
6 Would He contend with me in His great power?
No! But He would take *note* of me.
7 There the upright could reason with Him,
And I would be delivered forever from my Judge.

8 "Look, I go forward, but He is not *there,*
And backward, but I cannot perceive Him;
9 When He works on the left hand, I cannot behold *Him;*
When He turns to the right hand, I cannot see *Him.*
10 But He knows the way that I take;
When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.
11 My foot has held fast to His steps;
I have kept His way and not turned aside.
12 I have not departed from the commandment of His lips;
I have treasured the words of His mouth
More than my necessary *food.*

13 "But He *is* unique, and who can make Him change?
And *whatever* His soul desires, *that* He does.
14 For He performs *what is* appointed for me,
And many such *things are* with Him.
15 Therefore I am terrified at His presence;
When I consider *this,* I am afraid of Him.
16 For God made my heart weak,
And the Almighty terrifies me;
17 Because I was not cut off from the presence of darkness,
And He did *not* hide deep darkness from my face.

Job Complains of Violence on the Earth

24 "*Since* times are not hidden from the Almighty,
Why do those who know Him see not His days?

2 "*Some* remove landmarks;
They seize flocks violently and feed *on them;*
3 They drive away the donkey of the fatherless;
They take the widow's ox as a pledge.
4 They push the needy off the road;
All the poor of the land are forced to hide.
5 Indeed, *like* wild donkeys in the desert,

23:2 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint and Syriac read *His.*

They go out to their work, searching for food.
The wilderness *yields* food for them *and* for *their* children.
6 They gather their fodder in the field
And glean in the vineyard of the wicked.
7 They spend the night naked, without clothing,
And have no covering in the cold.
8 They are wet with the showers of the mountains,
And huddle around the rock for want of shelter.

9 "*Some* snatch the fatherless from the breast,
And take a pledge from the poor.
10 They cause *the poor* to go naked, without clothing;
And they take away the sheaves from the hungry.
11 They press out oil within their walls,
And tread winepresses, yet suffer thirst.
12 The dying groan in the city,
And the souls of the wounded cry out;
Yet God does not charge *them* with wrong.

13 "There are those who rebel against the light;
They do not know its ways
Nor abide in its paths.
14 The murderer rises with the light;
He kills the poor and needy;
And in the night he is like a thief.
15 The eye of the adulterer waits for the twilight,
Saying, 'No eye will see me';
And he disguises *his* face.
16 In the dark they break into houses
Which they marked for themselves in the daytime;
They do not know the light.
17 For the morning is the same to them as the shadow of death;
If *someone* recognizes *them,*
They are in the terrors of the shadow of death.

18 "They *should be* swift on the face of the waters,
Their portion *should be* cursed in the earth,
So that no *one would* turn into the way of their vineyards.
19 As drought and heat consume the snow waters,
So the grave[a] *consumes those who* have sinned.
20 The womb *should* forget him,
The worm *should* feed sweetly on him;
He *should* be remembered no more,
And wickedness *should* be broken like a tree.
21 For he preys on the barren *who* do not bear,
And does no good for the widow.

22 "But *God* draws the mighty away with His power;
He rises up, but no *man* is sure of life.
23 He gives them security, and they rely *on it;*
Yet His eyes *are* on their ways.
24 They are exalted for a little while,
Then they are gone.
They are brought low;
They are taken out of the way like all *others;*
They dry out like the heads of grain.

25 "Now if *it is* not *so,* who will prove me a liar,
And make my speech worth nothing?"

Bildad: How Can Man Be Righteous?

25 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said:

2 "Dominion and fear *belong* to Him;
He makes peace in His high places.
3 Is there any number to His armies?
Upon whom does His light not rise?
4 How then can man be righteous before God?
Or how can he be pure *who is* born of a woman?
5 If even the moon does not shine,
And the stars are not pure in His sight,
6 How much less man, *who is* a maggot,
And a son of man, *who is* a worm?"

24:19 [a]Or *Sheol*

Life LESSONS

Job 25:1—26:14

SITUATION
The discussion between Job and his friends continued. Bildad replied to Job's claim of innocence. Job responded sarcastically to Bildad (26:2–4) because his advice lacked consolation.

OBSERVATION
Man cannot be compared with God. God's immensity cannot be measured.

INSPIRATION
Heavens and earth. Visible and invisible. Thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities. No thing, place, or person omitted. The scale on the sea urchin. The hair on the elephant hide. The hurricane that wrecks the coast, the rain that nourishes the desert, the infant's first heartbeat, the elderly person's final breath—all can be traced back to the hand of Christ, the firstborn of creation. . . .

The Christ of the galaxies is the Christ of your Mondays. The Starmaker manages your travel schedule. Relax. You have a friend in high places. Does the child of Arnold Schwarzenegger worry about tight pickle-jar lids? Does the son of Nike founder Phil Knight sweat a broken shoestring? If the daughter of Bill Gates can't turn on her computer, does she panic?

No. Nor should you. The universe's Commander-in-Chief knows your name. He has walked your streets.

Even in heaven, Christ remains our next door Savior. Even in heaven, He is still "Christ Jesus . . . who died." The King of the universe commands comets

Job: Man's Frailty and God's Majesty

26 But Job answered and said:

2 "How have you helped *him who is* without power?
How have you saved the arm *that has* no strength?
3 How have you counseled *one who has* no wisdom?
And *how* have you declared sound advice to many?
4 To whom have you uttered words?
And whose spirit came from you?

5 "The dead tremble,
Those under the waters and those inhabiting them.
6 Sheol *is* naked before Him,
And Destruction has no covering.
7 He stretches out the north over empty space;
He hangs the earth on nothing.
8 He binds up the water in His thick clouds,
Yet the clouds are not broken under it.
9 He covers the face of *His* throne,
And spreads His cloud over it.
10 He drew a circular horizon on the face of the waters,
At the boundary of light and darkness.
11 The pillars of heaven tremble,
And are astonished at His rebuke.
12 He stirs up the sea with His power,
And by His understanding He breaks up the storm.
13 By His Spirit He adorned the heavens;
His hand pierced the fleeing serpent.
14 Indeed these *are* the mere edges of His ways,
And how small a whisper we hear of Him!
But the thunder of His power who can understand?"

Job Maintains His Integrity

27 Moreover Job continued his discourse, and said:

2 "*As* God lives, *who* has taken away my justice,
And the Almighty, *who* has made my soul bitter,
3 As long as my breath *is* in me,
And the breath of God in my nostrils,
4 My lips will not speak wickedness,
Nor my tongue utter deceit.
5 Far be it from me
That I should say you are right;
Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me.
6 My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go;
My heart shall not reproach *me* as long as I live.

7 "May my enemy be like the wicked,
And he who rises up against me like the unrighteous.
8 For what is the hope of the hypocrite,
Though he may gain *much,*
If God takes away his life?

9 Will God hear his cry
When trouble comes upon him?
10 Will he delight himself in the Almighty?
Will he always call on God?

11 "I will teach you about the hand of God;
What *is* with the Almighty I will not conceal.
12 Surely all of you have seen *it;*
Why then do you behave with complete nonsense?

13 "This is the portion of a wicked man with God,
And the heritage of oppressors, received from the Almighty:
14 If his children are multiplied, *it is* for the sword;
And his offspring shall not be satisfied with bread.
15 Those who survive him shall be buried in death,
And their[a] widows shall not weep,
16 Though he heaps up silver like dust,
And piles up clothing like clay—
17 He may pile *it* up, but the just will wear *it,*
And the innocent will divide the silver.
18 He builds his house like a moth,[a]
Like a booth *which* a watchman makes.
19 The rich man will lie down,
But not be gathered *up;*[a]
He opens his eyes,
And he *is* no more.
20 Terrors overtake him like a flood;
A tempest steals him away in the night.
21 The east wind carries him away, and he is gone;
It sweeps him out of his place.
22 It hurls against him and does not spare;
He flees desperately from its power.
23 *Men* shall clap their hands at him,
And shall hiss him out of his place.

Job's Discourse on Wisdom

28 "Surely there is a mine for silver,
And a place *where* gold is refined.
2 Iron is taken from the earth,
And copper *is* smelted *from* ore.
3 *Man* puts an end to darkness,
And searches every recess
For ore in the darkness and the shadow of death.
4 He breaks open a shaft away from people;
In places forgotten by feet
They hang far away from men;
They swing to and fro.
5 *As for* the earth, from it comes bread,

27:15 [a]Literally *his* **27:18** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Septuagint and Syriac read *spider* (compare 8:14); Targum reads *decay.* **27:19** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Septuagint and Syriac read *But shall not add* (that is, do it again); Vulgate reads *But take away nothing.*

with a human tongue and directs celestial traffic with a human hand. Still human. Still divine. Living forever through His two natures. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Although God has vast power, He still cares greatly for His children. Explore the verses below. Copy two on an index card and place the card where you will see it often. Remember that God never forgets who you are and what you are facing.

EXPLORATION
Value of People—Genesis 1:26; Job 32:8; John 3:16; 1 Peter 1:18, 19; Revelation 1:5.

Life Lessons

Job 27:1–23

SITUATION
When Job claimed that his suffering did not result from sin, Bildad accused him of pride. Job responded with a passionate declaration of his integrity.

OBSERVATION
Despite the accusations being hurled at him, Job recognized that he had a clear conscience.

INSPIRATION
Look within you. Look at your sense of right and wrong, your code of ethics. Somehow even as a child you knew it was wrong to hurt people and right to help them. Who told you? Who says? What is this magnetic pole that pulls the needles on the compass of your conscience if not God?

You aren't alone with your principles. Common virtues connect us. Every culture has frowned upon selfishness and celebrated

courage, punished dishonesty and rewarded nobility. . . . A universal standard exists. Just as a code writer connects computers with common software bundles, a common code connects people. We may violate or ignore the code, but we can't deny it. Even people who have never heard God's name sense His law within them. "There is something deep within [humanity] that echoes God's yes and no, right and wrong" (Romans 2:15 MSG). When atheists decry injustice, they can thank God for the ability to discern it. The conscience is God's fingerprint, proof of His existence (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you act differently when no one is looking? Is your conscience clear? If not, ask God to forgive your sin and help you live a life of integrity. Tell a trusted friend of any problem areas. Ask that person to hold you accountable.

EXPLORATION

Clear Conscience—Acts 24:14–16; Romans 9:1; 1 Timothy 3:9; Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 3:16.

Life Lessons

Job 28:1–28

SITUATION

Job continued his long reply to Bildad and his other friends. In his speech, Job claimed that God's wisdom supersedes all human wisdom.

OBSERVATION

Nature cannot tell everything about God's wisdom. For further insight we must look at God's Word.

But underneath it is turned up as by fire;
6 Its stones *are* the source of sapphires,
And it contains gold dust.
7 *That* path no bird knows,
Nor has the falcon's eye seen it.
8 The proud lions[a] have not trodden it,
Nor has the fierce lion passed over it.
9 He puts his hand on the flint;
He overturns the mountains at the roots.
10 He cuts out channels in the rocks,
And his eye sees every precious thing.
11 He dams up the streams from trickling;
What is hidden he brings forth to light.

12 "But where can wisdom be found?
And where *is* the place of understanding?
13 Man does not know its value,
Nor is it found in the land of the living.
14 The deep says, *'It is* not in me';
And the sea says, *'It is* not with me.'
15 It cannot be purchased for gold,
Nor can silver be weighed *for* its price.
16 It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir,
In precious onyx or sapphire.
17 Neither gold nor crystal can equal it,
Nor can it be exchanged for jewelry of fine gold.
18 No mention shall be made of coral or quartz,
For the price of wisdom *is* above rubies.
19 The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it,
Nor can it be valued in pure gold.

20 "From where then does wisdom come?
And where *is* the place of understanding?
21 It is hidden from the eyes of all living,
And concealed from the birds of the air.
22 Destruction and Death say,
'We have heard a report about it with our ears.'
23 God understands its way,
And He knows its place.
24 For He looks to the ends of the earth,
And sees under the whole heavens,
25 To establish a weight for the wind,
And apportion the waters by measure.
26 When He made a law for the rain,
And a path for the thunderbolt,
27 Then He saw *wisdom*[a] and declared it;
He prepared it, indeed, He searched it out.
28 And to man He said,
'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that *is* wisdom,
And to depart from evil *is* understanding.'"

28:8 [a]Literally *sons of pride,* figurative of the great lions **28:27** [a]Literally *it*

Job's Summary Defense

29 Job further continued his discourse, and said:

2 "Oh, that I were as *in* months past,
As *in* the days *when* God watched over me;
3 When His lamp shone upon my head,
And when by His light I walked *through* darkness;
4 Just as I was in the days of my prime,
When the friendly counsel of God *was* over my tent;
5 When the Almighty *was* yet with me,
When my children *were* around me;
6 When my steps were bathed with cream,[a]
And the rock poured out rivers of oil for me!

7 "When I went out to the gate by the city,
When I took my seat in the open square,
8 The young men saw me and hid,
And the aged arose *and* stood;
9 The princes refrained from talking,
And put *their* hand on their mouth;
10 The voice of nobles was hushed,
And their tongue stuck to the roof of their mouth.
11 When the ear heard, then it blessed me,
And when the eye saw, then it approved me;
12 Because I delivered the poor who cried out,
The fatherless and *the one who* had no helper.
13 The blessing of a perishing *man* came upon me,
And I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.
14 I put on righteousness, and it clothed me;
My justice *was* like a robe and a turban.
15 I *was* eyes to the blind,
And I *was* feet to the lame.
16 I *was* a father to the poor,
And I searched out the case *that* I did not know.
17 I broke the fangs of the wicked,
And plucked the victim from his teeth.

18 "Then I said, 'I shall die in my nest,
And multiply *my* days as the sand.
19 My root *is* spread out to the waters,
And the dew lies all night on my branch.
20 My glory *is* fresh within me,
And my bow is renewed in my hand.'

21 "*Men* listened to me and waited,
And kept silence for my counsel.
22 After my words they did not speak again,
And my speech settled on them *as dew.*
23 They waited for me *as* for the rain,

29:6 [a]Masoretic Text reads *wrath;* ancient versions and some Hebrew manuscripts read *cream* (compare 20:17).

INSPIRATION

You have a Bible? Read it.

Has any other book ever been described in this fashion: "The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12)?

"Living and powerful." The words of the Bible have life! Nouns with pulse rates. Muscular adjectives. Verbs darting back and forth across the page. God works though these words. The Bible is to God what a surgical glove is to the surgeon. He reaches through them to touch deep within you.

Haven't you felt His touch?

In a late, lonely hour, you read the words "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). The sentences comfort like a hand on your shoulder.

When anxiety termites away at your peace, someone shares this passage: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6). The words stir a sigh from your soul.

Or perhaps laziness is knocking on your door. You're considering a halfhearted effort when Colossians 3:23 comes to mind: "Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men." Such words can cut, can't they?

Put them to use. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord"

(Colossians 3:16). (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
To know more of God's wisdom, we must study the Bible. Develop a plan for daily study. Memorize one verse by rewriting it each day for a week. Reflect on your selected verse throughout the day.

EXPLORATION
God's Wisdom—Daniel 2:19–23; Romans 16:27; 1 Corinthians 1:21–24; Colossians 2:2, 3.

Life Lessons

Job 29:1—31:40

SITUATION
Job described his role in the community. He may have been a judge or city official. In his position he sought justice and cared for the needy.

OBSERVATION
Be careful to avoid pride because of your status. Job did not use his position for evil.

INSPIRATION
The little house made me think of pictures I'd seen of the United States during the Depression. Unlit kerosene lanterns (no electricity). Basins of water to wash up in (no running water). A wall lined with well-worn hoes, shovels, and picks (no modern equipment). The kitchen was a separate hut that sat next to the front door of the house. I was intrigued by the stove. It was made of hard, backed mud, molded in a long narrow piece about four feet long and three feet tall. A four or five inch trough ran down the center to hold the wood. The ever-present

And they opened their mouth wide *as* for the spring rain.
24 *If* I mocked at them, they did not believe *it,*
And the light of my countenance they did not cast down.
25 I chose the way for them, and sat as chief;
So I dwelt as a king in the army,
As one *who* comforts mourners.

30 "But now they mock at me, *men* younger than I,
Whose fathers I disdained to put with the dogs of my flock.
2 Indeed, what *profit* is the strength of their hands to me?
Their vigor has perished.
3 *They are* gaunt from want and famine,
Fleeing late to the wilderness, desolate and waste,
4 Who pluck mallow by the bushes,
And broom tree roots *for* their food.
5 They were driven out from among *men,*
They shouted at them as *at* a thief.
6 *They had* to live in the clefts of the valleys,
In caves of the earth and the rocks.
7 Among the bushes they brayed,
Under the nettles they nestled.
8 *They were* sons of fools,
Yes, sons of vile men;
They were scourged from the land.

9 "And now I am their taunting song;
Yes, I am their byword.
10 They abhor me, they keep far from me;
They do not hesitate to spit in my face.
11 Because He has loosed my[a] bowstring and afflicted me,
They have cast off restraint before me.
12 At *my* right *hand* the rabble arises;
They push away my feet,
And they raise against me their ways of destruction.
13 They break up my path,
They promote my calamity;
They have no helper.
14 They come as broad breakers;
Under the ruinous storm they roll along.
15 Terrors are turned upon me;
They pursue my honor as the wind,
And my prosperity has passed like a cloud.

16 "And now my soul is poured out because of my *plight;*
The days of affliction take hold of me.
17 My bones are pierced in me at night,
And my gnawing pains take no rest.
18 By great force my garment is disfigured;
It binds me about as the collar of my coat.

30:11 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Syriac, and Targum; Septuagint and Vulgate read *His.*

19 He has cast me into the mire,
And I have become like dust and ashes.

20 "I cry out to You, but You do not answer me;
I stand up, and You regard me.
21 *But* You have become cruel to me;
With the strength of Your hand You oppose me.
22 You lift me up to the wind and cause me to ride *on it;*
You spoil my success.
23 For I know *that* You will bring me *to* death,
And *to* the house appointed for all living.

24 "Surely He would not stretch out *His* hand against a heap of ruins,
If they cry out when He destroys *it.*
25 Have I not wept for him who was in trouble?
Has *not* my soul grieved for the poor?
26 But when I looked for good, evil came *to me;*
And when I waited for light, then came darkness.
27 My heart is in turmoil and cannot rest;
Days of affliction confront me.
28 I go about mourning, but not in the sun;
I stand up in the assembly *and* cry out for help.
29 I am a brother of jackals,
And a companion of ostriches.
30 My skin grows black and falls from me;
My bones burn with fever.
31 My harp is *turned* to mourning,
And my flute to the voice of those who weep.

31 "I have made a covenant with my eyes;
Why then should I look upon a young woman?
2 For what *is* the allotment of God from above,
And the inheritance of the Almighty from on high?
3 *Is* it not destruction for the wicked,
And disaster for the workers of iniquity?
4 Does He not see my ways,
And count all my steps?

5 "If I have walked with falsehood,
Or if my foot has hastened to deceit,
6 Let me be weighed on honest scales,
That God may know my integrity.
7 If my step has turned from the way,
Or my heart walked after my eyes,
Or if any spot adheres to my hands,
8 *Then* let me sow, and another eat;
Yes, let my harvest be rooted out.

9 "If my heart has been enticed by a woman,
Or *if* I have lurked at my neighbor's door,
10 *Then* let my wife grind for another,
And let others bow down over her.

pots cooking the beans and rice straddled the hot trough. I felt a long way from Rio.

Senor José took me on a tour through his segment of the world. For thirty-seven years he had plowed and tilled his two acres. It was obvious that he knew every hole and turn.

"I fed fourteen mouths off this land," he smiled, fingering a lettuce plant. "Where did you say you were from?"

"The U.S."

"What do you do there?"

I explained a bit about my work. . . .

"A missionary, huh? Your job must be pretty easy."

"How's that?" I asked.

"I have no trouble believing in God. After I see what He has done on my little farm, year after year, it is easy to believe." He smiled another toothless grin and yelled to his wife to bring out some beans.

As we drove home, I couldn't help thinking about Senor José. My, what a simple life. No traffic jams, airline schedules, or long lines. Far removed from Wall Street, IRS, and mortgages. Unacquainted with Johannine theology, Martin Luther, or Christian evidences.

I thought of his faith, his ability to believe, and his surprise that there were some who couldn't. I compared his faith with others I knew had more difficulty believing; a university student, a wealthy import-export man, an engineer. There was such a difference between José and the others.

His faith was rooted in the simple miracles that he witnessed every day:

A small seed becoming a towering tree.

A thin stalk pushing back the earth.

A rainbow arching in the midst of the thundercloud.

It was easy for him to believe. I can see why. Someone who witnesses God's daily display of majesty doesn't find the secret of Easter absurd. Someone who depends upon the mysteries of nature for his livelihood doesn't find it difficult to depend on an unseen God for his salvation. . . .

God's testimony. When was the last time you witnessed it? A stroll through knee-high grass in a green meadow. An hour listening to seagulls or looking at seashells on the beach. Or witnessing the shafts of sunlight brighten the snow on a crisp winter dawn. Miracles that almost match the magnitude of the empty tomb happen all around us; we only have to pay attention. (From *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Look around. What can you observe that speaks mightily about God's care and concern in your family, in nature, and in world events? Use your simple discovery in a conversation with a younger person this week. Help that person to build trust in God.

EXPLORATION

God's Care—Psalm 10:17, 18; Proverbs 23:10, 11; 1 Peter 3:15, 16.

11 For that *would be* wickedness;
Yes, it *would be* iniquity *deserving of* judgment.
12 For that *would be* a fire *that* consumes to destruction,
And would root out all my increase.

13 "If I have despised the cause of my male or female servant
When they complained against me,
14 What then shall I do when God rises up?
When He punishes, how shall I answer Him?
15 Did not He who made me in the womb make them?
Did not the same One fashion us in the womb?

16 "If I have kept the poor from *their* desire,
Or caused the eyes of the widow to fail,
17 Or eaten my morsel by myself,
So that the fatherless could not eat of it
18 (But from my youth I reared him as a father,
And from my mother's womb I guided *the widow*[a]);
19 If I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing,
Or any poor *man* without covering;
20 If his heart[a] has not blessed me,
And *if* he was *not* warmed with the fleece of my sheep;
21 If I have raised my hand against the fatherless,
When I saw I had help in the gate;
22 *Then* let my arm fall from my shoulder,
Let my arm be torn from the socket.
23 For destruction *from* God *is* a terror to me,
And because of His magnificence I cannot endure.

24 "If I have made gold my hope,
Or said to fine gold, '*You are* my confidence';
25 If I have rejoiced because my wealth *was* great,
And because my hand had gained much;
26 If I have observed the sun[a] when it shines,
Or the moon moving *in* brightness,
27 So that my heart has been secretly enticed,
And my mouth has kissed my hand;
28 This also *would be* an iniquity *deserving of* judgment,
For I would have denied God *who is* above.

29 "If I have rejoiced at the destruction of him who hated me,
Or lifted myself up when evil found him
30 (Indeed I have not allowed my mouth to sin
By asking for a curse on his soul);
31 If the men of my tent have not said,
'Who is there that has not been satisfied with his meat?'
32 (*But* no sojourner had to lodge in the street,
For I have opened my doors to the traveler[a]);

31:18 [a]Literally *her* (compare verse 16) **31:20** [a]Literally *loins* **31:26** [a]Literally *light* **31:32** [a]Following Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text reads *road*.

33 If I have covered my transgressions as Adam,
By hiding my iniquity in my bosom,
34 Because I feared the great multitude,
And dreaded the contempt of families,
So that I kept silence
And did not go out of the door—
35 Oh, that I had one to hear me!
Here is my mark.
Oh, that the Almighty would answer me,
That my Prosecutor had written a book!
36 Surely I would carry it on my shoulder,
And bind it on me *like* a crown;
37 I would declare to Him the number of my steps;
Like a prince I would approach Him.

38 "If my land cries out against me,
And its furrows weep together;
39 If I have eaten its fruit[a] without money,
Or caused its owners to lose their lives;
40 *Then* let thistles grow instead of wheat,
And weeds instead of barley."

The words of Job are ended.

Elihu Contradicts Job's Friends

32 So these three men ceased answering Job, because he *was* righteous in his own eyes. 2 Then the wrath of Elihu, the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, was aroused against Job; his wrath was aroused because he justified himself rather than God. 3 Also against his three friends his wrath was aroused, because they had found no answer, and *yet* had condemned Job.

4 Now because they *were* years older than he, Elihu had waited to speak to Job.[a] 5 When Elihu saw that *there was* no answer in the mouth of these three men, his wrath was aroused.

6 So Elihu, the son of Barachel the Buzite, answered and said:

"I *am* young in years, and you *are* very old;
Therefore I was afraid,
And dared not declare my opinion to you.
7 I said, 'Age[a] should speak,
And multitude of years should teach wisdom.'
8 But *there is* a spirit in man,
And the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding.
9 Great men[a] are not *always* wise,
Nor do the aged *always* understand justice.

10 "Therefore I say, 'Listen to me,
I also will declare my opinion.'
11 Indeed I waited for your words,

31:39 [a]Literally *its strength* **32:4** [a]Vulgate reads *till Job had spoken.* **32:7** [a]Literally *Days,* that is, years **32:9** [a]Or *Men of many years*

Life Lessons

Job 32:1—37:24

SITUATION
Elihu, the youngest of Job's friends, confronted Job. Elihu knew the advice of the other friends was wrong. Yet, he could not fully arrive at the right conclusion either.

OBSERVATION
Elihu turned Job's attention to some of God's attributes, including His eternality. Since God's years are innumerable, and since God is perfect, Job ought to turn reverently to the wonders of God's creation and turn from his rebellious ways.

INSPIRATION
Scripture says that the number of God's years is unsearchable (Job 36:26). We may search out the moment the first wave slapped on a shore or the first star burst in the sky, but we'll never find the first moment when God was God, for there is no moment when God was not God. He has never not been, for He is eternal. God is not bound by time.

But when Jesus came to the earth, all this changed. He heard for the first time a phrase never used in heaven: "Your time is up." As a child, He had to leave the Temple because His time was up. As a man, He had to leave Nazareth because His time was up. And as a Savior, He had to die because His time was up. For thirty-three years, the stallion of heaven lived in the corral of time.

That's certainly remarkable, but there is something even more so.

You want to see the brightest jewel in the

treasure of incarnation? You might think it was the fact that He lived in a body. One moment He was a boundless spirit; the next He was flesh and bones. Remember these words of King David? "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me" (Psalm 139:7–10).

Our asking "Where is God?" is like a fish asking "Where is water?" or a bird asking "Where is air?" God is everywhere! Equally present in Peking and Peoria. As active in the lives of Icelanders as in the lives of Texans. The dominion of God is "from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth" (Psalm 72:8). We cannot find a place where God is not. (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How do you react to that last sentence? How does that change your view of God? You can be comforted by the fact that God is everywhere. He cares about you no matter where you are or where you go.

EXPLORATION

God's Eternality—Psalm 29:10; 48:14; 90:2; 93:2; Jeremiah 10:10.

I listened to your reasonings, while you searched out what to say.
12 I paid close attention to you;
And surely not one of you convinced Job,
Or answered his words—
13 Lest you say,
'We have found wisdom';
God will vanquish him, not man.
14 Now he has not directed *his* words against me;
So I will not answer him with your words.

15 "They are dismayed and answer no more;
Words escape them.
16 And I have waited, because they did not speak,
Because they stood still *and* answered no more.
17 I also will answer my part,
I too will declare my opinion.
18 For I am full of words;
The spirit within me compels me.
19 Indeed my belly *is* like wine *that* has no vent;
It is ready to burst like new wineskins.
20 I will speak, that I may find relief;
I must open my lips and answer.
21 Let me not, I pray, show partiality to anyone;
Nor let me flatter any man.
22 For I do not know how to flatter,
Else my Maker would soon take me away.

Elihu Contradicts Job

33 "But please, Job, hear my speech,
And listen to all my words.
2 Now, I open my mouth;
My tongue speaks in my mouth.
3 My words *come* from my upright heart;
My lips utter pure knowledge.
4 The Spirit of God has made me,
And the breath of the Almighty gives me life.
5 If you can answer me,
Set *your words* in order before me;
Take your stand.
6 Truly I *am* as your spokesman[a] before God;
I also have been formed out of clay.
7 Surely no fear of me will terrify you,
Nor will my hand be heavy on you.

8 "Surely you have spoken in my hearing,
And I have heard the sound of *your* words, *saying,*
9 'I *am* pure, without transgression;
I *am* innocent, and *there is* no iniquity in me.
10 Yet He finds occasions against me,
He counts me as His enemy;

33:6 [a]Literally *as your mouth*

11 He puts my feet in the stocks,
He watches all my paths.'

12 "Look, *in* this you are not righteous.
I will answer you,
For God is greater than man.
13 Why do you contend with Him?
For He does not give an accounting of
any of His words.
14 For God may speak in one way, or in
another,
Yet man does not perceive it.
15 In a dream, in a vision of the night,
When deep sleep falls upon men,
While slumbering on their beds,
16 Then He opens the ears of men,
And seals their instruction.
17 In order to turn man *from his* deed,
And conceal pride from man,
18 He keeps back his soul from the Pit,
And his life from perishing by the sword.

19 "*Man* is also chastened with pain on his
bed,
And with strong *pain* in many of his
bones,
20 So that his life abhors bread,
And his soul succulent food.
21 His flesh wastes away from sight,
And his bones stick out *which once* were
not seen.
22 Yes, his soul draws near the Pit,
And his life to the executioners.

23 "If there is a messenger for him,
A mediator, one among a thousand,
To show man His uprightness,
24 Then He is gracious to him, and says,
'Deliver him from going down to the Pit;
I have found a ransom';
25 His flesh shall be young like a child's,
He shall return to the days of his youth.
26 He shall pray to God, and He will delight
in him,
He shall see His face with joy,
For He restores to man His righteousness.
27 Then he looks at men and says,
'I have sinned, and perverted *what was*
right,
And it did not profit me.'
28 He will redeem his[a] soul from going down
to the Pit,
And his[b] life shall see the light.

29 "Behold, God works all these *things,*
Twice, *in fact,* three *times* with a man,
30 To bring back his soul from the Pit,
That he may be enlightened with the light
of life.

31 "Give ear, Job, listen to me;
Hold your peace, and I will speak.
32 If you have anything to say, answer me;
Speak, for I desire to justify you.
33 If not, listen to me;
Hold your peace, and I will teach you
wisdom."

Elihu Proclaims God's Justice

34 Elihu further answered and said:
2 "Hear my words, you wise *men;*
Give ear to me, you who have knowledge.
3 For the ear tests words
As the palate tastes food.
4 Let us choose justice for ourselves;
Let us know among ourselves what *is*
good.

5 "For Job has said, 'I am righteous,
But God has taken away my justice;
6 Should I lie concerning my right?
My wound *is* incurable, *though I am*
without transgression.'
7 What man *is* like Job,
Who drinks scorn like water,
8 Who goes in company with the workers
of iniquity,
And walks with wicked men?
9 For he has said, 'It profits a man nothing
That he should delight in God.'

10 "Therefore listen to me, you men of
understanding:
Far be it from God *to do* wickedness,
And *from* the Almighty to *commit*
iniquity.
11 For He repays man *according to* his work,
And makes man to find a reward
according to *his* way.

33:28 [a]Or *my* (Kethib) [b]Or *my* (Kethib)

12 Surely God will never do wickedly,
Nor will the Almighty pervert justice.
13 Who gave Him charge over the earth?
Or who appointed *Him over* the whole world?
14 If He should set His heart on it,
If He should gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath,
15 All flesh would perish together,
And man would return to dust.

16 "If *you have* understanding, hear this;
Listen to the sound of my words:
17 Should one who hates justice govern?
Will you condemn *Him who is* most just?
18 *Is it fitting* to say to a king, '*You are* worthless,'
And to nobles, '*You are* wicked'?
19 Yet He is not partial to princes,
Nor does He regard the rich more than the poor;
For they *are* all the work of His hands.
20 In a moment they die, in the middle of the night;
The people are shaken and pass away;
The mighty are taken away without a hand.

21 "For His eyes *are* on the ways of man,
And He sees all his steps.
22 There is no darkness nor shadow of death
Where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.
23 For He need not further consider a man,
That he should go before God in judgment.
24 He breaks in pieces mighty men without inquiry,
And sets others in their place.
25 Therefore He knows their works;
He overthrows *them* in the night,
And they are crushed.
26 He strikes them as wicked *men*
In the open sight of others,
27 Because they turned back from Him,
And would not consider any of His ways,
28 So that they caused the cry of the poor to come to Him;
For He hears the cry of the afflicted.
29 When He gives quietness, who then can make trouble?
And when He hides *His* face, who then can see Him,
Whether *it is* against a nation or a man alone?—
30 That the hypocrite should not reign,
Lest the people be ensnared.

31 "For has *anyone* said to God,
'I have borne *chastening;*
I will offend no more;
32 Teach me *what* I do not see;
If I have done iniquity, I will do no more'?
33 Should He repay *it* according to your *terms,*
Just because you disavow it?
You must choose, and not I;
Therefore speak what you know.

34 "Men of understanding say to me,
Wise men who listen to me:
35 'Job speaks without knowledge,
His words *are* without wisdom.'
36 Oh, that Job were tried to the utmost,
Because *his* answers *are like* those of wicked men!
37 For he adds rebellion to his sin;
He claps *his hands* among us,
And multiplies his words against God."

Elihu Condemns Self-Righteousness

35 Moreover Elihu answered and said:
2 "Do you think this is right?
Do you say,
'My righteousness is more than God's'?
3 For you say,
'What advantage will it be to You?
What profit shall I have, more than *if* I had sinned?'

4 "I will answer you,
And your companions with you.
5 Look to the heavens and see;
And behold the clouds—
They are higher than you.
6 If you sin, what do you accomplish against Him?
Or, *if* your transgressions are multiplied, what do you do to Him?
7 If you are righteous, what do you give Him?

Or what does He receive from your hand?
8 Your wickedness affects a man such as you,
And your righteousness a son of man.

9 "Because of the multitude of oppressions they cry out;
They cry out for help because of the arm of the mighty.
10 But no one says, 'Where *is* God my Maker,
Who gives songs in the night,
11 Who teaches us more than the beasts of the earth,
And makes us wiser than the birds of heaven?'
12 There they cry out, but He does not answer,
Because of the pride of evil men.
13 Surely God will not listen to empty *talk,*
Nor will the Almighty regard it.
14 Although you say you do not see Him,
Yet justice *is* before Him, and you must wait for Him.
15 And now, because He has not punished in His anger,
Nor taken much notice of folly,
16 Therefore Job opens his mouth in vain;
He multiplies words without knowledge."

Elihu Proclaims God's Goodness

36 Elihu also proceeded and said:

2 "Bear with me a little, and I will show you
That *there are* yet words to speak on God's behalf.
3 I will fetch my knowledge from afar;
I will ascribe righteousness to my Maker.
4 For truly my words *are* not false;
One who is perfect in knowledge *is* with you.

5 "Behold, God *is* mighty, but despises *no one;*
He is mighty in strength of understanding.
6 He does not preserve the life of the wicked,
But gives justice to the oppressed.
7 He does not withdraw His eyes from the righteous;
But *they are* on the throne with kings,
For He has seated them forever,
And they are exalted.
8 And if *they are* bound in fetters,
Held in the cords of affliction,
9 Then He tells them their work and their transgressions—
That they have acted defiantly.
10 He also opens their ear to instruction,
And commands that they turn from iniquity.
11 If they obey and serve *Him,*
They shall spend their days in prosperity,
And their years in pleasures.
12 But if they do not obey,
They shall perish by the sword,
And they shall die without knowledge.[a]

13 "But the hypocrites in heart store up wrath;
They do not cry for help when He binds them.
14 They die in youth,
And their life *ends* among the perverted persons.[a]
15 He delivers the poor in their affliction,
And opens their ears in oppression.

16 "Indeed He would have brought you out of dire distress,
Into a broad place where *there is* no restraint;
And what is set on your table *would be* full of richness.
17 But you are filled with the judgment due the wicked;
Judgment and justice take hold *of you.*
18 Because *there is* wrath, *beware* lest He take you away with *one* blow;
For a large ransom would not help you avoid *it.*
19 Will your riches,
Or all the mighty forces,
Keep you from distress?
20 Do not desire the night,
When people are cut off in their place.
21 Take heed, do not turn to iniquity,

36:12 [a]Masoretic Text reads *as one without knowledge.* **36:14** [a]Hebrew *qedeshim,* that is, those practicing sodomy and prostitution in religious rituals

For you have chosen this rather than
affliction.

22 "Behold, God is exalted by His power;
Who teaches like Him?
23 Who has assigned Him His way,
Or who has said, 'You have done wrong'?

Elihu Proclaims God's Majesty

24 "Remember to magnify His work,
Of which men have sung.
25 Everyone has seen it;
Man looks on *it* from afar.

26 "Behold, God *is* great, and we do not know
Him;
Nor can the number of His years *be*
discovered.
27 For He draws up drops of water,
Which distill as rain from the mist,
28 Which the clouds drop down
And pour abundantly on man.
29 Indeed, can *anyone* understand the
spreading of clouds,
The thunder from His canopy?
30 Look, He scatters His light upon it,
And covers the depths of the sea.
31 For by these He judges the peoples;
He gives food in abundance.
32 He covers *His* hands with lightning,
And commands it to strike.
33 His thunder declares it,
The cattle also, concerning the rising
storm.

37 "At this also my heart trembles,
And leaps from its place.
2 Hear attentively the thunder of His voice,
And the rumbling *that* comes from His
mouth.
3 He sends it forth under the whole heaven,
His lightning to the ends of the earth.
4 After it a voice roars;
He thunders with His majestic voice,
And He does not restrain them when His
voice is heard.
5 God thunders marvelously with His voice;
He does great things which we cannot
comprehend.
6 For He says to the snow, 'Fall *on* the
earth';
Likewise to the gentle rain and the heavy
rain of His strength.
7 He seals the hand of every man,
That all men may know His work.
8 The beasts go into dens,
And remain in their lairs.
9 From the chamber *of the south* comes the
whirlwind,
And cold from the scattering winds *of the*
north.
10 By the breath of God ice is given,
And the broad waters are frozen.
11 Also with moisture He saturates the thick
clouds;
He scatters His bright clouds.
12 And they swirl about, being turned by His
guidance,
That they may do whatever He
commands them
On the face of the whole earth.[a]
13 He causes it to come,
Whether for correction,
Or for His land,
Or for mercy.

14 "Listen to this, O Job;
Stand still and consider the wondrous
works of God.
15 Do you know when God dispatches
them,
And causes the light of His cloud to
shine?
16 Do you know how the clouds are
balanced,
Those wondrous works of Him who is
perfect in knowledge?
17 Why *are* your garments hot,
When He quiets the earth by the south
wind?
18 With Him, have you spread out the skies,
Strong as a cast metal mirror?

19 "Teach us what we should say to Him,
For we can prepare nothing because of
the darkness.
20 Should He be told that I *wish to* speak?
If a man were to speak, surely he would
be swallowed up.
21 Even now *men* cannot look at the light
when it is bright in the skies,

37:12 [a]Literally *the world of the earth*

When the wind has passed and cleared them.
22 He comes from the north *as* golden *splendor;*
With God *is* awesome majesty.
23 *As for* the Almighty, we cannot find Him;
He is excellent in power,
In judgment and abundant justice;
He does not oppress.
24 Therefore men fear Him;
He shows no partiality to any *who are* wise of heart."

The Lord Reveals His Omnipotence to Job

38 Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said:

2 "Who *is* this who darkens counsel
By words without knowledge?
3 Now prepare yourself like a man;
I will question you, and you shall answer Me.

4 "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?
Tell *Me,* if you have understanding.
5 Who determined its measurements?
Surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?
6 To what were its foundations fastened?
Or who laid its cornerstone,
7 When the morning stars sang together,
And all the sons of God shouted for joy?

8 "Or *who* shut in the sea with doors,
When it burst forth *and* issued from the womb;
9 When I made the clouds its garment,
And thick darkness its swaddling band;
10 When I fixed My limit for it,
And set bars and doors;
11 When I said,
'This far you may come, but no farther,
And here your proud waves must stop!'

12 "Have you commanded the morning since your days *began,*
And caused the dawn to know its place,
13 That it might take hold of the ends of the earth,
And the wicked be shaken out of it?
14 It takes on form like clay *under* a seal,
And stands out like a garment.
15 From the wicked their light is withheld,
And the upraised arm is broken.

16 "Have you entered the springs of the sea?
Or have you walked in search of the depths?
17 Have the gates of death been revealed to you?
Or have you seen the doors of the shadow of death?
18 Have you comprehended the breadth of the earth?
Tell *Me,* if you know all this.

Life Lessons

Job 38:1—41:34

SITUATION
Job could not require God to give answers. Instead, through rhetorical questions, God revealed His power and perfection to Job. Job and his friends needed to decide how they would respond to God.

OBSERVATION
Elihu told Job that God was too powerful to communicate with people. God proved Elihu wrong by speaking to Job.

INSPIRATION
"God, why is this happening to me?"

So God speaks.

Out of the thunder, He speaks. Out of the sky, He speaks. For all of us who would put ditto marks under Job's question and sign our names to it, He speaks. . . .

He speaks out of the storm and into the storm, for that is where Job is. That is where God is best heard.

God's voice thunders in the room. Elihu sits down. Job sits up. And the two will never be the same again.

"Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" [Job 38:2].

Job doesn't respond.

"Prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me" [Job 38:3].

"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding" [Job 38:4].

One question would have been enough for Job, but it isn't enough for God.

"Who determined [the earth's] measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line

upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" [Job 38:5–7].

Questions rush forth. They pour like sheets of rain out of the clouds. They splatter in the chambers of Job's heart with a wildness and a beauty and a terror that leave every Job who has ever lived drenched and speechless, watching the Master redefine who is who in the universe. . . .

God's questions aren't intended to teach; they are intended to stun. They aren't intended to enlighten; they are intended to awaken. They aren't intended to stir the mind; they are intended to bend the knees. . . .

Finally Job's feeble hand lifts, and God stops long enough for him to respond. "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; yes, twice, but I will proceed no further" [Job 40:4, 5]. . . .

"Who has preceded Me, that I should pay him?" God declares in the crescendo of the wind. "Everything under the heaven is Mine" [Job 41:11].

Job couldn't argue. God owes no one anything. No explanations. No excuses. No help. God has no debt, no outstanding balance, no favors to return. God owes no man anything.

Which makes the fact that He gave us everything even more astounding. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Consider your understanding of God. Do you acknowledge God as the almighty creator and absolute authority? Can

19 "Where *is* the way *to* the dwelling of light?
And darkness, where *is* its place,
20 That you may take it to its territory,
That you may know the paths *to* its home?
21 Do you know *it,* because you were born then,
Or *because* the number of your days *is* great?

22 "Have you entered the treasury of snow,
Or have you seen the treasury of hail,
23 Which I have reserved for the time of trouble,
For the day of battle and war?
24 By what way is light diffused,
Or the east wind scattered over the earth?

25 "Who has divided a channel for the overflowing *water,*
Or a path for the thunderbolt,
26 To cause it to rain on a land *where there is* no one,
A wilderness in which *there is* no man;
27 To satisfy the desolate waste,
And cause to spring forth the growth of tender grass?
28 Has the rain a father?
Or who has begotten the drops of dew?
29 From whose womb comes the ice?
And the frost of heaven, who gives it birth?
30 The waters harden like stone,
And the surface of the deep is frozen.

31 "Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades,
Or loose the belt of Orion?
32 Can you bring out Mazzaroth[a] in its season?
Or can you guide the Great Bear with its cubs?
33 Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?
Can you set their dominion over the earth?

34 "Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,
That an abundance of water may cover you?
35 Can you send out lightnings, that they may go,
And say to you, 'Here we *are!*'?
36 Who has put wisdom in the mind?[a]
Or who has given understanding to the heart?
37 Who can number the clouds by wisdom?
Or who can pour out the bottles of heaven,
38 When the dust hardens in clumps,
And the clods cling together?

39 "Can you hunt the prey for the lion,
Or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,
40 When they crouch in *their* dens,
Or lurk in their lairs to lie in wait?

38:32 [a]Literally *Constellations* **38:36** [a]Literally *inward parts*

41 Who provides food for the raven,
When its young ones cry to God,
And wander about for lack of food?

39 "Do you know the time when the wild mountain goats bear young?
Or can you mark when the deer gives birth?
2 Can you number the months *that* they fulfill?
Or do you know the time when they bear young?
3 They bow down,
They bring forth their young,
They deliver their offspring.[a]
4 Their young ones are healthy,
They grow strong with grain;
They depart and do not return to them.

5 "Who set the wild donkey free?
Who loosed the bonds of the onager,
6 Whose home I have made the wilderness,
And the barren land his dwelling?
7 He scorns the tumult of the city;
He does not heed the shouts of the driver.
8 The range of the mountains *is* his pasture,
And he searches after every green thing.

9 "Will the wild ox be willing to serve you?
Will he bed by your manger?
10 Can you bind the wild ox in the furrow with ropes?
Or will he plow the valleys behind you?
11 Will you trust him because his strength *is* great?
Or will you leave your labor to him?
12 Will you trust him to bring home your grain,
And gather it to your threshing floor?

13 "The wings of the ostrich wave proudly,
But are her wings and pinions *like the* kindly stork's?
14 For she leaves her eggs on the ground,
And warms them in the dust;
15 She forgets that a foot may crush them,
Or that a wild beast may break them.
16 She treats her young harshly, as though *they were* not hers;
Her labor is in vain, without concern,
17 Because God deprived her of wisdom,
And did not endow her with understanding.
18 When she lifts herself on high,
She scorns the horse and its rider.

19 "Have you given the horse strength?
Have you clothed his neck with thunder?[a]
20 Can you frighten him like a locust?

39:3 [a]Literally *pangs*, figurative of offspring **39:19** [a]Or *a mane*

you accept His love and special concern for you? Today, take note of events or insights that remind you of these truths. Tonight, prayerfully reflect on God's greatness.

EXPLORATION
God and People—Genesis 1:27; Exodus 15:11; Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 103:13–18; Jeremiah 31:3; Zephaniah 3:17; Romans 3:23; Philippians 2:5–11; Hebrews 2:10–12; 1 John 3:1; Revelation 1:8.

His majestic snorting strikes terror.
21 He paws in the valley, and rejoices in *his* strength;
He gallops into the clash of arms.
22 He mocks at fear, and is not frightened;
Nor does he turn back from the sword.
23 The quiver rattles against him,
The glittering spear and javelin.
24 He devours the distance with fierceness and rage;
Nor does he come to a halt because the trumpet *has* sounded.
25 At *the blast of* the trumpet he says, 'Aha!'
He smells the battle from afar,
The thunder of captains and shouting.

26 "Does the hawk fly by your wisdom,
And spread its wings toward the south?
27 Does the eagle mount up at your command,
And make its nest on high?
28 On the rock it dwells and resides,
On the crag of the rock and the stronghold.
29 From there it spies out the prey;
Its eyes observe from afar.
30 Its young ones suck up blood;
And where the slain *are,* there it *is.*"

40 Moreover the Lord answered Job, and said:

2 "Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct *Him?*
He who rebukes God, let him answer it."

Job's Response to God

3 Then Job answered the Lord and said:

4 "Behold, I am vile;
What shall I answer You?
I lay my hand over my mouth.
5 Once I have spoken, but I will not answer;
Yes, twice, but I will proceed no further."

God's Challenge to Job

6 Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said:

7 "Now prepare yourself like a man;
I will question you, and you shall answer Me:
8 "Would you indeed annul My judgment?
Would you condemn Me that you may be justified?
9 Have you an arm like God?
Or can you thunder with a voice like His?
10 Then adorn yourself *with* majesty and splendor,
And array yourself with glory and beauty.
11 Disperse the rage of your wrath;
Look on everyone *who is* proud, and humble him.
12 Look on everyone *who is* proud, *and* bring him low;
Tread down the wicked in their place.
13 Hide them in the dust together,
Bind their faces in hidden *darkness.*
14 Then I will also confess to you
That your own right hand can save you.

15 "Look now at the behemoth,[a] which I made *along* with you;
He eats grass like an ox.
16 See now, his strength *is* in his hips,
And his power *is* in his stomach muscles.
17 He moves his tail like a cedar;
The sinews of his thighs are tightly knit.
18 His bones *are like* beams of bronze,
His ribs like bars of iron.
19 He *is* the first of the ways of God;
Only He who made him can bring near His sword.
20 Surely the mountains yield food for him,
And all the beasts of the field play there.
21 He lies under the lotus trees,
In a covert of reeds and marsh.
22 The lotus trees cover him *with* their shade;
The willows by the brook surround him.
23 Indeed the river may rage,
Yet he is not disturbed;
He is confident, though the Jordan gushes into his mouth,
24 *Though* he takes it in his eyes,
Or one pierces *his* nose with a snare.

41 "Can you draw out Leviathan[a] with a hook,
Or *snare* his tongue with a line *which* you lower?
2 Can you put a reed through his nose,
Or pierce his jaw with a hook?
3 Will he make many supplications to you?

40:15 [a] A large animal, exact identity unknown **41:1** [a] A large sea creature, exact identity unknown

Will he speak softly to you?
4 Will he make a covenant with you?
Will you take him as a servant forever?
5 Will you play with him as *with* a bird,
Or will you leash him for your maidens?
6 Will *your* companions make a banquet[a] of him?
Will they apportion him among the merchants?
7 Can you fill his skin with harpoons,
Or his head with fishing spears?
8 Lay your hand on him;
Remember the battle—
Never do it again!
9 Indeed, *any* hope of *overcoming* him is false;
Shall *one not* be overwhelmed at the sight of him?
10 No one *is so* fierce that he would dare stir him up.
Who then is able to stand against Me?
11 Who has preceded Me, that I should pay *him?*
Everything under heaven is Mine.

12 "I will not conceal[a] his limbs,
His mighty power, or his graceful proportions.
13 Who can remove his outer coat?
Who can approach *him* with a double bridle?
14 Who can open the doors of his face,
With his terrible teeth all around?
15 *His* rows of scales are *his* pride,
Shut up tightly *as with* a seal;
16 One is so near another
That no air can come between them;
17 They are joined one to another,
They stick together and cannot be parted.
18 His sneezings flash forth light,
And his eyes *are* like the eyelids of the morning.
19 Out of his mouth go burning lights;
Sparks of fire shoot out.
20 Smoke goes out of his nostrils,
As *from* a boiling pot and burning rushes.
21 His breath kindles coals,
And a flame goes out of his mouth.
22 Strength dwells in his neck,
And sorrow dances before him.
23 The folds of his flesh are joined together;
They are firm on him and cannot be moved.
24 His heart is as hard as stone,
Even as hard as the lower *millstone.*
25 When he raises himself up, the mighty are afraid;
Because of his crashings they are beside[a] themselves.
26 *Though* the sword reaches him, it cannot avail;
Nor does spear, dart, or javelin.
27 He regards iron as straw,
And bronze as rotten wood.
28 The arrow cannot make him flee;
Slingstones become like stubble to him.
29 Darts are regarded as straw;
He laughs at the threat of javelins.
30 His undersides *are* like sharp potsherds;
He spreads pointed *marks* in the mire.
31 He makes the deep boil like a pot;
He makes the sea like a pot of ointment.
32 He leaves a shining wake behind him;
One would think the deep had white hair.
33 On earth there is nothing like him,
Which is made without fear.
34 He beholds every high *thing;*
He *is* king over all the children of pride."

Job's Repentance and Restoration

42 Then Job answered the Lord and said:

2 "I know that You can do everything,
And that no purpose *of Yours* can be withheld from You.
3 *You asked,* 'Who *is* this who hides counsel without knowledge?'
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
4 Listen, please, and let me speak;
You said, 'I will question you, and you shall answer Me.'

5 "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear,
But now my eye sees You.
6 Therefore I abhor *myself,*
And repent in dust and ashes."

41:6 [a]Or *bargain over him* **41:12** [a]Literally *keep silent about* **41:25** [a]Or *purify themselves*

7 And so it was, after the Lord had spoken
these words to Job, that the Lord said to
Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is aroused
against you and your two friends, for you have
not spoken of Me *what is* right, as My servant
Job *has.* 8 Now therefore, take for yourselves
seven bulls and seven rams, go to My servant
Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offer-
ing; and My servant Job shall pray for you. For
I will accept him, lest I deal with you *according*
to your folly; because you have not spoken of
Me *what is* right, as My servant Job *has.*"
9 So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the
Shuhite *and* Zophar the Naamathite went
and did as the Lord commanded them; for
the Lord had accepted Job. 10 And the Lord
restored Job's losses[a] when he prayed for his
friends. Indeed the Lord gave Job twice as
much as he had before. 11 Then all his broth-
ers, all his sisters, and all those who had been
his acquaintances before, came to him and ate
food with him in his house; and they consoled
him and comforted him for all the adversity
that the Lord had brought upon him. Each
one gave him a piece of silver and each a ring
of gold.
12 Now the Lord blessed the latter *days* of
Job more than his beginning; for he had four-
teen thousand sheep, six thousand camels,
one thousand yoke of oxen, and one thou-
sand female donkeys. 13 He also had seven
sons and three daughters. 14 And he called
the name of the first Jemimah, the name of
the second Keziah, and the name of the third
Keren-Happuch. 15 In all the land were found
no women *so* beautiful as the daughters of
Job; and their father gave them an inheritance
among their brothers.
16 After this Job lived one hundred and forty
years, and saw his children and grandchildren
for four generations. 17 So Job died, old and
full of days.

42:10 [a]Literally *Job's captivity,* that is, what was captured from Job

Life LESSONS

Job 42:1–17

SITUATION
Job learned of God's greatness and humbly prayed. God graciously restored Job's material blessings and family.

OBSERVATION
We are better able to appreciate blessings if we endure hardship.

INSPIRATION
All his life, Job had been a good man. All his life, he had believed in God. All his life, he had discussed God, had notions about Him, and had prayed to Him.

But in the storm Job sees Him!

He sees Hope. Lover. Destroyer. Giver. Taker. Dreamer. Deliverer. Job sees the tender anger of a God whose unending love is often received with peculiar mistrust. Job stands as a blade of grass against the consuming fire of God's splendor. Job's demands melt like wax as God pulls back the curtain and heaven's light falls uneclipsed across the earth.

Job sees God.

God could turn away at this point. The gavel has been slammed, the verdict has been rendered. The Eternal Judge has spoken.

Ah, but God is not angry with Job. Firm? Yes. Direct? No doubt. Clear and convincing? Absolutely. But angry? No.

God is never irritated by the candle of an honest seeker.

If you underline any passage in the Book of Job, underline this one: "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You" [Job 42:5].

Job sees God—and that is enough.

But it isn't enough for God.

The years to come find Job once again sitting behind his mahogany desk with health restored and profits up. His lap is once again full of children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren—for four generations!

If Job ever wonders why God doesn't bring back the children He had taken away, he doesn't ask. Maybe he doesn't ask because he knows that his children could never be happier than they are in the presence of this One he has seen so briefly.

Something tells me that Job would do it all again, if that's what it took to hear God's voice and stand in the Presence. Even if God left him with his bedsores and bills, Job would do it again.

For God gave Job more than Job ever dreamed. God gave Job Himself. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
How have personal problems hindered your spiritual progress? What steps are you taking to know God better? Stand still and experience God's presence.

EXPLORATION
Knowing God—Jeremiah 9:24; John 15:13–15; 17:3; James 4:8; 1 John 2:14; 4:7, 8.

THE BOOK OF

PSALMS

INTRODUCTION

Worship. In two thousand years we haven't worked out the kinks. We still struggle for the right words in prayer. We still fumble over Scripture. We don't know when to kneel. We don't know when to stand. We don't know how to pray.

Worship is a daunting task.

For that reason, God gave us the Psalms—a praisebook for God's people. The Psalms could be titled *God's Book of Common Prayer.* This collection of hymns and petitions are strung together by one thread—a heart hungry for God.

Some are defiant. Others are reverent. Some are to be sung. Others are to be prayed. Some are intensely personal. Others are written as if the whole world would use them. Some were penned in caves, others in temples.

But all have one purpose—to give us the words to say when we stand before God.

The very variety should remind us that worship is personal. No secret formula exists. What moves you may stymie another. Each worships differently. But each should worship.

This book will help you do just that.

Here is a hint. Don't just read the prayers of these saints, pray them. Experience their energy. Imitate their honesty. Enjoy their creativity. Let these souls lead you in worship.

And let's remember. The language of worship is not polished, perfect, or advanced. It's just honest.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: A variety of writers including David, Solomon, Asaph, and even Moses

Date Written: 1440–430 B.C.

Key Themes:

- God is worthy of all worship.
- God will defend His people against their enemies.
- Being in relationship with God is the key to all joy and security.

Key Verse:

"I will praise You, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works" (Psalm 9:1).

Contents:

I. Book One 1:1—41:13
II. Book Two 42:1—72:20
III. Book Three 73:1—89:52
IV. Book Four 90:1—106:48
V. Book Five 107:1—150:6

Life LESSONS

Psalms 1:1—3:8

SITUATION
Life offers two roads to travel—the way of the righteous or the way of the wicked. God provides, protects, and nourishes the righteous.

OBSERVATION
Follow the faithful road. God's rewards supersede the benefits of the wicked. He can give you peace so that you can lay down and sleep and awake refreshed and sustained.

INSPIRATION
In August of 1930, forty-five-year-old Joseph Crater waved good-bye to friends after an evening meal in a New York restaurant, flagged down a taxi, and rode off. He was never seen or heard from again. . . .

A search of his apartment revealed one clue. It was a note attached to a check, and both were left for his wife. The check was for a sizable amount and the note simply read, "I am very weary. Love, Joe."

The note could have been nothing more than a thought at the end of a hard day. Or it could have meant a great deal more—the epitaph of a despairing man.

Weariness is tough. I don't mean the physical weariness that comes with mowing the lawn, or the mental weariness that follows a hard day of decisions and thinking. No, the weariness that attacked Judge Crater is much worse. It's the weariness that comes just before you give up. That feeling of honest desperation. It's the dispirited father,

Book One: Psalms 1—41

PSALM 1

The Way of the Righteous and the End of the Ungodly

Blessed *is* the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
2 But his delight *is* in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
3 He shall be like a tree
Planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in its season,
Whose leaf also shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper.

4 The ungodly *are* not so,
But *are* like the chaff which the wind drives away.
5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment,
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

6 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the ungodly shall perish.

PSALM 2

The Messiah's Triumph and Kingdom

Why do the nations rage,
And the people plot a vain thing?
2 The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against the Lord and against His Anointed, *saying,*
3 "Let us break Their bonds in pieces
And cast away Their cords from us."

4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;
The Lord shall hold them in derision.
5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath,
And distress them in His deep displeasure:
6 "Yet I have set My King
On My holy hill of Zion."

7 "I will declare the decree:
The Lord has said to Me,
'You *are* My Son,
Today I have begotten You.
8 Ask of Me, and I will give *You*
The nations *for* Your inheritance,
And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession.

9 You shall break[a] them with a rod of iron;
You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.' "

10 Now therefore, be wise, O kings;
Be instructed, you judges of the earth.
11 Serve the Lord with fear,
And rejoice with trembling.
12 Kiss the Son,[a] lest He[b] be angry,
And you perish *in* the way,
When His wrath is kindled but a little.
Blessed *are* all those who put their trust in Him.

PSALM 3

The Lord Helps His Troubled People

A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son.

Lord, how they have increased who trouble me!
Many *are* they who rise up against me.
2 Many *are* they who say of me,
"*There is* no help for him in God." *Selah*

3 But You, O Lord, *are* a shield for me,
My glory and the One who lifts up my head.
4 I cried to the Lord with my voice,
And He heard me from His holy hill. *Selah*

5 I lay down and slept;
I awoke, for the Lord sustained me.
6 I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people
Who have set *themselves* against me all around.

7 Arise, O Lord;
Save me, O my God!
For You have struck all my enemies on the cheekbone;
You have broken the teeth of the ungodly.
8 Salvation *belongs* to the Lord.
Your blessing *is* upon Your people. *Selah*

PSALM 4

The Safety of the Faithful

To the Chief Musician. With stringed instruments.
A Psalm of David.

Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness!
You have relieved me in *my* distress;
Have mercy on me, and hear my prayer.

2:9 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *rule* (compare Revelation 2:27). **2:12** [a]Septuagint and Vulgate read *Embrace discipline;* Targum reads *Receive instruction.* [b]Septuagint reads *the Lord.*

the abandoned child, or the retiree with time on his hands. It's that stage in life when motivation disappears; the children grow up, a job is lost, a wife dies. The result is weariness—deep, lonely, frustrated weariness.

Only one man in history has claimed to have an answer for it. He stands before all the Joseph Craters of the world with the same promise: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God has set before you two choices. If you want the Lord to protect you, provide for you, and nourish you, why pursue the path that leads to judgment? Consider the path you now are on. Are you weary, despairing? God wants to give you His peace. What changes, if any, do you need to make in order to get back on the right track?

EXPLORATION

Choices—Deuteronomy 4:25–31; 11:26–28; 30:19, 20; Joshua 24:15; 1 Kings 18:21.

2 How long, O you sons of men,
Will you turn my glory to shame?
How long will you love worthlessness
And seek falsehood? *Selah*
3 But know that the Lord has set apart[a] for Himself him who is godly;
The Lord will hear when I call to Him.

4 Be angry, and do not sin.
Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. *Selah*
5 Offer the sacrifices of righteousness,
And put your trust in the Lord.

6 *There are* many who say,
"Who will show us *any* good?"
Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us.
7 You have put gladness in my heart,
More than in the season that their grain and wine increased.
8 I will both lie down in peace, and sleep;
For You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

PSALM 5

A Prayer for Guidance

To the Chief Musician. With flutes.[a] A Psalm of David.

Give ear to my words, O Lord,
Consider my meditation.
2 Give heed to the voice of my cry,
My King and my God,
For to You I will pray.
3 My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord;
In the morning I will direct *it* to You,
And I will look up.

4 For You *are* not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness,
Nor shall evil dwell with You.
5 The boastful shall not stand in Your sight;
You hate all workers of iniquity.
6 You shall destroy those who speak falsehood;
The Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

7 But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy;
In fear of You I will worship toward Your holy temple.
8 Lead me, O Lord, in Your righteousness because of my enemies;
Make Your way straight before my face.

4:3 [a]Many Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate read *made wonderful.* **5:title** [a]Hebrew *nehiloth*

Life Lessons

Psalms 4:1—6:10

SITUATION
David rejoiced because of God's protection and peace. He encouraged others to trust in God. He knew, through deep struggle and grief, that God could sustain him.

OBSERVATION
Sorrow comes, but godly people can place their confidence in God because He listens to them and puts joy in their hearts.

INSPIRATION
Grief takes time. Give yourself some. "A wise person thinks about death" (Ecclesiastes 7:4 NCV). *Lament* may be a foreign verb in our world but not in Scripture's. Seventy percent of the psalms are poems of sorrow. Why, the Old Testament includes a book of lamentations. The son of David wrote, "Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better" (Ecclesiastes 7:3).

We spelunk life's deepest issues in the cave of sorrow. Why am I here? Where am I headed? Cemetery strolls stir hard yet vital questions. David indulged the full force of his remorse: "I am weary with my groaning; all night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears" (Psalm 6:6).

And then later: "For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, And my bones waste away" (Psalm 31:10).

Are you angry with God? Tell Him. Disgusted with God? Let Him know. Weary of telling people you feel

9 For *there is* no faithfulness in their mouth;
Their inward part *is* destruction;
Their throat *is* an open tomb;
They flatter with their tongue.
10 Pronounce them guilty, O God!
Let them fall by their own counsels;
Cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions,
For they have rebelled against You.

11 But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You;
Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them;
Let those also who love Your name
Be joyful in You.
12 For You, O Lord, will bless the righteous;
With favor You will surround him as *with* a shield.

PSALM 6

A Prayer of Faith in Time of Distress

To the Chief Musician. With stringed instruments. On an eight-stringed harp.[a] A Psalm of David.

O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your anger,
Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure.
2 Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I *am* weak;
O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled.
3 My soul also is greatly troubled;
But You, O Lord—how long?

4 Return, O Lord, deliver me!
Oh, save me for Your mercies' sake!
5 For in death *there is* no remembrance of You;
In the grave who will give You thanks?

6 I am weary with my groaning;
All night I make my bed swim;
I drench my couch with my tears.
7 My eye wastes away because of grief;
It grows old because of all my enemies.

8 Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity;
For the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping.
9 The Lord has heard my supplication;
The Lord will receive my prayer.
10 Let all my enemies be ashamed and greatly troubled;
Let them turn back *and* be ashamed suddenly.

6:title [a]Hebrew *sheminith*

fine when you don't? Tell the truth. . . .

So go ahead, face your grief. Give yourself time. Permit yourself tears. God understands. He knows the sorrow of a grave. He buried His Son. But He also knows the joy of resurrection. And, by His power, you will too. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you sorrowing? Give yourself time. Then ask God for a new sense of joy and love. When tension mounts, pause to thank God for his love.

EXPLORATION

Joy—Psalm 16:9; Matthew 5:3–12; John 15:11; Philippians 4:4.

Remember, God loves you just the way you are, but He refuses to leave you that way. He wants you to have a hope-filled heart . . . just like Jesus.

—Max Lucado (Just Like Jesus)

Life Lessons

Psalms 7:1—8:9

SITUATION
This psalm may have been David's response to slanderous accusations. Some accused him of trying to kill King Saul and seize the throne (1 Samuel 24:9–11).

OBSERVATION
Depend on God to bring justice. God judges perfectly when you are falsely accused.

INSPIRATION
I'm thinking of an old comedy routine. Joe complains to Jerry about the irritating habit of a mutual friend. The guy pokes his finger in Joe's chest as he talks. It drives Joe crazy. So he resolves to get even. He shows Jerry a small bottle of highly explosive nitroglycerin tied to a string. He explains, "I'm going to wear this around my neck, letting the bottle hang over the exact spot where I keep getting poked. Next time he sticks his finger in my chest, he'll pay for it."

Not nearly as much as Joe will, right? Enemy destroyers need two graves. "It is foolish to harbor a grudge" (Ecclesiastes 7:9 TEV). An eye for an eye becomes a neck for a neck and a job for a job and a reputation for a reputation. When does it stop? It stops when one person imitates David's God-dominated mind.

He faced Saul the way he faced Goliath—by facing God more so. When the soldiers in the cave urged David to kill Saul, look who occupied David's thoughts: "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord's anointed,

PSALM 7

Prayer and Praise for Deliverance from Enemies

A Meditation[a] of David, which he sang to the Lord concerning the words of Cush, a Benjamite.

O Lord my God, in You I put my trust;
Save me from all those who persecute me;
And deliver me,
2 Lest they tear me like a lion,
Rending *me* in pieces, while *there is* none to deliver.

3 O Lord my God, if I have done this:
If there is iniquity in my hands,
4 If I have repaid evil to him who was at peace with me,
Or have plundered my enemy without cause,
5 Let the enemy pursue me and overtake *me;*
Yes, let him trample my life to the earth,
And lay my honor in the dust. *Selah*

6 Arise, O Lord, in Your anger;
Lift Yourself up because of the rage of my enemies;
Rise up for me[a] *to* the judgment You have commanded!
7 So the congregation of the peoples shall surround You;
For their sakes, therefore, return on high.
8 The Lord shall judge the peoples;
Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness,
And according to my integrity within me.

9 Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end,
But establish the just;
For the righteous God tests the hearts and minds.
10 My defense *is* of God,
Who saves the upright in heart.

11 God *is* a just judge,
And God is angry *with the wicked* every day.
12 If he does not turn back,
He will sharpen His sword;
He bends His bow and makes it ready.
13 He also prepares for Himself instruments of death;
He makes His arrows into fiery shafts.

14 Behold, *the wicked* brings forth iniquity;
Yes, he conceives trouble and brings forth falsehood.
15 He made a pit and dug it out,
And has fallen into the ditch *which* he made.
16 His trouble shall return upon his own head,
And his violent dealing shall come down on his own crown.

7:title [a]Hebrew *Shiggaion* **7:6** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *O Lord my God.*

17 I will praise the Lord according to His righteousness,
And will sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High.

PSALM 8

The Glory of the Lord in Creation

To the Chief Musician. On the instrument of Gath.[a]
A Psalm of David.

O Lord, our Lord,
How excellent *is* Your name in all the earth,
Who have set Your glory above the heavens!

2 Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants
You have ordained strength,
Because of Your enemies,
That You may silence the enemy and the avenger.

3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,
4 What is man that You are mindful of him,
And the son of man that You visit him?
5 For You have made him a little lower than the angels,[a]
And You have crowned him with glory and honor.

6 You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands;
You have put all *things* under his feet,
7 All sheep and oxen—
Even the beasts of the field,
8 The birds of the air,
And the fish of the sea
That pass through the paths of the seas.

9 O Lord, our Lord,
How excellent *is* Your name in all the earth!

PSALM 9

Prayer and Thanksgiving for the Lord's Righteous Judgments

To the Chief Musician. To *the tune of* "Death of the Son."[a]
A Psalm of David.

I will praise *You,* O Lord, with my whole heart;
I will tell of all Your marvelous works.
2 I will be glad and rejoice in You;
I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High.

8:title [a]Hebrew *Al Gittith* **8:5** [a]Hebrew *Elohim, God;* Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Jewish tradition translate as *angels.* **9:title** [a]Hebrew *Muth Labben*

to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord" (1 Sam. 24:6).

When David called out to Saul from the mouth of the cave, "David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed down" (24:8). Then he reiterated his conviction: "I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed" (24:10).

In the second scene, during the nighttime campsite attack, David maintained his belief: "Who can stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?" (26:9).

In these two scenes I count six times when David called Saul "the Lord's anointed." Can you think of another term David might have used? *Buzzkill* and *epoxy brain* come to my mind. But not to David's. He saw, not Saul the enemy, but Saul the anointed. He refused to see his grief-giver as anything less than a child of God. David didn't applaud Saul's behavior; he just acknowledged Saul's proprietor—God. David filtered his view of Saul through the grid of heaven. The king still belonged to God, and that gave David hope. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Think of a time when you were falsely accused. What did you do? Did you turn to God as David did, or did you take matters into your own hands? The next time you face injustice, remember that God perfectly judges all difficult matters. Turn the injustices over to Him.

EXPLORATION

Justice of God—Exodus 34:6, 7; Deuteronomy 32:4; Job 34:17–30; Psalm 58:11; 140:12; Luke 18:7, 8.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 9:1—10:18

SITUATION
David and other psalmists praised God as a way of saying thank you. God helped David and the Israelites. They knew God would show His constant care in the future, too.

OBSERVATION
God is never deaf to His children's cries for help.

INSPIRATION
God's present is His presence.

His greatest gift is Himself. Sunsets steal our breath. Caribbean blue stills our hearts. Newborn babies stir our tears. Lifelong love bejewels our lives. But take all these away—strip away the sunsets, oceans, cooing babies, and tender hearts—and leave us in the Sahara, and we still have reason to dance in the sand. Why? Because God is with us.

This must be what David knew. And this must be what God wants us to know. We are never alone. Ever.

God loves you too much to leave you alone, so He hasn't. He hasn't left you alone with your fears, your worries, your disease, or your death. So kick up your heels for joy. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Whenever you face a trial, pray for God's help. Pray that God will be glorified in the situation. And thank Him for the care He shows.

EXPLORATION
God as Help—Psalm 30:10; 33:20; 54:4; 70:5; 115:9; 146:5.

3 When my enemies turn back,
They shall fall and perish at Your presence.
4 For You have maintained my right and my cause;
You sat on the throne judging in righteousness.
5 You have rebuked the nations,
You have destroyed the wicked;
You have blotted out their name forever and ever.

6 O enemy, destructions are finished forever!
And you have destroyed cities;
Even their memory has perished.
7 But the Lord shall endure forever;
He has prepared His throne for judgment.
8 He shall judge the world in righteousness,
And He shall administer judgment for the peoples in
uprightness.

9 The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed,
A refuge in times of trouble.
10 And those who know Your name will put their trust in You;
For You, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek You.

11 Sing praises to the Lord, who dwells in Zion!
Declare His deeds among the people.
12 When He avenges blood, He remembers them;
He does not forget the cry of the humble.

13 Have mercy on me, O Lord!
Consider my trouble from those who hate me,
You who lift me up from the gates of death,
14 That I may tell of all Your praise
In the gates of the daughter of Zion.
I will rejoice in Your salvation.

15 The nations have sunk down in the pit *which* they made;
In the net which they hid, their own foot is caught.
16 The Lord is known *by* the judgment He executes;
The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.
Meditation.[a] *Selah*

17 The wicked shall be turned into hell,
And all the nations that forget God.
18 For the needy shall not always be forgotten;
The expectation of the poor shall *not* perish forever.

19 Arise, O Lord,
Do not let man prevail;
Let the nations be judged in Your sight.
20 Put them in fear, O Lord,
That the nations may know themselves *to be but* men. *Selah*

9:16 [a]Hebrew *Higgaion*

PSALM 10

A Song of Confidence in God's Triumph over Evil

Why do You stand afar off, O Lord?
Why do You hide in times of trouble?
2 The wicked in *his* pride persecutes the poor;
Let them be caught in the plots which they have devised.

3 For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire;
He blesses the greedy *and* renounces the Lord.
4 The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek *God;*
God *is* in none of his thoughts.

5 His ways are always prospering;
Your judgments *are* far above, out of his sight;
As for all his enemies, he sneers at them.
6 He has said in his heart, "I shall not be moved;
I shall never be in adversity."
7 His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and oppression;
Under his tongue *is* trouble and iniquity.

8 He sits in the lurking places of the villages;
In the secret places he murders the innocent;
His eyes are secretly fixed on the helpless.
9 He lies in wait secretly, as a lion in his den;
He lies in wait to catch the poor;
He catches the poor when he draws him into his net.
10 So he crouches, he lies low,
That the helpless may fall by his strength.
11 He has said in his heart,
"God has forgotten;
He hides His face;
He will never see."

12 Arise, O Lord!
O God, lift up Your hand!
Do not forget the humble.
13 Why do the wicked renounce God?
He has said in his heart,
"You will not require *an account.*"

14 But You have seen, for You observe trouble and grief,
To repay *it* by Your hand.
The helpless commits himself to You;
You are the helper of the fatherless.
15 Break the arm of the wicked and the evil *man;*
Seek out his wickedness *until* You find none.

16 The Lord *is* King forever and ever;
The nations have perished out of His land.
17 Lord, You have heard the desire of the humble;
You will prepare their heart;

Life LESSONS

Psalms 11:1—13:6

SITUATION
David complained to God about the evil in society. The wicked seemed to prosper, while the righteous suffered.

OBSERVATION
God will punish evil at the proper time. Until then, He will protect us.

INSPIRATION
There are snowstorms. There are hailstorms. There are rainstorms. And there are doubtstorms.

Every so often a doubtstorm rolls into my life, bringing with it a flurry of questions and gale-force winds of fear. And, soon after it comes, a light shines through it.

Sometimes the storm comes after the evening news. Some nights I wonder why I watch it. Some nights it's just too much. From the steps of the Supreme Court to the steppes of South Africa, the news is usually gloomy . . . thirty minutes of bite-sized tragedies. A handsome man in a nice suit with a warm voice gives bad news. They call him the anchorman. Good title. One needs an anchor in today's tempestuous waters. . . .

Sometimes the storm comes when I'm at work. Story after story of homes that won't heal and hearts that won't melt. Always more hunger than food. More needs than money. More questions than answers. On Sundays I stand before a church with a three-point outline in my hand, thirty minutes on the clock, and a prayer on my lips. I do my best to say something that will convince

a stranger that an unseen God still hears.

And I sometimes wonder why so many hearts have to hurt.

Do you ever get doubtstorms? Some of you don't, I know. I've talked to you. Some of you have a "Davidish" optimism that defies any Goliath. I used to think that you were naive at best and phony at worst.

I don't think that anymore.

I think you are gifted. You are gifted with faith. You can see the rainbow before the clouds part. If you have this gift, then skip this chapter. I won't say anything you need to hear.

But others of you wonder . . .

You wonder what others know that you don't. You wonder if you are blind or if they are. You wonder why some proclaim "Eureka" before the gold is found. You wonder why some shout "Land ho" before the fog has cleared. You wonder how some people believe so confidently while you believe so reluctantly.

As a result, you are a bit uncomfortable on the padded pew of blind belief. Your Bible hero is Thomas. Your middle name is Caution. Your queries are the bane of every Sunday school teacher.

"If God is so good, why do I sometimes feel so bad?"

"If His message is so clear, why do I get so confused?"

"If the Father is in control, why do good people have gut-wrenching problems?"

You wonder if it is a blessing or a curse to have a mind that never rests. . . .

Tough questions. Throw-in-the-towel questions. Questions the disciples must have asked. . . .

Where is God when His world is stormy?

You will cause Your ear to hear,
18 To do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed,
That the man of the earth may oppress no more.

PSALM 11

Faith in the Lord's Righteousness

To the Chief Musician. *A Psalm* of David.

In the Lord I put my trust;
How can you say to my soul,
"Flee *as* a bird to your mountain"?
2 For look! The wicked bend *their* bow,
They make ready their arrow on the string,
That they may shoot secretly at the upright in heart.
3 If the foundations are destroyed,
What can the righteous do?

4 The Lord *is* in His holy temple,
The Lord's throne *is* in heaven;
His eyes behold,
His eyelids test the sons of men.
5 The Lord tests the righteous,
But the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates.
6 Upon the wicked He will rain coals;
Fire and brimstone and a burning wind
Shall be the portion of their cup.

7 For the Lord *is* righteous,
He loves righteousness;
His countenance beholds the upright.[a]

PSALM 12

Man's Treachery and God's Constancy

To the Chief Musician. On an eight-stringed harp.[a]
A Psalm of David.

Help, Lord, for the godly man ceases!
For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.
2 They speak idly everyone with his neighbor;
With flattering lips *and* a double heart they speak.

3 May the Lord cut off all flattering lips,
And the tongue that speaks proud things,
4 Who have said,
"With our tongue we will prevail;
Our lips *are* our own;
Who *is* lord over us?"

11:7 [a]Or *The upright beholds His countenance* **12:title** [a]Hebrew *sheminith*

5 "For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy,
Now I will arise," says the Lord;
"I will set *him* in the safety for which he yearns."

6 The words of the Lord *are* pure words,
Like silver tried in a furnace of earth,
Purified seven times.
7 You shall keep them, O Lord,
You shall preserve them from this generation forever.

8 The wicked prowl on every side,
When vileness is exalted among the sons of men.

PSALM 13

Trust in the Salvation of the Lord

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever?
How long will You hide Your face from me?
2 How long shall I take counsel in my soul,
Having sorrow in my heart daily?
How long will my enemy be exalted over me?

3 Consider *and* hear me, O Lord my God;
Enlighten my eyes,
Lest I sleep the *sleep of* death;
4 Lest my enemy say,
"I have prevailed against him";
Lest those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved.

5 But I have trusted in Your mercy;
My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation.
6 I will sing to the Lord,
Because He has dealt bountifully with me.

PSALM 14

Folly of the Godless, and God's Final Triumph

To the Chief Musician. *A Psalm* of David.

The fool has said in his heart,
"*There is* no God."
They are corrupt,
They have done abominable works,
There is none who does good.

2 The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men,
To see if there are any who understand, who seek God.
3 They have all turned aside,
They have together become corrupt;
There is none who does good,
No, not one.

Doubtstorms: turbulent days when the enemy is too big, the task too great, the future too bleak, and the answers too few. . . .

"When God comes," we doubters think, "all pain will flee. Life will be tranquil. No questions will remain."

And because we look for the bonfire, we miss the candle. Because we listen for the shout, we miss the whisper.

But it is in burnished candles that God comes, and through whispered promises He speaks: "When you doubt, look around; I am closer than you think." (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
In what ways do you see evil people prospering and righteous people suffering? Your challenge is to *wait*; to *trust* that God will one day balance the scales.

EXPLORATION
God Judges the Wicked—Zephaniah 3:1–8; Malachi 3:13—4:3; 2 Peter 2:1–13; Revelation 20.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 14:1—15:5

SITUATION
David mourned or lamented. He may have written Psalm 14 when enemies pressed in on him. David wrote Psalm 15 in a liturgical style. Perhaps he taught this song to the Israelites as a reminder of godly living.

OBSERVATION
Evil, wickedness, and deceit define how a world without God behaves. Yet the righteous live according to God's commands. Truth, justice, and a passion for

righteousness please God. His love is immeasurable.

INSPIRATION

[God] knows your limitations. He's well aware of your weaknesses. You can no more die for your own sins than you can solve world hunger. And, according to Him, that's okay. The world doesn't rely on you. God loves you too much to say it's all about you. He keeps the cosmos humming. You and I sprinkle sawdust on oil spots and thank Him for the privilege. We've peeked under the hood. We don't know what it takes to run the world, and wise are we who leave the work to His hands.

To say "It's not about you" is not to say you aren't loved; quite the contrary. It's because God loves you that it's not about you.

And, oh, what a love this is. It's "too wonderful to be measured" (Ephesians 3:19 CEV). But though we cannot measure it, may I urge you to trust it? Some of you are so hungry for such love. Those who should have loved you didn't. Those who could have loved you wouldn't. You were left at the hospital. Left at the altar. Left with an empty bed. Left with a broken heart. Left with your question, "Does anybody love me?"

Please listen to heaven's answer. As you ponder Him on the Cross, hear God assure, "I do." (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you realize how much God loves you? The fact of His amazing love should cause you to desire to live according to His high moral standards. Make decisions as if God were your companion in all your activities—for He is!

4 Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge,
Who eat up my people *as* they eat bread,
And do not call on the Lord?
5 There they are in great fear,
For God *is* with the generation of the righteous.
6 You shame the counsel of the poor,
But the Lord *is* his refuge.

7 Oh, that the salvation of Israel *would come* out of Zion!
When the Lord brings back the captivity of His people,
Let Jacob rejoice *and* Israel be glad.

PSALM 15

The Character of Those Who May Dwell with the Lord

A Psalm of David.

Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle?
Who may dwell in Your holy hill?

2 He who walks uprightly,
And works righteousness,
And speaks the truth in his heart;
3 He *who* does not backbite with his tongue,
Nor does evil to his neighbor,
Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend;
4 In whose eyes a vile person is despised,
But he honors those who fear the Lord;
He *who* swears to his own hurt and does not change;
5 He *who* does not put out his money at usury,
Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.

He who does these *things* shall never be moved.

PSALM 16

The Hope of the Faithful, and the Messiah's Victory

A Michtam of David.

Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust.

2 *O my soul,* you have said to the Lord,
"You *are* my Lord,
My goodness is nothing apart from You."
3 As for the saints who *are* on the earth,
"They are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight."

4 Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten *after* another *god;*
Their drink offerings of blood I will not offer,
Nor take up their names on my lips.

5 O Lord, *You are* the portion of my inheritance and my cup;
You maintain my lot.

6 The lines have fallen to me in pleasant *places;*
Yes, I have a good inheritance.

7 I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel;
My heart also instructs me in the night seasons.
8 I have set the Lord always before me;
Because *He is* at my right hand I shall not be moved.

9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices;
My flesh also will rest in hope.
10 For You will not leave my soul in Sheol,
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.
11 You will show me the path of life;
In Your presence *is* fullness of joy;
At Your right hand *are* pleasures forevermore.

PSALM 17

Prayer with Confidence in Final Salvation

A Prayer of David.

Hear a just cause, O Lord,
Attend to my cry;
Give ear to my prayer *which is* not from deceitful lips.
2 Let my vindication come from Your presence;
Let Your eyes look on the things that are upright.

3 You have tested my heart;
You have visited *me* in the night;
You have tried me and have found nothing;
I have purposed that my mouth shall not transgress.
4 Concerning the works of men,
By the word of Your lips,
I have kept away from the paths of the destroyer.
5 Uphold my steps in Your paths,
That my footsteps may not slip.

6 I have called upon You, for You will hear me, O God;
Incline Your ear to me, *and* hear my speech.
7 Show Your marvelous lovingkindness by Your right hand,
O You who save those who trust *in You*
From those who rise up *against them.*
8 Keep me as the apple of Your eye;
Hide me under the shadow of Your wings,
9 From the wicked who oppress me,
From my deadly enemies who surround me.

10 They have closed up their fat *hearts;*
With their mouths they speak proudly.
11 They have now surrounded us in our steps;
They have set their eyes, crouching down to the earth,

EXPLORATION
Righteousness—Daniel 4:27; Hosea 10:12; Matthew 5:20; Ephesians 6:14; Philippians 1:9–11; 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Peter 3:11.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 16:1—17:15

SITUATION
David's prayers revealed his trust in and reliance upon God, both in this life and in the life to come.

OBSERVATION
David's trust in God inspires Christians today.

INSPIRATION
Jesus never missed the mark.

Equally amazing, He never distances Himself from those who do.

Just read the first verse of Matthew's Gospel. Jesus knew David's ways. He witnessed the adultery, winced at the murders, and grieved at the dishonesty. But David's failures didn't change Jesus' relation to David. The initial verse of the first chapter of the first Gospel calls Christ "the Son of David" (Matthew 1:1). The title contains no disclaimers, explanations, or asterisks. I'd have added a footnote: "This connection in no way offers tacit approval to David's behavior." No such words appear. David blew it. Jesus knew it. But he claimed David anyway.

He did for David what my father did for my brother and me.

Back in our elementary school days, my brother received a BB gun for Christmas. We immediately set up a firing range in the backyard and spent the

afternoon shooting at an archery target. Growing bored with the ease of hitting the circle, my brother sent me to fetch a hand mirror. He placed the gun backward on his shoulder, spotted the archery bull's-eye in the mirror, and did his best Buffalo Bill imitation. But he missed the target. He also missed the storehouse behind the target and the fence behind the storehouse. We had no idea where the BB pellet flew. Our neighbor across the alley knew, however. He soon appeared at the back fence, asking who had shot the BB gun and who was going to pay for his sliding-glass door.

At this point I disowned my brother. I changed my last name and claimed to be a holiday visitor from Canada. My father was more noble than I. Hearing the noise, he appeared in the backyard, freshly rousted from his Christmas Day nap, and talked with the neighbor.

Among his words were these:

"Yes, they are my children."

"Yes, I'll pay for their mistakes."

Christ says the same about you. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Find an enticing jigsaw puzzle and try putting it together. As you experience the challenge and frustration of finding the right pieces, stop and read these psalms again. Note the connections you can make with these psalms, the puzzle, and your life. Rest in the fact that God has already put together the "big picture" of your life.

EXPLORATION

Trust—Proverbs 3:5–7; Victory—1 Timothy 1:18; 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7.

12 As a lion is eager to tear his prey,
And like a young lion lurking in secret places.

13 Arise, O Lord,
Confront him, cast him down;
Deliver my life from the wicked with Your sword,
14 With Your hand from men, O Lord,
From men of the world *who have* their portion in *this* life,
And whose belly You fill with Your hidden treasure.
They are satisfied with children,
And leave the rest of their *possession* for their babes.

15 As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness;
I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.

PSALM 18

God the Sovereign Savior

To the Chief Musician. *A Psalm* of David the servant of the Lord, who spoke to the Lord the words of this song on the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. And he said:

I will love You, O Lord, my strength.
2 The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer;
My God, my strength, in whom I will trust;
My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.
3 I will call upon the Lord, *who is worthy* to be praised;
So shall I be saved from my enemies.

4 The pangs of death surrounded me,
And the floods of ungodliness made me afraid.
5 The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me;
The snares of death confronted me.
6 In my distress I called upon the Lord,
And cried out to my God;
He heard my voice from His temple,
And my cry came before Him, *even* to His ears.

7 Then the earth shook and trembled;
The foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken,
Because He was angry.
8 Smoke went up from His nostrils,
And devouring fire from His mouth;
Coals were kindled by it.
9 He bowed the heavens also, and came down
With darkness under His feet.
10 And He rode upon a cherub, and flew;
He flew upon the wings of the wind.
11 He made darkness His secret place;
His canopy around Him *was* dark waters

And thick clouds of the skies.
12 From the brightness before Him,
His thick clouds passed with hailstones and coals of fire.

13 The Lord thundered from heaven,
And the Most High uttered His voice,
Hailstones and coals of fire.[a]
14 He sent out His arrows and scattered the foe,
Lightnings in abundance, and He vanquished them.
15 Then the channels of the sea were seen,
The foundations of the world were uncovered
At Your rebuke, O Lord,
At the blast of the breath of Your nostrils.

16 He sent from above, He took me;
He drew me out of many waters.
17 He delivered me from my strong enemy,
From those who hated me,
For they were too strong for me.
18 They confronted me in the day of my calamity,
But the Lord was my support.
19 He also brought me out into a broad place;
He delivered me because He delighted in me.

20 The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness;
According to the cleanness of my hands
He has recompensed me.
21 For I have kept the ways of the Lord,
And have not wickedly departed from my God.
22 For all His judgments *were* before me,
And I did not put away His statutes from me.
23 I was also blameless before Him,
And I kept myself from my iniquity.
24 Therefore the Lord has recompensed me according to my
righteousness,
According to the cleanness of my hands in His sight.

25 With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful;
With a blameless man You will show Yourself blameless;
26 With the pure You will show Yourself pure;
And with the devious You will show Yourself shrewd.
27 For You will save the humble people,
But will bring down haughty looks.

28 For You will light my lamp;
The Lord my God will enlighten my darkness.
29 For by You I can run against a troop,
By my God I can leap over a wall.
30 *As for* God, His way *is* perfect;

18:13 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; a few Hebrew manuscripts and Septuagint omit *Hailstones and coals of fire.*

Life Lessons

Psalm 18:1–50

SITUATION
King David cried out to God in great distress. He recognized that God would save him through His mighty power.

OBSERVATION
In this beautiful praise song to the Lord, David acknowledged that help and deliverance come only from God. David also included the many reasons that God saves and helps His people.

INSPIRATION
May I share with you a favorite verse of mine? I like it so much I wrote it on the first page of my Bible.

"He delivered me because He delighted in me" (Psalm 18:19).

And you thought He saved you because of your decency. You thought He saved you because of your good works or good attitude or good looks. Sorry. If that were the case, your salvation would be lost when your voice went south or your works got weak. There are many reasons God saves you: to bring glory to Himself, to appease His justice, to demonstrate His sovereignty. But one of the sweetest reasons God saved you is because He is fond of you. He likes having you around. He thinks you are the best thing to come down the pike in quite awhile. "As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62:5).

If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. If He had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He sends you flowers every

spring and a sunrise every morning. Whenever you want to talk, He'll listen. He can live anywhere in the universe, and He chose your heart. And the Christmas gift He sent you in Bethlehem? Face it, friend. He's crazy about you. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
When you feel overwhelmed and frightened by the "enemies" in your life, remember David's song. God is your rock and your protector. He is able and willing to save you because He delights in you.

EXPLORATION
God's Delight in Us—Psalm 37:23; Isaiah 65:19; Zephaniah 3:17.

Life Lessons

Psalm 19:1–14

SITUATION
David praised God for the beauty of nature. David believed that rather than inhibiting actions, God's laws pointed out shortfalls and sins.

OBSERVATION
God's law helps us avoid sin and enjoy fellowship with Him. The law does not prevent enjoyment but encourages it. Above all, His laws show us His great love, and His wonderful creation proves His existence.

INSPIRATION
I*f only I could talk to the pilot.* Thirty seconds would do. Face-to- face. Just an explanation. He was, after all, the one bumping my wife and me from his plane.

Not that I could blame him. Denalyn had picked up more than souvenirs

The word of the Lord is proven;
He *is* a shield to all who trust in Him.

31 For who *is* God, except the Lord?
And who *is* a rock, except our God?
32 *It is* God who arms me with strength,
And makes my way perfect.
33 He makes my feet like the *feet of* deer,
And sets me on my high places.
34 He teaches my hands to make war,
So that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.

35 You have also given me the shield of Your salvation;
Your right hand has held me up,
Your gentleness has made me great.
36 You enlarged my path under me,
So my feet did not slip.

37 I have pursued my enemies and overtaken them;
Neither did I turn back again till they were destroyed.
38 I have wounded them,
So that they could not rise;
They have fallen under my feet.
39 For You have armed me with strength for the battle;
You have subdued under me those who rose up against me.
40 You have also given me the necks of my enemies,
So that I destroyed those who hated me.
41 They cried out, but *there was* none to save;
Even to the Lord, but He did not answer them.
42 Then I beat them as fine as the dust before the wind;
I cast them out like dirt in the streets.

43 You have delivered me from the strivings of the people;
You have made me the head of the nations;
A people I have not known shall serve me.
44 As soon as they hear of me they obey me;
The foreigners submit to me.
45 The foreigners fade away,
And come frightened from their hideouts.

46 The Lord lives!
Blessed *be* my Rock!
Let the God of my salvation be exalted.
47 *It is* God who avenges me,
And subdues the peoples under me;
48 He delivers me from my enemies.
You also lift me up above those who rise against me;
You have delivered me from the violent man.
49 Therefore I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the Gentiles,
And sing praises to Your name.

50 Great deliverance He gives to His king,
And shows mercy to His anointed,
To David and his descendants forevermore.

PSALM 19

The Perfect Revelation of the Lord

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament shows His handiwork.
2 Day unto day utters speech,
And night unto night reveals knowledge.
3 *There is* no speech nor language
Where their voice is not heard.
4 Their line[a] has gone out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world.

In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun,
5 Which *is* like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
And rejoices like a strong man to run its race.
6 Its rising *is* from one end of heaven,
And its circuit to the other end;
And there is nothing hidden from its heat.

7 The law of the Lord *is* perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the Lord *is* sure, making wise the simple;
8 The statutes of the Lord *are* right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the Lord *is* pure, enlightening the eyes;
9 The fear of the Lord *is* clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the Lord *are* true *and* righteous altogether.
10 More to be desired *are they* than gold,
Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
11 Moreover by them Your servant is warned,
And in keeping them *there is* great reward.

12 Who can understand *his* errors?
Cleanse me from secret *faults.*
13 Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous *sins;*
Let them not have dominion over me.
Then I shall be blameless,
And I shall be innocent of great transgression.

14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in Your sight,
O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.

19:4 [a]Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *sound;* Targum reads *business.*

in Hong Kong. She was so nauseous I had to wheelchair her through the airport. She flopped onto her seat and pillowed her head against the window, and I promised to leave her alone for the fourteen-hour flight.

I had a simple goal: get Denalyn on the plane.

The airline staff had an opposite one: get Denalyn off. . . .

I downplayed Denalyn's condition. "Give us one barf bag, and we're happy travelers." No one laughed. Apparently bug-bearing patrons compete with terrorists for the title "Most Unwanted Passenger." The virus word reached the pilot, and the pilot rendered his verdict: "Not on my plane."

"You must leave," his bouncer informed matter-of-factly.

"Says who?"

"The pilot."

I leaned sideways and looked down the aisle for the man in charge, but the cockpit door was closed. *Coward.* If only I could talk to him, present my side. We didn't deserve banishment. We pay our taxes, vote in primaries, tip waiters. I wanted to plead my case, but the man in charge was unavailable for comment. He had a 747 to fly, seven thousand miles to navigate . . . and no time for us. . . .

Can you relate? You may feel similar sentiments about the pilot of the universe. God: the too-busy-for-you commander-in-chief, the faceless skipper who passes down nonnegotiable decisions.

His universe hums like a Rolls-Royce, but sick passengers never appear on His radar screen. Even worse, you may suspect a vacant captain's seat. How do we know a hand secures the controls? Can we

assume the presence of a pilot behind the steel door?

Christ weighs in decidedly on this discussion. He escorts passengers to the cockpit, enters 3:16 in the keypad, and unlocks the door to God. No Bible verse better expresses His nature. (We ought to submit it to *Webster's.*) Every word in the passage explains the second one. "For *God* so loved the world . . ."

Jesus assumes what Scripture declares: *God is.* . . .

Our universe is God's preeminent missionary. "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1). A house implies a builder; a painting suggests a painter. Don't stars suggest a star maker?

Doesn't creation imply a creator? "The heavens declare His righteousness" (Psalm 97:6). Look above you. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Think about the things that exist—and what that means about how those things came to be. What do you see in creation that makes you realize that God is a most loving (and creative!) Creator?

EXPLORATION

Law of God—Exodus 15:26; 20:1–17; Leviticus 20:22, 23; Galatians 2:16.

Life Lessons

Psalms 20:1—22:31

SITUATION

Jesus quoted the first line of Psalm 22 when He suffered on the Cross.

OBSERVATION

This psalm prophesied Jesus' suffering on the Cross. It described His emotional,

PSALM 20

The Assurance of God's Saving Work

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble;
May the name of the God of Jacob defend you;
2 May He send you help from the sanctuary,
And strengthen you out of Zion;
3 May He remember all your offerings,
And accept your burnt sacrifice. *Selah*

4 May He grant you according to your heart's *desire,*
And fulfill all your purpose.
5 We will rejoice in your salvation,
And in the name of our God we will set up *our* banners!
May the Lord fulfill all your petitions.

6 Now I know that the Lord saves His anointed;
He will answer him from His holy heaven
With the saving strength of His right hand.

7 Some *trust* in chariots, and some in horses;
But we will remember the name of the Lord our God.
8 They have bowed down and fallen;
But we have risen and stand upright.

9 Save, Lord!
May the King answer us when we call.

PSALM 21

Joy in the Salvation of the Lord

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

The king shall have joy in Your strength, O Lord;
And in Your salvation how greatly shall he rejoice!
2 You have given him his heart's desire,
And have not withheld the request of his lips. *Selah*

3 For You meet him with the blessings of goodness;
You set a crown of pure gold upon his head.
4 He asked life from You, *and* You gave *it* to him—
Length of days forever and ever.
5 His glory *is* great in Your salvation;
Honor and majesty You have placed upon him.
6 For You have made him most blessed forever;
You have made him exceedingly glad with Your presence.
7 For the king trusts in the Lord,
And through the mercy of the Most High he shall not be moved.

8 Your hand will find all Your enemies;
Your right hand will find those who hate You.

9 You shall make them as a fiery oven in the time of Your anger;
The Lord shall swallow them up in His wrath,
And the fire shall devour them.
10 Their offspring You shall destroy from the earth,
And their descendants from among the sons of men.
11 For they intended evil against You;
They devised a plot *which* they are not able *to perform.*
12 Therefore You will make them turn their back;
You will make ready *Your arrows* on Your string toward their faces.

13 Be exalted, O Lord, in Your own strength!
We will sing and praise Your power.

PSALM 22

The Suffering, Praise, and Posterity of the Messiah

To the Chief Musician. Set to "The Deer of the Dawn."[a]
A Psalm of David.

My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?
Why are You so far from helping Me,
And from the words of My groaning?
2 O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear;
And in the night season, and am not silent.

3 But You *are* holy,
Enthroned in the praises of Israel.
4 Our fathers trusted in You;
They trusted, and You delivered them.
5 They cried to You, and were delivered;
They trusted in You, and were not ashamed.

6 But I *am* a worm, and no man;
A reproach of men, and despised by the people.
7 All those who see Me ridicule Me;
They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, *saying,*
8 "He trusted[a] in the Lord, let Him rescue Him;
Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!"

9 But You *are* He who took Me out of the womb;
You made Me trust *while* on My mother's breasts.
10 I was cast upon You from birth.
From My mother's womb
You *have been* My God.
11 Be not far from Me,
For trouble *is* near;
For *there is* none to help.

12 Many bulls have surrounded Me;
Strong *bulls* of Bashan have encircled Me.

22:title [a]Hebrew *Aijeleth Hashahar* **22:8** [a]Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *hoped;* Targum reads *praised.*

spiritual, and physical anguish.

INSPIRATION

Lord?

Yes.

I may be stepping out of line by saying this, but I need to tell You something that's been on my mind.

Go ahead.

I don't like this verse: "My God, My God, why have you abandoned Me?" It doesn't sound like You; it doesn't sound like something You would say.

Usually I love it when You speak. I listen when You speak. I imagine the power of Your voice, the thunder of Your commands, the dynamism in Your dictates.

That's what I like to hear.

Remember the creation song You sang into the soundless eternity? Ah, now that's You. That was the act of a God!

And when You ordained the waves to splash and they roared, when You declared that the stars be flung and they flew, when You proclaimed that life be alive and it all began? . . . Or the whisper of breath into the clay-caked Adam? That was You at Your best. That's the way I like to hear You. That's the voice I love to hear.

That's why I don't like this verse. . . .

Look at the sentence. There is a "why" at the beginning and a question mark at the end. You don't ask questions. . . .

And as long as I'm shooting straight with You—I don't like to see the word *abandon,* either. The Source of life . . . abandoned? The Giver of love . . . alone? The Father of it all . . . isolated?

Come on. Surely You don't mean it. Could deity feel abandoned?

Could we change the

sentence a bit? Not much. Just the verb.

What would You suggest?

How about *challenge?* "My God, My God, why did You challenge me?" Isn't that better? Now we can applaud. Now we can lift banners for Your dedication. Now we can explain it to our children. It makes sense now. You see, that makes You a hero. A hero. History is full of heroes.

And who is a hero but someone who survives a challenge.

Or, if that's not acceptable, I have another one. Why not *afflict?* "My God, My God, why did You afflict Me?" Yes, that's it. Now You are a martyr, taking a stand for truth. A patriot, pierced by evil. A noble soldier who took the sword all the way to the hilt; bloody and beaten, but victorious.

Afflicted is much better than *abandoned.* You are a martyr. Right up there with Patrick Henry and Abraham Lincoln.

You are God, Jesus! You couldn't be abandoned. You couldn't be left alone. You couldn't be deserted in Your most painful moment.

Abandonment. That is the punishment for a criminal. Abandonment. That is the suffering borne by the most evil. Abandonment. That's for the vile—not for You. Not You, the King of kings. Not You, the Beginning and the End. Not You, the One Unborn. After all, didn't John call You the Lamb of God? . . .

"Who has come to take away the sins of the world." Wait a minute. "To take away the sins . . . " I'd never thought about those words.

I'd read them but never thought about them. I thought You just, I don't know, sent sin away. Banished it. I thought You'd

13 They gape at Me *with* their mouths,
Like a raging and roaring lion.

14 I am poured out like water,
And all My bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax;
It has melted within Me.
15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
And My tongue clings to My jaws;
You have brought Me to the dust of death.

16 For dogs have surrounded Me;
The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me.
They pierced[a] My hands and My feet;
17 I can count all My bones.
They look *and* stare at Me.
18 They divide My garments among them,
And for My clothing they cast lots.

19 But You, O Lord, do not be far from Me;
O My Strength, hasten to help Me!
20 Deliver Me from the sword,
My precious *life* from the power of the dog.
21 Save Me from the lion's mouth
And from the horns of the wild oxen!

You have answered Me.

22 I will declare Your name to My brethren;
In the midst of the assembly I will praise You.
23 You who fear the Lord, praise Him!
All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him,
And fear Him, all you offspring of Israel!
24 For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted;
Nor has He hidden His face from Him;
But when He cried to Him, He heard.

25 My praise *shall be* of You in the great assembly;
I will pay My vows before those who fear Him.
26 The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
Those who seek Him will praise the Lord.
Let your heart live forever!

27 All the ends of the world
Shall remember and turn to the Lord,
And all the families of the nations
Shall worship before You.[a]

22:16 [a]Following some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Syriac, Vulgate; Masoretic Text reads *Like a lion.* **22:27** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Septuagint, and Targum; Arabic, Syriac, and Vulgate read *Him.*

28 For the kingdom *is* the Lord's,
And He rules over the nations.

29 All the prosperous of the earth
Shall eat and worship;
All those who go down to the dust
Shall bow before Him,
Even he who cannot keep himself alive.

30 A posterity shall serve Him.
It will be recounted of the Lord to the *next* generation,
31 They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born,
That He has done *this*.

PSALM 23

The Lord the Shepherd of His People

A Psalm of David.

The Lord *is* my shepherd;
I shall not want.
2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
3 He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You *are* with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.
6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell[a] in the house of the Lord
Forever.

PSALM 24

The King of Glory and His Kingdom

A Psalm of David.

The earth *is* the Lord's, and all its fullness,
The world and those who dwell therein.
2 For He has founded it upon the seas,
And established it upon the waters.

23:6 [a]Following Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text reads *return*.

just stood in front of the mountains of our sins and told them to begone. Just like You did to the demons. Just like You did to the hypocrites in the temple.

I just thought You commanded the evil out. I never noticed that You took it out. It never occurred to me that You actually touched it—or worse still that it touched You.

That must have been a horrible moment. I know what it's like to be touched by sin. I know what it's like to smell the stench of that stuff. Remember what I used to be like? Before I knew You, I wallowed in that mire. I didn't just touch sin, I loved it. I drank it. I danced with it. I was in the middle of it.

But why am I telling You? You remember. You were the one who saw me. You were the one who found me. I was lonely. I was afraid. Remember? "Why? Why me? Why has all this hurt happened?"

I know it wasn't much of a question. It wasn't the right question. But it was all I knew to ask. You see, God, I felt so confused. So desolate. Sin will do that to you. Sin leaves you shipwrecked, orphaned, adrift. Sin leaves you aban—

Oh. Oh, my.

My, goodness, God. Is that what happened? You mean sin did the same to You that it did to me?

Oh, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I didn't know. I didn't understand. You really were alone, weren't You?

Your question was real, wasn't it, Jesus? You really were afraid. You really were alone. Just like I was. Only, I deserved it. You didn't.

Forgive me, I spoke out of turn. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

When was the last time

you felt lonely? The next time you feel that way, look around. Everyone else may have deserted you, but God remains at your side.

EXPLORATION
Victory Is the Lord's—
1 Samuel 17:47; Psalm 18:1–6; 28:7; Proverbs 3:5, 6; Romans 8:37; Hebrews 12:2.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 23:1—24:10

SITUATION
David portrayed God as a caring shepherd. This shepherd protected his sheep from harm.

OBSERVATION
Although we may face stressful situations, God leads us safely through as a shepherd would do for his sheep.

INSPIRATION
Are you hoping that a change in circumstances will bring a change in your attitude? If so, you are in prison, and you need to learn a secret of traveling light. What you have in your Shepherd is greater than what you don't have in life.

May I meddle for a moment? What is the one thing separating you from joy? How do you fill in this blank: "I will be happy when _____"? When I am healed. When I am promoted. When I am married. When I am single. When I am rich. How would you finish that statement?

Now, with your answer firmly in mind, answer this. If your ship never comes in, if your dream never comes true, if the situation never changes, could you be happy? If not, then you are sleeping in the cold cell of discontent. You are in

3 Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord?
Or who may stand in His holy place?
4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol,

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: The Shepherd Who Cares for Us and Guides Us

Aren't we glad Christ didn't call Himself the Good Cowboy? But some do perceive God that way. A hard-faced, square-jawed ranch-hand from heaven who drives His church against its will to places it doesn't want to go.

But that's a wrong image. Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd. The Shepherd who knows His sheep by name and lays down His life for them. The Shepherd who protects, provides, and possesses His sheep. The Bible is replete with this picture of God. . . .

Eighty percent of Jesus' listeners made their living off of the land. Many were shepherds. They lived on the mesa with the sheep. No flock ever grazed without a shepherd, and no shepherd was ever off duty. When sheep wandered, the shepherd found them. When they fell, he carried them. When they were hurt, he healed them.

Sheep aren't smart. They tend to wander into running creeks for water, then their wool grows heavy and they drown. They need a shepherd to lead them to "still waters" (Psalm 23:2). They have no natural defense—no claws, no horns, no fangs. They are helpless. Sheep need a shepherd with a "rod and . . . staff" (Psalm 23:4) to protect them. They have no sense of direction. They need someone to lead them on "paths of righteousness" (Psalm 23:3).

So do we. We, too, tend to be swept away by waters we should have avoided. We have no defense against the evil lion who prowls about seeking who he might devour. We, too, get lost. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6).

We need a shepherd. We don't need a cowboy to herd us; we need a shepherd to care for us and to guide us.

And we have one. One who knows us by name. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 798.

Nor sworn deceitfully.
5 He shall receive blessing from the Lord,
And righteousness from the God of his salvation.
6 This *is* Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him,
Who seek Your face. *Selah*

7 Lift up your heads, O you gates!
And be lifted up, you everlasting doors!
And the King of glory shall come in.
8 Who *is* this King of glory?
The Lord strong and mighty,
The Lord mighty in battle.
9 Lift up your heads, O you gates!
Lift up, you everlasting doors!
And the King of glory shall come in.
10 Who is this King of glory?
The Lord of hosts,
He *is* the King of glory. *Selah*

PSALM 25

A Plea for Deliverance and Forgiveness

A Psalm of David.

To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
2 O my God, I trust in You;
Let me not be ashamed;
Let not my enemies triumph over me.
3 Indeed, let no one who waits on You be ashamed;
Let those be ashamed who deal treacherously without cause.

4 Show me Your ways, O Lord;
Teach me Your paths.
5 Lead me in Your truth and teach me,
For You *are* the God of my salvation;
On You I wait all the day.

6 Remember, O Lord, Your tender mercies and Your lovingkindnesses,
For they *are* from of old.
7 Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions;
According to Your mercy remember me,
For Your goodness' sake, O Lord.

8 Good and upright *is* the Lord;
Therefore He teaches sinners in the way.
9 The humble He guides in justice,
And the humble He teaches His way.
10 All the paths of the Lord *are* mercy and truth,
To such as keep His covenant and His testimonies.
11 For Your name's sake, O Lord,
Pardon my iniquity, for it *is* great.

prison. And you need to know what you have in your Shepherd.

You have a God who hears you, the power of love behind you, the Holy Spirit within you, and all of heaven ahead of you. If you have the Shepherd, you have grace for every sin, direction for every turn, a candle for every corner, and an anchor for every storm. You have everything you need.

And who can take it from you? Can leukemia infect your salvation? Can bankruptcy impoverish your prayers? A tornado might take your earthly house, but will it touch your heavenly home?

And look at your position. Why clamor for prestige and power? Are you not already privileged to be part of the greatest work in history? . . .

Try saying it slowly. "The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need" [Psalm 23:1 NCV].

Again, "The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need."

Again, "The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need."

Shhhhhhh. Did you hear something? I think I did. I'm not sure . . . but I think I heard the opening of a jail door. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Find your bearings today by following the Good Shepherd. Trust Jesus today to lead you to an eternal home.

EXPLORATION

Shepherd—Genesis 48:15; Psalm 78:71, 72; Mark 6:34; John 10:26–29.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 25:1—26:12

SITUATION
David prayed for God to give him mercy. He not only asked for forgiveness but for help to do right.

OBSERVATION
Trust God to forgive your sins. He shows us the right path to take and protects us from evil.

INSPIRATION
Deep within we've known (haven't we known?) something is awry—we feel disconnected. What we hope will bring life brings limited amounts . . . three fifty worth. We connect with a career, find meaning in family, yet long for something more.

We feel the frustration I felt on Christmas morning, 1964. I assembled a nine-year-old's dream gift: a genuine Santa Fe Railroad miniature train set, complete with battery-powered engine and flashing crossing lights. I placed the locomotive on the tracks and watched in sheer glee as three pounds of pure steel wound its way across my bedroom floor. Around and around and around and . . . around . . . and around . . . After some time I picked it up and turned it the other direction. It went around and around and around . . .

"Mom, what else did you get me for Christmas?"

Similarly, our lives chug in long ovals, one lap after another. First job. Promotion. Wedding day. Nursery beds. Kids. Grandkids. Around and around . . . Is there anything else?

Our dissatisfaction mates

12 Who *is* the man that fears the Lord?
Him shall He[a] teach in the way He[b] chooses.
13 He himself shall dwell in prosperity,
And his descendants shall inherit the earth.
14 The secret of the Lord *is* with those who fear Him,
And He will show them His covenant.
15 My eyes *are* ever toward the Lord,
For He shall pluck my feet out of the net.

16 Turn Yourself to me, and have mercy on me,
For I *am* desolate and afflicted.
17 The troubles of my heart have enlarged;
Bring me out of my distresses!
18 Look on my affliction and my pain,
And forgive all my sins.
19 Consider my enemies, for they are many;
And they hate me with cruel hatred.
20 Keep my soul, and deliver me;
Let me not be ashamed, for I put my trust in You.
21 Let integrity and uprightness preserve me,
For I wait for You.

22 Redeem Israel, O God,
Out of all their troubles!

PSALM 26

A Prayer for Divine Scrutiny and Redemption

A Psalm of David.

Vindicate me, O Lord,
For I have walked in my integrity.
I have also trusted in the Lord;
I shall not slip.
2 Examine me, O Lord, and prove me;
Try my mind and my heart.
3 For Your lovingkindness *is* before my eyes,
And I have walked in Your truth.
4 I have not sat with idolatrous mortals,
Nor will I go in with hypocrites.
5 I have hated the assembly of evildoers,
And will not sit with the wicked.

6 I will wash my hands in innocence;
So I will go about Your altar, O Lord,
7 That I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving,
And tell of all Your wondrous works.
8 Lord, I have loved the habitation of Your house,
And the place where Your glory dwells.

25:12 [a]Or *he* [b]Or *he*

9 Do not gather my soul with sinners,
Nor my life with bloodthirsty men,
10 In whose hands *is* a sinister scheme,
And whose right hand is full of bribes.

11 But as for me, I will walk in my integrity;
Redeem me and be merciful to me.
12 My foot stands in an even place;
In the congregations I will bless the Lord.

PSALM 27

An Exuberant Declaration of Faith

A Psalm of David.

The Lord *is* my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
The Lord *is* the strength of my life;
Of whom shall I be afraid?
2 When the wicked came against me
To eat up my flesh,
My enemies and foes,
They stumbled and fell.
3 Though an army may encamp against me,
My heart shall not fear;
Though war may rise against me,
In this I *will be* confident.

4 One *thing* I have desired of the Lord,
That will I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the Lord
All the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the Lord,
And to inquire in His temple.
5 For in the time of trouble
He shall hide me in His pavilion;
In the secret place of His tabernacle
He shall hide me;
He shall set me high upon a rock.

6 And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me;
Therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle;
I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the Lord.

7 Hear, O Lord, *when* I cry with my voice!
Have mercy also upon me, and answer me.
8 *When You said,* "Seek My face,"
My heart said to You, "Your face, Lord, I will seek."
9 Do not hide Your face from me;
Do not turn Your servant away in anger;

with disappointment and gives birth to some unruly children: drunkenness, power plays, eighty-hour workweeks, nosedives into sexual perversions—all nothing more than poorly disguised longings for Eden. We long to restore what Adam lost. As someone once said, "The man who knocks on the door of a brothel is seeking God."

Where and when the brothel fails, Jesus steps forth with a reconnection invitation. Though we be "dead in [our] transgressions and sins [Ephesians 2:1] and alienated from the life of God [Ephesians 4:18], whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God [1 John 5:1]. Reborn! This is not a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan—this rebirth comes from God" [John 1:13 NLT].

Don't miss the invisible, inward miracle triggered by belief. God reinstates us to Garden-of-Eden status. What Adam and Eve did, we now do! The flagship family walked with God; we can too. They heard His voice; so can we. They were naked and unashamed; we can be transparent and unafraid. No more running or hiding.

He breathes life into flatlined lives. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Is there a sin in your past that you keep remembering, regretting, and confessing to God? Decide today to do with that sin what God does with all sin that He forgives—forget it!

EXPLORATION

Forgiveness—Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 43:25; Micah 7:18, 19; Hebrews 8:12; 1 John 1:9.

You have been my help;
Do not leave me nor forsake me,
O God of my salvation.
10 When my father and my mother forsake me,
Then the Lord will take care of me.

11 Teach me Your way, O Lord,
And lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies.
12 Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries;
For false witnesses have risen against me,
And such as breathe out violence.
13 *I would have lost heart,* unless I had believed
That I would see the goodness of the Lord
In the land of the living.

14 Wait on the Lord;
Be of good courage,
And He shall strengthen your heart;
Wait, I say, on the Lord!

PSALM 28

Rejoicing in Answered Prayer

A Psalm of David.

To You I will cry, O Lord my Rock:
Do not be silent to me,
Lest, if You *are* silent to me,
I become like those who go down to the pit.
2 Hear the voice of my supplications
When I cry to You,
When I lift up my hands toward Your holy sanctuary.

3 Do not take me away with the wicked
And with the workers of iniquity,
Who speak peace to their neighbors,
But evil *is* in their hearts.
4 Give them according to their deeds,
And according to the wickedness of their endeavors;
Give them according to the work of their hands;
Render to them what they deserve.
5 Because they do not regard the works of the Lord,
Nor the operation of His hands,
He shall destroy them
And not build them up.

6 Blessed *be* the Lord,
Because He has heard the voice of my supplications!
7 The Lord *is* my strength and my shield;
My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped;
Therefore my heart greatly rejoices,
And with my song I will praise Him.

Life LESSONS

Psalm 27:1—28:9

SITUATION
In Psalm 27, David sought to be close to God. His Number 1 desire was to live in the constant presence of God, seeking the Lord's instruction, protection, and guidance.

OBSERVATION
God desires us to have singleness of purpose—to know Him and abide with Him.

INSPIRATION
If you could ask God for one thing, what would you request? David tells us what he would ask. He longs to *live* in the house of God. I emphasize the word "live," because it deserves to be emphasized. David doesn't want to chat. He doesn't desire a cup of coffee on the back porch. He doesn't ask for a meal or to spend an evening in God's house. He wants to move in with Him . . . forever. He's asking for his own room . . . permanently. He doesn't want to be stationed in God's house, he longs to retire there. He doesn't seek a temporary assignment, but rather lifelong residence.

When David says, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6), he's saying simply that he never wants to step away from God. He craves to remain in the aura, in the atmosphere, in the awareness that he is in God's house, wherever he is.

The Lord's Prayer is a floor plan of the house of God: a step-by-step description of how God meets our needs when we dwell in Him. Everything that occurs in a healthy house is described

8 The Lord *is* their strength,[a]
And He *is* the saving refuge of His anointed.
9 Save Your people,
And bless Your inheritance;
Shepherd them also,
And bear them up forever.

PSALM 29

Praise to God in His Holiness and Majesty

A Psalm of David.

Give unto the Lord, O you mighty ones,
Give unto the Lord glory and strength.
2 Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name;
Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

3 The voice of the Lord *is* over the waters;
The God of glory thunders;
The Lord *is* over many waters.
4 The voice of the Lord *is* powerful;
The voice of the Lord *is* full of majesty.

5 The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars,
Yes, the Lord splinters the cedars of Lebanon.
6 He makes them also skip like a calf,
Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox.
7 The voice of the Lord divides the flames of fire.

8 The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness;
The Lord shakes the Wilderness of Kadesh.
9 The voice of the Lord makes the deer give birth,
And strips the forests bare;
And in His temple everyone says, "Glory!"

10 The Lord sat *enthroned* at the Flood,
And the Lord sits as King forever.
11 The Lord will give strength to His people;
The Lord will bless His people with peace.

PSALM 30

The Blessedness of Answered Prayer

A Psalm. A Song at the dedication of the house of David.

I will extol You, O Lord, for You have lifted me up,
And have not let my foes rejoice over me.
2 O Lord my God, I cried out to You,
And You healed me.

28:8 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *the strength of His people.*

in this prayer. Protection, instruction, forgiveness, provision . . . all occur under God's roof.

"Then why," you might ask, "don't more people feel protected, forgiven, or instructed?"

My answer is as simple as the question is direct. Most have not learned to dwell in the house. Oh, we visit it. We stop in for the day or even drop by for a meal. But abide here? This is God's desire.

Remember the promise of His Son, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:23). (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Do you desire to spend all your time in God's presence? Are there activities, thoughts, even people that keep you from Him? List three specific steps you can take to make knowing God your Number 1 priority.

EXPLORATION
Abiding—Psalm 23:6, 84:1–4; John 8:31, 14:23; Ephesians 3:17; 1 John 4:16; Revelation 3:20; 21:3.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 29:1—30:12

SITUATION
David applauded God for His protection and help. Though David still had problems, he knew that God was powerful and faithful and always worthy of praise.

OBSERVATION
God satisfies us because He holds all the power and

protection we need. Trusting Him brings contentment.

INSPIRATION

Before you change your job title, examine your perspective toward life.

Success is not defined by position or pay scale but by this: doing the most what you do the best.

Parents, give that counsel to your kids. Tell them to do what they love to do so well that someone pays them to do it.

Spouses, urge your mate to choose satisfaction over salary. Better to be married to a happy person who has a thin wallet than a miserable person with a thick one. Besides, "a pretentious, showy life is an empty life; a plain and simple life is a full life" (Prov. 13:7 MSG).

Pursue the virtue of contentment. "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6). When choosing or changing jobs, be careful. Consult your design. Consult your Designer. But never consult your greed. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Enjoy your age, job, friends, and lifestyle. When you are tempted to be dissatisfied, pray, "God, help me to find my contentment in you."

EXPLORATION

Contentment—Exodus 20:17; Psalm 17:13–15; Matthew 6:24; Philippians 4:10–14.

3 O Lord, You brought my soul up from the grave;
You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.[a]

4 Sing praise to the Lord, you saints of His,
And give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name.[a]
5 For His anger *is but for* a moment,
His favor *is for* life;
Weeping may endure for a night,
But joy *comes* in the morning.

6 Now in my prosperity I said,
"I shall never be moved."
7 Lord, by Your favor You have made my mountain stand strong;
You hid Your face, *and* I was troubled.

8 I cried out to You, O Lord;
And to the Lord I made supplication:
9 "What profit *is there* in my blood,
When I go down to the pit?
Will the dust praise You?
Will it declare Your truth?
10 Hear, O Lord, and have mercy on me;
Lord, be my helper!"

11 You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;
You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness,
12 To the end that *my* glory may sing praise to You and not be silent.
O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever.

PSALM 31

The Lord a Fortress in Adversity

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

In You, O Lord, I put my trust;
Let me never be ashamed;
Deliver me in Your righteousness.
2 Bow down Your ear to me,
Deliver me speedily;
Be my rock of refuge,
A fortress of defense to save me.

3 For You *are* my rock and my fortress;
Therefore, for Your name's sake,
Lead me and guide me.
4 Pull me out of the net which they have secretly laid for me,
For You *are* my strength.
5 Into Your hand I commit my spirit;
You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.

30:3 [a]Following Qere and Targum; Kethib, Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *from those who descend to the pit.* **30:4** [a]Or *His holiness*

6 I have hated those who regard useless idols;
But I trust in the Lord.
7 I will be glad and rejoice in Your mercy,
For You have considered my trouble;
You have known my soul in adversities,
8 And have not shut me up into the hand of the enemy;
You have set my feet in a wide place.

9 Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am in trouble;
My eye wastes away with grief,
Yes, my soul and my body!
10 For my life is spent with grief,
And my years with sighing;
My strength fails because of my iniquity,
And my bones waste away.
11 I am a reproach among all my enemies,
But especially among my neighbors,
And *am* repulsive to my acquaintances;
Those who see me outside flee from me.
12 I am forgotten like a dead man, out of mind;
I am like a broken vessel.
13 For I hear the slander of many;
Fear *is* on every side;
While they take counsel together against me,
They scheme to take away my life.

14 But as for me, I trust in You, O Lord;
I say, "You *are* my God."
15 My times *are* in Your hand;
Deliver me from the hand of my enemies,
And from those who persecute me.
16 Make Your face shine upon Your servant;
Save me for Your mercies' sake.
17 Do not let me be ashamed, O Lord, for I have called upon You;
Let the wicked be ashamed;
Let them be silent in the grave.
18 Let the lying lips be put to silence,
Which speak insolent things proudly and contemptuously
against the righteous.

19 Oh, how great *is* Your goodness,
Which You have laid up for those who fear You,
Which You have prepared for those who trust in You
In the presence of the sons of men!
20 You shall hide them in the secret place of Your presence
From the plots of man;
You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion
From the strife of tongues.

21 Blessed *be* the Lord,
For He has shown me His marvelous kindness in a strong city!
22 For I said in my haste,

Life Lessons

Psalm 31:1–24

SITUATION
Although the writer of this psalm was grieved, his complete dedication to God caused him to thank God.

OBSERVATION
Throughout trials God provides a place of refuge. God provides stability in a broken world.

INSPIRATION
A boy went into a pet shop, looking for a puppy. The store owner showed him a litter in a box. The boy looked at the puppies. He picked each one up, examined it, and put it back into the box.

After several minutes, he walked back to the owner and said, "I picked one out. How much will it cost?"

The man gave him the price, and the boy promised to be back in a few days with the money. . . .

The boy went to work—weeding, washing windows, cleaning yards. He worked hard and saved his money. When he had enough for the puppy, he returned to the store.

He walked up to the counter and laid down a pocketful of wadded bills. The store owner sorted and counted the cash. . . . "All right, son, you can go get your puppy."

The boy reached into the back of the box, pulled out a skinny dog with a limp leg, and started to leave.

The owner stopped him.

"Don't take that puppy," he objected. "He's crippled. He can't play. He'll never run with you. He can't fetch. Get one of the healthy pups."

"No thank you, sir," the

boy replied. "This is exactly the kind of dog I've been looking for."

As the boy turned to leave, the store owner started to speak but remained silent. Suddenly he understood. For extending from the bottom of the boy's trousers was a brace—a brace for his crippled leg.

Why did the boy want the dog? Because he knew how it felt. And he knew it was very special. . . .

Jesus knows how you feel. You're under the gun at work? Jesus knows how you feel. You've got more to do than is humanly possible? So did He. You've got children who make a "piranha hour" out of your dinner hour? Jesus knows what that's like. People take more from you than they give? Jesus understands. . . . (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Find a Christian who works for a worthy cause. Encourage the person. Pray for him or her. Help however you can. Praise God for his faithfulness.

EXPLORATION
Faithfulness of God—Lamentations 3:19–23; Trust—Proverbs 3:5, 6; Assurance in Suffering—1 John 4:4.

Life Lessons

Psalms 32:1—33:22

SITUATION
In Psalm 33, we can delight with the psalmist in a God who not only created everything, but whose plan for this world will stand forever.

OBSERVATION
Praise God whose plans

"I am cut off from before Your eyes";
Nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications
When I cried out to You.

23 Oh, love the Lord, all you His saints!
For the Lord preserves the faithful,
And fully repays the proud person.
24 Be of good courage,
And He shall strengthen your heart,
All you who hope in the Lord.

PSALM 32

The Joy of Forgiveness

A Psalm of David. A Contemplation.[a]

Blessed *is he whose* transgression *is* forgiven,
Whose sin *is* covered.
2 Blessed *is* the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit *there is* no deceit.

3 When I kept silent, my bones grew old
Through my groaning all the day long.
4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. *Selah*
5 I acknowledged my sin to You,
And my iniquity I have not hidden.
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*

6 For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You
In a time when You may be found;
Surely in a flood of great waters
They shall not come near him.
7 You *are* my hiding place;
You shall preserve me from trouble;
You shall surround me with songs of deliverance. *Selah*

8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will guide you with My eye.
9 Do not be like the horse *or* like the mule,
Which have no understanding,
Which must be harnessed with bit and bridle,
Else they will not come near you.

10 Many sorrows *shall be* to the wicked;
But he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him.
11 Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous;
And shout for joy, all *you* upright in heart!

32:title [a]Hebrew *Maschil*

New Life In Christ

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. —Psalm 32:8

God Speaks to Us

There is no language He will not speak. Which leads us to a delightful question. What language is He speaking to you? I'm not referring to an idiom or dialect but to the day-to-day drama of your life. God does speak, you know. He speaks to us in whatever language we will understand.

There are times He speaks the "language of abundance." Is your tummy full? Are your bills paid? Got a little jingle in your pocket? Don't be so proud of what you have that you miss what you need to hear. Could it be you have much so you can give much? "God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Is God talking in the "language of abundance"? Or are you hearing the "vernacular of want"? We'd rather He spoke the language of abundance, but He doesn't always.

Are you hearing the "language of need"? Or how about the "language of affliction"? Talk about an idiom we avoid. But you and I both know how clearly God speaks in hospital hallways and sickbeds. We know what David meant with the words, "He *makes* me to lie down" (Psalm 23:2, italics mine). Nothing seems to turn our ears toward heaven like a frail body.

God speaks all languages—including yours. Has He not said, "I will instruct you . . . in the way you should go" (Psalm 32:8)? Are we not urged to "receive . . . instruction from His mouth" (Job 22:22)? What language is God speaking to you?

And aren't you glad He is speaking? Aren't you grateful that He cares enough to talk? Isn't it good to know that "the secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him" (Psalm 25:14)? (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

Question: What language is God using to speak to you? What specific steps can you take in response?

For more on "New Life in Christ," see page 752.

stand forever and who triumphed over Satan at the cross.

INSPIRATION

Remember, Satan cannot penetrate the walls of the Great House of God.

Is it still hard to imagine how your struggle could lead to any good? Still hard to conceive how your disease or debt or death could be a tool for anything worthwhile? If so, then I've got one final example. While not wanting to minimize your struggle, I must say yours is a cakewalk compared to this one. A sinless Savior was covered with sin. The author of life was placed in the cave of death. Satan's victory appeared sure. Finally, the devil had scored on the right end of the court. And not only had he scored, he'd slam-dunked the MVP and left him lying on the floor. The devil had blown it with everyone from Sara to Peter, but this time he'd done it right. The whole world had seen it. The victory dance had already begun.

But all of a sudden there was a light in the tomb and a rumbling of the rock; then Friday's tragedy emerged as Sunday's Savior, and even Satan knew he'd been had. He'd been a tool in the hand of the gardener. All the time he thought he was defeating heaven, he was helping heaven. God wanted to prove His power over sin and death, and that's exactly what He did. And guess who helped Him do it? Once again Satan's lay-up becomes a foul-up. Only this time, he didn't give heaven some points, he gave heaven the championship game. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Where are you struggling

right now? Is there some area in your life where you are experiencing defeat? Remember the Cross and God's ultimate victory over Satan, sin, and death. Turn defeat into victory by praising and thanking God and trusting in Him.

EXPLORATION
Victory—John 16:33; Romans 8:37; 2 Corinthians 2:14; 1 John 4:4.

PSALM 33

The Sovereignty of the Lord in Creation and History

Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous!
For praise from the upright is beautiful.
2 Praise the Lord with the harp;
Make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings.
3 Sing to Him a new song;
Play skillfully with a shout of joy.

4 For the word of the Lord *is* right,
And all His work *is done* in truth.
5 He loves righteousness and justice;
The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

6 By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,
And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.
7 He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap;[a]
He lays up the deep in storehouses.

8 Let all the earth fear the Lord;
Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.
9 For He spoke, and it was *done;*
He commanded, and it stood fast.

10 The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;
He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect.
11 The counsel of the Lord stands forever,
The plans of His heart to all generations.
12 Blessed *is* the nation whose God *is* the Lord,
The people He has chosen as His own inheritance.

13 The Lord looks from heaven;
He sees all the sons of men.
14 From the place of His dwelling He looks
On all the inhabitants of the earth;
15 He fashions their hearts individually;
He considers all their works.

16 No king *is* saved by the multitude of an army;
A mighty man is not delivered by great strength.
17 A horse *is* a vain hope for safety;
Neither shall it deliver *any* by its great strength.

18 Behold, the eye of the Lord *is* on those who fear Him,
On those who hope in His mercy,
19 To deliver their soul from death,
And to keep them alive in famine.

20 Our soul waits for the Lord;
He *is* our help and our shield.

33:7 [a]Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate read *in a vessel.*

21 For our heart shall rejoice in Him,
Because we have trusted in His holy name.
22 Let Your mercy, O Lord, be upon us,
Just as we hope in You.

PSALM 34

The Happiness of Those Who Trust in God

A Psalm of David when he pretended madness before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed.

I will bless the Lord at all times;
His praise *shall* continually *be* in my mouth.
2 My soul shall make its boast in the Lord;
The humble shall hear *of it* and be glad.
3 Oh, magnify the Lord with me,
And let us exalt His name together.

4 I sought the Lord, and He heard me,
And delivered me from all my fears.
5 They looked to Him and were radiant,
And their faces were not ashamed.
6 This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard *him,*
And saved him out of all his troubles.
7 The angel[a] of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him,
And delivers them.

8 Oh, taste and see that the Lord *is* good;
Blessed *is* the man *who* trusts in Him!
9 Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints!
There is no want to those who fear Him.
10 The young lions lack and suffer hunger;
But those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good *thing.*

11 Come, you children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the Lord.
12 Who *is* the man *who* desires life,
And loves *many* days, that he may see good?
13 Keep your tongue from evil,
And your lips from speaking deceit.
14 Depart from evil and do good;
Seek peace and pursue it.

15 The eyes of the Lord *are* on the righteous,
And His ears *are open* to their cry.
16 The face of the Lord *is* against those who do evil,
To cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

17 *The righteous* cry out, and the Lord hears,
And delivers them out of all their troubles.

34:7 [a]Or *Angel*

Life LESSONS

Psalm 34:1–22

SITUATION
David composed this psalm after he escaped King Achish in Gath by pretending to be insane (1 Samuel 21:10–15). David told how faithful God remained during a time of trouble.

OBSERVATION
God delivers those who persevere in their faith.

INSPIRATION
David gets worse before he gets better. He escapes to Gath, the hometown of Goliath. He tries to forge a friendship based on a mutual adversary. If your enemy is Saul and my enemy is Saul, we become friends, right?

In this case, wrong.

The Gittites aren't hospitable. "Is this not David, the king of the land?" they ask. "Did they not sing of him to one another in dances, saying: 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands'?" (1 Samuel 21:11).

David panics. He's a lamb in a pack of wolves. Tall men, taller walls. Piercing glares, piercing spears. We'd like to hear a prayer to his Shepherd; we'd appreciate a pronouncement of God's strength. Don't hold your breath. David doesn't see God. He sees trouble. So he takes matters into his own hands.

He pretends to be insane, scratching on doors and drooling down his beard. Finally the king of Gath says to his men, "'Must you bring me a madman? We already have enough of them around here! Why

should I let someone like this be my guest?' So David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam" (21:14–22:1 NLT).

Dare we envision this picture of David? Staring with galvanized eyes. Quivering like jelly. He sticks out his tongue, rolls in the dirt, grunts and grins, spits, shakes, and foams. David feigns something like epilepsy.

The Philistines . . . shove him out the city gates and leave him with nowhere to go.

He can't go to the court of Saul or the house of Michal, the city of Samuel or the safety of Nob. So he goes to the only place he can—the place where no one goes, because nothing survives. He goes to the desert, the wilderness. To the honeycombed canyons that overlook the Dead Sea. He finds a cave, the cave called Adullam. In it he finds shade, silence, and safety. He stretches on the cool dirt and closes his eyes and begins his decade in the wilderness.

Can you relate to David's story? (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Can you remember a time when you were in desperate circumstances? What was the cry of your heart? When you have the opportunity, do as David did—praise God. Tell someone else what you learned. Memorize verses 17–22.

EXPLORATION

God's Goodness—
2 Chronicles 5:13; 6:41; Psalm 31:19; 52:9; Matthew 19:17; James 1:17.

18 The Lord *is* near to those who have a broken heart,
And saves such as have a contrite spirit.

19 Many *are* the afflictions of the righteous,
But the Lord delivers him out of them all.
20 He guards all his bones;
Not one of them is broken.
21 Evil shall slay the wicked,
And those who hate the righteous shall be condemned.
22 The Lord redeems the soul of His servants,
And none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned.

PSALM 35

The Lord the Avenger of His People

A Psalm of David.

Plead *my cause,* O Lord, with those who strive with me;
Fight against those who fight against me.
2 Take hold of shield and buckler,
And stand up for my help.
3 Also draw out the spear,
And stop those who pursue me.
Say to my soul,
"I *am* your salvation."

4 Let those be put to shame and brought to dishonor
Who seek after my life;
Let those be turned back and brought to confusion
Who plot my hurt.
5 Let them be like chaff before the wind,
And let the angel[a] of the Lord chase *them.*
6 Let their way be dark and slippery,
And let the angel of the Lord pursue them.
7 For without cause they have hidden their net for me *in* a pit,
Which they have dug without cause for my life.
8 Let destruction come upon him unexpectedly,
And let his net that he has hidden catch himself;
Into that very destruction let him fall.

9 And my soul shall be joyful in the Lord;
It shall rejoice in His salvation.
10 All my bones shall say,
"Lord, who *is* like You,
Delivering the poor from him who is too strong for him,
Yes, the poor and the needy from him who plunders him?"

11 Fierce witnesses rise up;
They ask me *things* that I do not know.
12 They reward me evil for good,

35:5 [a]Or *Angel*

To the sorrow of my soul.
13 But as for me, when they were sick,
My clothing *was* sackcloth;
I humbled myself with fasting;
And my prayer would return to my own heart.
14 I paced about as though *he were* my friend *or* brother;
I bowed down heavily, as one who mourns *for his* mother.

15 But in my adversity they rejoiced
And gathered together;
Attackers gathered against me,
And I did not know *it;*
They tore *at me* and did not cease;
16 With ungodly mockers at feasts
They gnashed at me with their teeth.

17 Lord, how long will You look on?
Rescue me from their destructions,
My precious *life* from the lions.
18 I will give You thanks in the great assembly;
I will praise You among many people.

19 Let them not rejoice over me who are wrongfully my enemies;
Nor let them wink with the eye who hate me without a cause.
20 For they do not speak peace,
But they devise deceitful matters
Against *the* quiet ones in the land.
21 They also opened their mouth wide against me,
And said, "Aha, aha!
Our eyes have seen *it.*"

22 *This* You have seen, O Lord;
Do not keep silence.
O Lord, do not be far from me.
23 Stir up Yourself, and awake to my vindication,
To my cause, my God and my Lord.
24 Vindicate me, O Lord my God, according to Your righteousness;
And let them not rejoice over me.
25 Let them not say in their hearts, "Ah, so we would have it!"
Let them not say, "We have swallowed him up."

26 Let them be ashamed and brought to mutual confusion
Who rejoice at my hurt;
Let them be clothed with shame and dishonor
Who exalt themselves against me.

27 Let them shout for joy and be glad,
Who favor my righteous cause;
And let them say continually,
"Let the Lord be magnified,
Who has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant."
28 And my tongue shall speak of Your righteousness
And of Your praise all the day long.

Life Lessons

Psalms 35:1—36:12

SITUATION
David begged God to rescue him from those who sought his demise. He recognized the wickedness of his enemies and asked God to intervene.

OBSERVATION
God fights on behalf of His children.

INSPIRATION
The presence of fear does not mean you have no faith. Fear visits everyone. Even Christ was afraid (Mark 14:33). But make your fear a visitor and not a resident. Hasn't fear taken enough? Enough smiles? Chuckles? Restful nights, exuberant days? Meet your fears with faith.

Do what my father urged my brother and me to do. Summertime for the Lucado family always involved a trip from West Texas to the Rocky Mountains. (Think Purgatory to Paradise.) My dad loved to fish for trout on the edge of the white-water rivers. Yet he knew that the currents were dangerous and his sons could be careless. Upon arrival we'd scout out the safe places to cross the river. He'd walk us down the bank until we found a line of stable rocks. He was even known to add one or two to compensate for our short strides.

As we watched, he'd test the stones, knowing if they held him, they'd hold us. Once on the other side, he'd signal for us to follow.

"Don't be afraid," he could have said. "Trust me."

We children never needed coaxing. But we adults often do. Does a river of fear run

between you and Jesus? Cross over to Him. . . . If you wave Jesus away, joy will die, laughter will perish, and tomorrow will be buried in today's grave of dread.

Don't make that mistake. Give the day a chance. Believe He can. Believe He cares. Believe He comes. Don't be afraid. Just believe. (From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

When you face battles in life, write them in a prayer journal. Wait on your Defender and record His victory in your journal. This will build your faith.

EXPLORATION

Fighting—Exodus 14:13, 14; 1 Samuel 17:45–47; 2 Chronicles 20:15–17; Nehemiah 4:20; Romans 12:19.

PSALM 36

Man's Wickedness and God's Perfections

To the Chief Musician. *A Psalm* of David the servant of the Lord.

An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked:
There is no fear of God before his eyes.
2 For he flatters himself in his own eyes,
When he finds out his iniquity *and* when he hates.
3 The words of his mouth *are* wickedness and deceit;
He has ceased to be wise *and* to do good.
4 He devises wickedness on his bed;
He sets himself in a way *that is* not good;
He does not abhor evil.

5 Your mercy, O Lord, *is* in the heavens;
Your faithfulness *reaches* to the clouds.
6 Your righteousness *is* like the great mountains;
Your judgments *are* a great deep;
O Lord, You preserve man and beast.

7 How precious *is* Your lovingkindness, O God!
Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings.
8 They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house,
And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures.
9 For with You *is* the fountain of life;
In Your light we see light.

10 Oh, continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You,
And Your righteousness to the upright in heart.
11 Let not the foot of pride come against me,
And let not the hand of the wicked drive me away.
12 There the workers of iniquity have fallen;
They have been cast down and are not able to rise.

PSALM 37

The Heritage of the Righteous and the Calamity of the Wicked

A Psalm of David.

Do not fret because of evildoers,
Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.
2 For they shall soon be cut down like the grass,
And wither as the green herb.

3 Trust in the Lord, and do good;
Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.
4 Delight yourself also in the Lord,
And He shall give you the desires of your heart.

5 Commit your way to the Lord,
Trust also in Him,
And He shall bring *it* to pass.
6 He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light,
And your justice as the noonday.

7 Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him;
Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way,
Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.
8 Cease from anger, and forsake wrath;
Do not fret—*it* only *causes* harm.

9 For evildoers shall be cut off;
But those who wait on the Lord,
They shall inherit the earth.
10 For yet a little while and the wicked *shall be* no *more;*
Indeed, you will look carefully for his place,
But it *shall be* no *more.*
11 But the meek shall inherit the earth,
And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

12 The wicked plots against the just,
And gnashes at him with his teeth.
13 The Lord laughs at him,
For He sees that his day is coming.
14 The wicked have drawn the sword
And have bent their bow,
To cast down the poor and needy,
To slay those who are of upright conduct.
15 Their sword shall enter their own heart,
And their bows shall be broken.

16 A little that a righteous man has
Is better than the riches of many wicked.
17 For the arms of the wicked shall be broken,
But the Lord upholds the righteous.

18 The Lord knows the days of the upright,
And their inheritance shall be forever.
19 They shall not be ashamed in the evil time,
And in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.
20 But the wicked shall perish;
And the enemies of the Lord,
Like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish.
Into smoke they shall vanish away.

21 The wicked borrows and does not repay,
But the righteous shows mercy and gives.
22 For *those* blessed by Him shall inherit the earth,
But *those* cursed by Him shall be cut off.

23 The steps of a *good* man are ordered by the Lord,
And He delights in his way.

Life Lessons

Psalm 37:1–40

SITUATION
David used a number of expressions to contrast the righteous and the wicked. David said that good consequences are a result of good behavior.

OBSERVATION
God's people will receive "what they want" as they trust God, commit their lives to Him, and delight in serving the Lord.

INSPIRATION
What are my longings? This question may surprise you. Perhaps you thought your longings had nothing to do with keeping your life on track. I couldn't disagree more. Your heart is crucial. Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart." When we submit to God's plans, we can trust our desires. Our assignment is found at the intersection of God's plan and our pleasures. What do you love to do? What brings you joy? What gives you a sense of satisfaction?

Some long to feed the poor. Others enjoy leading the church. Others relish singing or teaching or holding the hands of the sick or counseling the confused. Each of us has been made to serve God in a unique way.

"We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

"You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. . . .

Marvelous are Your works. . . . My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret. . . . Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them" (Psalm 139:13–16).

You are a custom design; you are tailor-made. God prescribed your birth. Regardless of the circumstances that surrounded your arrival, you are not an accident. God planned you before you were born.

The longings of your heart, then, are not incidental; they are critical messages. The desires of your heart are not to be ignored; they are to be consulted. As the wind turns the weather vane, so God uses your passions to turn your life. God is too gracious to ask you to do something you hate. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What is God calling you to do? What do you enjoy doing? Is there a connection? Ask your pastor and your friends for advice. Discover and use your spiritual gifts. Then you will find joy in serving God.

EXPLORATION

Spiritual Gifts—Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12:1–11; Ephesians 4:7–13; 1 Peter 4:10, 11.

24 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down;
For the Lord upholds *him with* His hand.

25 I have been young, and *now* am old;
Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken,
Nor his descendants begging bread.
26 *He is* ever merciful, and lends;
And his descendants *are* blessed.

27 Depart from evil, and do good;
And dwell forevermore.
28 For the Lord loves justice,
And does not forsake His saints;
They are preserved forever,
But the descendants of the wicked shall be cut off.
29 The righteous shall inherit the land,
And dwell in it forever.

30 The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom,
And his tongue talks of justice.
31 The law of his God *is* in his heart;
None of his steps shall slide.

32 The wicked watches the righteous,
And seeks to slay him.
33 The Lord will not leave him in his hand,
Nor condemn him when he is judged.

34 Wait on the Lord,
And keep His way,
And He shall exalt you to inherit the land;
When the wicked are cut off, you shall see *it.*
35 I have seen the wicked in great power,
And spreading himself like a native green tree.
36 Yet he passed away,[a] and behold, he *was* no *more;*
Indeed I sought him, but he could not be found.

37 Mark the blameless *man,* and observe the upright;
For the future of *that* man *is* peace.
38 But the transgressors shall be destroyed together;
The future of the wicked shall be cut off.

39 But the salvation of the righteous *is* from the Lord;
He is their strength in the time of trouble.
40 And the Lord shall help them and deliver them;
He shall deliver them from the wicked,
And save them,
Because they trust in Him.

37:36 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Septuagint, and Targum; Syriac and Vulgate read *I passed by.*

PSALM 38

Prayer in Time of Chastening

A Psalm of David. To bring to remembrance.

O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your wrath,
Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure!
2 For Your arrows pierce me deeply,
And Your hand presses me down.

3 *There is* no soundness in my flesh
Because of Your anger,
Nor *any* health in my bones
Because of my sin.
4 For my iniquities have gone over my head;
Like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me.
5 My wounds are foul *and* festering
Because of my foolishness.

6 I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly;
I go mourning all the day long.
7 For my loins are full of inflammation,
And *there is* no soundness in my flesh.
8 I am feeble and severely broken;
I groan because of the turmoil of my heart.

9 Lord, all my desire *is* before You;
And my sighing is not hidden from You.
10 My heart pants, my strength fails me;
As for the light of my eyes, it also has gone from me.

11 My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague,
And my relatives stand afar off.
12 Those also who seek my life lay snares *for me;*
Those who seek my hurt speak of destruction,
And plan deception all the day long.

13 But I, like a deaf *man,* do not hear;
And *I am* like a mute *who* does not open his mouth.
14 Thus I am like a man who does not hear,
And in whose mouth *is* no response.

15 For in You, O Lord, I hope;
You will hear, O Lord my God.
16 For I said, *"Hear me,* lest they rejoice over me,
Lest, when my foot slips, they exalt *themselves* against me."

17 For I *am* ready to fall,
And my sorrow *is* continually before me.
18 For I will declare my iniquity;
I will be in anguish over my sin.
19 But my enemies *are* vigorous, *and* they are strong;

Life Lessons

Psalms 38:1—39:13

SITUATION
David prayed when he suffered. He knew only God could bring forgiveness and healing.

OBSERVATION
In the midst of our loneliness, despair, and confusion, we find hope in God alone.

INSPIRATION
The brevity of life grants power to abide, not an excuse to bail. Fleeting days don't justify fleeing problems. Fleeting days strengthen us to endure problems. Will your problems pass? No guarantee they will. Will your pain cease? Perhaps. Perhaps not. But heaven gives this promise: "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17).

The words "weight of glory" conjure up images of the ancient pan scale. Remember the blindfolded lady of justice? She holds a pan scale—two pans, one on either side of the needle. The weight of a purchase would be determined by placing weights on one side and the purchase on the other.

God does the same with your struggles. On one side He stacks all your burdens. Famines. Firings. Parents who forgot you. Bosses who ignored you. Bad breaks, bad health, bad days. Stack them up, and watch one side of the pan scale plummet.

Now witness God's response. Does He remove them? Eliminate the

burdens? No, rather than take them, He offsets them. He places an eternal weight of glory on the other side. Endless joy. Measureless peace. An eternity of Him. Watch what happens as he sets eternity on your scale.

Everything changes! The burdens lift. The heavy becomes light when weighed against eternity. If life is "just a moment," can't we endure any challenge for a moment?

We can be sick for *just a moment*.

We can be lonely for *just a moment*.

We can be persecuted for *just a moment*.

We can struggle for *just a moment*.

Can't we?

Can't we wait for our peace? It's not about us anyway. And it's certainly not about now. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you feel hopeful or hopeless about the future? What kind of hope does the world provide? What kind of hope does your Shepherd provide? Ask God to diminish your loneliness, decrease your despair, and lift your confusion.

EXPLORATION

Hope—Job 13:15; Psalm 62:5; Romans 12:12; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Hebrews 6:19.

And those who hate me wrongfully have multiplied.
20 Those also who render evil for good,
They are my adversaries, because I follow *what is* good.

21 Do not forsake me, O Lord;
O my God, be not far from me!
22 Make haste to help me,
O Lord, my salvation!

PSALM 39

Prayer for Wisdom and Forgiveness

To the Chief Musician. To Jeduthun. A Psalm of David.

I said, "I will guard my ways,
Lest I sin with my tongue;
I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle,
While the wicked are before me."
2 I was mute with silence,
I held my peace *even* from good;
And my sorrow was stirred up.
3 My heart was hot within me;
While I was musing, the fire burned.
Then I spoke with my tongue:

4 "Lord, make me to know my end,
And what *is* the measure of my days,
That I may know how frail I *am*.
5 Indeed, You have made my days *as* handbreadths,
And my age *is* as nothing before You;
Certainly every man at his best state *is* but vapor. *Selah*
6 Surely every man walks about like a shadow;
Surely they busy themselves in vain;
He heaps up *riches,*
And does not know who will gather them.

7 "And now, Lord, what do I wait for?
My hope *is* in You.
8 Deliver me from all my transgressions;
Do not make me the reproach of the foolish.
9 I was mute, I did not open my mouth,
Because it was You who did *it*.
10 Remove Your plague from me;
I am consumed by the blow of Your hand.
11 When with rebukes You correct man for iniquity,
You make his beauty melt away like a moth;
Surely every man *is* vapor. *Selah*

12 "Hear my prayer, O Lord,
And give ear to my cry;
Do not be silent at my tears;
For I *am* a stranger with You,

A sojourner, as all my fathers *were.*
13 Remove Your gaze from me, that I may regain strength,
Before I go away and am no more."

PSALM 40

Faith Persevering in Trial

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

I waited patiently for the Lord;
And He inclined to me,
And heard my cry.
2 He also brought me up out of a horrible pit,
Out of the miry clay,
And set my feet upon a rock,
And established my steps.
3 He has put a new song in my mouth—
Praise to our God;
Many will see *it* and fear,
And will trust in the Lord.

4 Blessed *is* that man who makes the Lord his trust,
And does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.
5 Many, O Lord my God, *are* Your wonderful works
Which You have done;
And Your thoughts toward us
Cannot be recounted to You in order;
If I would declare and speak *of them,*
They are more than can be numbered.

6 Sacrifice and offering You did not desire;
My ears You have opened.
Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require.
7 Then I said, "Behold, I come;
In the scroll of the book *it is* written of me.
8 I delight to do Your will, O my God,
And Your law *is* within my heart."

9 I have proclaimed the good news of righteousness
In the great assembly;
Indeed, I do not restrain my lips,
O Lord, You Yourself know.
10 I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart;
I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation;
I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth
From the great assembly.

11 Do not withhold Your tender mercies from me, O Lord;
Let Your lovingkindness and Your truth continually preserve me.
12 For innumerable evils have surrounded me;
My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to
look up;

Life LESSONS

Psalms 40:1—41:13

SITUATION
David fled from Saul prior to replacing him as king.

OBSERVATION
God delivers us from trouble. The wait may be difficult, but we can be thankful for the outcome and can tell others about it.

INSPIRATION
An old man walks down a Florida beach. The sun sets like an orange ball on the horizon. The waves slap the sand. The smell of saltwater stings the air. The beach is vacant. No sun to entice the sunbathers. Not enough light for the fishermen. So, aside from a few joggers and strollers, the gentleman is alone.

He carries a bucket in his bony hand. A bucket of shrimp. It's not for him. It's not for the fish. It's for the sea gulls.

He walks to an isolated pier cast in gold by the setting sun. He steps out to the end of the pier. The time has come for the weekly ritual.

He stands and waits.

Soon the sky becomes a mass of dancing dots. The evening silence gives way to the screeching of birds. They fill the sky and then cover the moorings. They are on a pilgrimage to meet the old man.

For a half hour or so, the bushy-browed, shoulder-bent gentleman will stand on the pier, surrounded by the birds of the sea, until his bucket is empty.

But even after the food is gone, his feathered friends still linger. They linger as if they're attracted to more than just food. They perch

They are more than the hairs of my head;
Therefore my heart fails me.

13 Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me;
O Lord, make haste to help me!
14 Let them be ashamed and brought to mutual confusion
Who seek to destroy my life;
Let them be driven backward and brought to dishonor
Who wish me evil.
15 Let them be confounded because of their shame,
Who say to me, "Aha, aha!"

16 Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You;
Let such as love Your salvation say continually,
"The Lord be magnified!"
17 But I *am* poor and needy;
Yet the Lord thinks upon me.
You *are* my help and my deliverer;
Do not delay, O my God.

PSALM 41

The Blessing and Suffering of the Godly

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

Blessed *is* he who considers the poor;
The Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.
2 The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive,
And he will be blessed on the earth;
You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies.
3 The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness;
You will sustain him on his sickbed.

4 I said, "Lord, be merciful to me;
Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You."
5 My enemies speak evil of me:
"When will he die, and his name perish?"
6 And if he comes to see *me,* he speaks lies;
His heart gathers iniquity to itself;
When he goes out, he tells *it.*

7 All who hate me whisper together against me;
Against me they devise my hurt.
8 "An evil disease," *they say,* "clings to him.
And *now* that he lies down, he will rise up no more."
9 Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted,
Who ate my bread,
Has lifted up *his* heel against me.

10 But You, O Lord, be merciful to me, and raise me up,
That I may repay them.
11 By this I know that You are well pleased with me,

on his hat. They walk on the pier. And they all share a moment together. . . .

The old man on the pier couldn't go a week without saying "thank you."

His name was Eddie Rickenbacker. If you were alive in October 1943, you probably remember the day that he was reported missing at sea.

He had been sent on a mission to deliver a message to Gen. Douglas MacArthur. With a handpicked crew in a B-17 known as the "Flying Fortress," he set off across the South Pacific. Somewhere the crew became lost, the fuel ran out, and the plane went down.

All eight crew members escaped into the life rafts. They battled the weather, the water, the sharks, and the sun. But most of all, they battled the hunger. After eight days, their rations were gone. They ran out of options. It would take a miracle for them to survive.

And a miracle occurred.

After an afternoon devotional service, the men said a prayer and tried to rest. As Rickenbacker was dozing with his hat over his eyes, something landed on his head. He would later say that he knew it was a sea gull. He didn't know how he knew; he just knew. That gull meant food . . . if he could catch it. And he did.

The flesh was eaten. The intestines were used as fish bait. And the crew survived.

What was a sea gull doing hundreds of miles away from land?

Only God knows.

But whatever the reason, Rickenbacker was thankful. As a result, every Friday evening this old captain walked to the pier, his bucket full of shrimp and his heart full of thanks.

Because my enemy does not triumph over me.
12 As for me, You uphold me in my integrity,
And set me before Your face forever.

13 Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel
From everlasting to everlasting!
Amen and Amen.

Book Two: Psalms 42—72

PSALM 42

Yearning for God in the Midst of Distresses

To the Chief Musician. A Contemplation[a] of the sons of Korah.

As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So pants my soul for You, O God.
2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God?[a]
3 My tears have been my food day and night,
While they continually say to me,
"Where *is* your God?"

4 When I remember these *things,*
I pour out my soul within me.
For I used to go with the multitude;
I went with them to the house of God,
With the voice of joy and praise,
With a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast.

5 Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And *why* are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him
For the help of His countenance.[a]

6 O my God,[a] my soul is cast down within me;
Therefore I will remember You from the land of the Jordan,
And from the heights of Hermon,
From the Hill Mizar.
7 Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls;
All Your waves and billows have gone over me.
8 The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime,
And in the night His song *shall be* with me—
A prayer to the God of my life.

42:title [a]Hebrew *Maschil* **42:2** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Syriac, and Targum read *I see the face of God.* **42:5** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; a few Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *The help of my countenance, my God.* **42:6** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; a few Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate put *my God* at the end of verse 5.

We'd be wise to do the same. We've much in common with Rickenbacker. We, too, were saved by a Sacrificial Visitor.

We, too, were rescued by One who journeyed far from only God knows where.

And we, like the captain, have every reason to look into the sky . . . and worship. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Tired of waiting for a career break? A loving spouse? Children? Pray through this psalm when you feel impatient. Let God know your feelings, and tell Him your frustrations.

EXPLORATION
Waiting—Psalm 5:3; 27:14; 130:5, 6; Isaiah 30:18; Micah 7:7; Luke 12:35–40; James 5:7, 8.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 42:1—43:5

SITUATION
Psalms 42 and 43 were probably written as one psalm. Though the writer felt separated from God, he recognized that he should put his hope in God.

OBSERVATION
Seek God even in times of discouragement, and He will provide hope.

INSPIRATION
What do you need most today? Do you need just a word of hope? That's what we all need. And that's what the Word of God does that nothing and no one else can. The Word of God says to us that there is no hopeless situation, no hopeless illness, no hopeless marriage. If there were hopeless situations, then

God would have given up long ago.

Having a Savior in Christ means that the hopeless have hope, the dead have life, and the abandoned have Good News.

Our hope is the anchor for the soul. "Where's your hope?" Jesus asks. It is the confident hope of the return of Christ. (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "Hope")

APPLICATION

List the circumstances or events in your life that are preventing you from hoping in God. Pray through each one of them, asking God to give you renewed hope in each situation.

EXPLORATION

Hope—Psalm 16:9–11; 31:24; 71:5; Proverbs 14:32; Lamentations 3:21–24; Romans 5:2; Ephesians 1:18; Colossians 1:5.

9 I will say to God my Rock,
"Why have You forgotten me?
Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"
10 *As* with a breaking of my bones,
My enemies reproach me,
While they say to me all day long,
"Where *is* your God?"

11 Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God;
For I shall yet praise Him,
The help of my countenance and my God.

PSALM 43

Prayer to God in Time of Trouble

Vindicate me, O God,
And plead my cause against an ungodly nation;
Oh, deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man!
2 For You *are* the God of my strength;
Why do You cast me off?
Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

3 Oh, send out Your light and Your truth!
Let them lead me;
Let them bring me to Your holy hill
And to Your tabernacle.
4 Then I will go to the altar of God,
To God my exceeding joy;
And on the harp I will praise You,
O God, my God.

5 Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God;
For I shall yet praise Him,
The help of my countenance and my God.

PSALM 44

Redemption Remembered in Present Dishonor

To the Chief Musician. A Contemplation[a] of the sons of Korah.

We have heard with our ears, O God,
Our fathers have told us,
The deeds You did in their days,
In days of old:
2 You drove out the nations with Your hand,
But them You planted;
You afflicted the peoples, and cast them out.

44:title [a]Hebrew *Maschil*

3 For they did not gain possession of the land by their own sword,
Nor did their own arm save them;
But it was Your right hand, Your arm, and the light of Your countenance,
Because You favored them.

4 You are my King, O God;[a]
Command[b] victories for Jacob.
5 Through You we will push down our enemies;
Through Your name we will trample those who rise up against us.
6 For I will not trust in my bow,
Nor shall my sword save me.
7 But You have saved us from our enemies,
And have put to shame those who hated us.
8 In God we boast all day long,
And praise Your name forever. *Selah*

9 But You have cast *us* off and put us to shame,
And You do not go out with our armies.
10 You make us turn back from the enemy,
And those who hate us have taken spoil for themselves.
11 You have given us up like sheep *intended* for food,
And have scattered us among the nations.
12 You sell Your people for *next to* nothing,
And are not enriched by selling them.

13 You make us a reproach to our neighbors,
A scorn and a derision to those all around us.
14 You make us a byword among the nations,
A shaking of the head among the peoples.
15 My dishonor *is* continually before me,
And the shame of my face has covered me,
16 Because of the voice of him who reproaches and reviles,
Because of the enemy and the avenger.

17 All this has come upon us;
But we have not forgotten You,
Nor have we dealt falsely with Your covenant.
18 Our heart has not turned back,
Nor have our steps departed from Your way;
19 But You have severely broken us in the place of jackals,
And covered us with the shadow of death.

20 If we had forgotten the name of our God,
Or stretched out our hands to a foreign god,
21 Would not God search this out?
For He knows the secrets of the heart.

44:4 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Septuagint and Vulgate read *and my God.* [b]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *Who commands.*

Life Lessons

Psalm 44:1–26

SITUATION
The sons of Korah wrote this psalm after Israel lost a war. The Israelites did not understand what caused them to lose.

OBSERVATION
Although disappointed and confused, Israel kept trusting in God. They praised Him and knew that He continued to be strong.

INSPIRATION
Two-year-old Sara sits on my lap. We are watching a comedy on television about a guy who has a mouse in his room. He is asleep. He opens one eye and finds himself peering into the face of the rodent. . . .

I laugh, but Sara panics. She turns away from the screen and buries her face in my shoulder. Her arms encircle my neck and clamp like a vise. Her little body grows rigid. She thinks the mouse is going to get her.

"It's ok, Sara," I assure her. . . .

She is afraid.

But with time, I convince her. . . . Sara has gone from white-faced fear to peaceful chuckles in a few moments. Why? Because her father spoke and she believed.

Would that we would do the same. Got any giant mice on your screen? Got any fears that won't go away? . . .

I wish the fears were just television images. They aren't. They lurk in hospital rooms and funeral homes. They stare at us from divorce papers and eviction notices. They glare through the eyes of cruel parents or an abusive mate. . . .

There are times when

mice roar. There are times when we need a strong pair of arms. You need to know that the arms of God are there. (From *Tell Me the Story* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What problem or fear do you need to trust God with today? Remember that God already knows your problem and wants you to trust Him for strength to solve it. Tell God about your need.

EXPLORATION
Trust God—Proverbs 3:5; Isaiah 26:3, 4; 50:10; Jeremiah 17:7, 8; Habakkuk 3:17–19; Romans 15:13; Hebrews 6:18, 19.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 45:1—46:11

SITUATION
God's strength provided safety, security, and peace. His power guaranteed victory. (Psalm 45 may have been written for a wedding.)

OBSERVATION
Nothing occurs beyond the reach of God's power. Awareness of God's power provides rest and encouragement to Christians.

INSPIRATION
America is in a hurry. Time has skyrocketed in value. The value of any commodity depends on its scarcity. And time that once was abundant now is going to the highest bidder.

. . . "Time," according to pollster Louis Harris, "may have become the most precious commodity in the land."

Do we really have less time? Or is it just our imagination?

In 1965 a testimony

22 Yet for Your sake we are killed all day long;
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

23 Awake! Why do You sleep, O Lord?
Arise! Do not cast *us* off forever.
24 Why do You hide Your face,
And forget our affliction and our oppression?
25 For our soul is bowed down to the dust;
Our body clings to the ground.
26 Arise for our help,
And redeem us for Your mercies' sake.

PSALM 45

The Glories of the Messiah and His Bride

To the Chief Musician. Set to "The Lilies."[a] A Contemplation[b] of the sons of Korah. A Song of Love.

My heart is overflowing with a good theme;
I recite my composition concerning the King;
My tongue *is* the pen of a ready writer.

2 You are fairer than the sons of men;
Grace is poured upon Your lips;
Therefore God has blessed You forever.
3 Gird Your sword upon *Your* thigh, O Mighty One,
With Your glory and Your majesty.
4 And in Your majesty ride prosperously because of truth, humility,
and righteousness;
And Your right hand shall teach You awesome things.
5 Your arrows *are* sharp in the heart of the King's enemies;
The peoples fall under You.

6 Your throne, O God, *is* forever and ever;
A scepter of righteousness *is* the scepter of Your kingdom.
7 You love righteousness and hate wickedness;
Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You
With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.
8 All Your garments *are scented* with myrrh and aloes *and* cassia,
Out of the ivory palaces, by which they have made You glad.
9 Kings' daughters *are* among Your honorable women;
At Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir.

10 Listen, O daughter,
Consider and incline your ear;
Forget your own people also, and your father's house;
11 So the King will greatly desire your beauty;
Because He *is* your Lord, worship Him.
12 And the daughter of Tyre *will come* with a gift;
The rich among the people will seek your favor.

45:title [a]Hebrew *Shoshannim* [b]Hebrew *Maschil*

13 The royal daughter *is* all glorious within *the palace;*
Her clothing *is* woven with gold.
14 She shall be brought to the King in robes of many colors;
The virgins, her companions who follow her, shall be brought to You.
15 With gladness and rejoicing they shall be brought;
They shall enter the King's palace.

16 Instead of Your fathers shall be Your sons,
Whom You shall make princes in all the earth.
17 I will make Your name to be remembered in all generations;
Therefore the people shall praise You forever and ever.

PSALM 46

God the Refuge of His People and Conqueror of the Nations

To the Chief Musician. *A Psalm* of the sons of Korah.
A Song for Alamoth.

God *is* our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble.
2 Therefore we will not fear,
Even though the earth be removed,
And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;
3 *Though* its waters roar *and* be troubled,
Though the mountains shake with its swelling. *Selah*

4 *There is* a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God,
The holy *place* of the tabernacle of the Most High.
5 God *is* in the midst of her, she shall not be moved;
God shall help her, just at the break of dawn.
6 The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved;
He uttered His voice, the earth melted.

7 The Lord of hosts *is* with us;
The God of Jacob *is* our refuge. *Selah*

8 Come, behold the works of the Lord,
Who has made desolations in the earth.
9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two;
He burns the chariot in the fire.

10 Be still, and know that I *am* God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!

11 The Lord of hosts *is* with us;
The God of Jacob *is* our refuge. *Selah*

before a Senate subcommittee claimed the future looked bright for free time in America. By 1985, predicted the report, Americans would be working twenty-two hours a week and would be able to retire at age thirty-eight.

The reason? The computer age would usher in a gleaming array of advances that would do our work for us while stabilizing our economy.

Take the household, they cited. Microwaves, quick-fix foods, and food processors will pave the way into the carefree future. And the office? Well, you know that old stencil machine? It'll be replaced by a copier. And the files? Computers are the files of the future. And that electric typewriter? Don't get too attached to it; a computer will do its work, too.

And now, years later, we have everything the report promised. The computers are byting, the VCRs are recording, the fax machines are faxing. Yet the clocks are still ticking, and people are still running. The truth is, the average amount of leisure time has *shrunk* 37 percent since 1973. The average work week has *increased* from forty-one to forty-seven hours. (And, for many of you, forty-seven hours would be a calm week.)

Why didn't the forecast come true? What did the committee overlook? They misjudged the appetite of the consumer. As the individualism of the sixties led to the materialism of the eighties, the free time gained for us by technology didn't make us relax; it made us run. Gadgets provided more time . . . more time meant more potential money . . . more potential money

meant more time needed . . . and round and round it went. Lives grew louder as demands became greater. And as demands became greater, lives grew emptier.

"I've got so many irons in the fire, I can't keep any of them hot," complained one young father.

Can you relate?

When I was ten years old, my mother enrolled me in piano lessons. Now, many youngsters excel at the keyboard. Not me. Spending thirty minutes every afternoon tethered to a piano bench was a torture just one level away from swallowing broken glass. The metronome inspected each second with glacial slowness before it was allowed to pass.

Some of the music, though, I learned to enjoy. I hammered the staccatos. I belabored the crescendos. The thundering finishes I kettle-drummed. But there was one instruction in the music I could never obey to my teacher's satisfaction. The rest. The zigzagged command to do nothing. Nothing! What sense does that make? Why sit at the piano and pause when you can pound?

"Because," my teacher patiently explained, "music is always sweeter after a rest."

It didn't make sense to me at age ten. But now, a few decades later, the words ring with wisdom—divine wisdom. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you weary? Look to the protection and strength of God. The world can be overwhelming at times, but remember that God has everything under control. Relax in Him.

PSALM 47

Praise to God, the Ruler of the Earth

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of the sons of Korah.

Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples!
Shout to God with the voice of triumph!
2 For the Lord Most High *is* awesome;
He is a great King over all the earth.
3 He will subdue the peoples under us,
And the nations under our feet.
4 He will choose our inheritance for us,
The excellence of Jacob whom He loves. *Selah*

5 God has gone up with a shout,
The Lord with the sound of a trumpet.
6 Sing praises to God, sing praises!
Sing praises to our King, sing praises!
7 For God *is* the King of all the earth;
Sing praises with understanding.

8 God reigns over the nations;
God sits on His holy throne.
9 The princes of the people have gathered together,
The people of the God of Abraham.
For the shields of the earth *belong* to God;
He is greatly exalted.

PSALM 48

The Glory of God in Zion

A Song. A Psalm of the sons of Korah.

Great *is* the Lord, and greatly to be praised
In the city of our God,
In His holy mountain.
2 Beautiful in elevation,
The joy of the whole earth,
Is Mount Zion *on* the sides of the north,
The city of the great King.
3 God *is* in her palaces;
He is known as her refuge.

4 For behold, the kings assembled,
They passed by together.
5 They saw *it, and* so they marveled;
They were troubled, they hastened away.
6 Fear took hold of them there,
And pain, as of a woman in birth pangs,
7 *As when* You break the ships of Tarshish
With an east wind.

8 As we have heard,
So we have seen
In the city of the Lord of hosts,
In the city of our God:
God will establish it forever. *Selah*

9 We have thought, O God, on Your lovingkindness,
In the midst of Your temple.
10 According to Your name, O God,
So *is* Your praise to the ends of the earth;
Your right hand is full of righteousness.
11 Let Mount Zion rejoice,
Let the daughters of Judah be glad,
Because of Your judgments.

12 Walk about Zion,
And go all around her.
Count her towers;
13 Mark well her bulwarks;
Consider her palaces;
That you may tell *it* to the generation following.
14 For this *is* God,
Our God forever and ever;
He will be our guide
Even to death.[a]

PSALM 49

The Confidence of the Foolish

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of the sons of Korah.

Hear this, all peoples;
Give ear, all inhabitants of the world,
2 Both low and high,
Rich and poor together.
3 My mouth shall speak wisdom,
And the meditation of my heart *shall give* understanding.
4 I will incline my ear to a proverb;
I will disclose my dark saying on the harp.

5 Why should I fear in the days of evil,
When the iniquity at my heels surrounds me?
6 Those who trust in their wealth
And boast in the multitude of their riches,
7 None *of them* can by any means redeem *his* brother,
Nor give to God a ransom for him—
8 For the redemption of their souls *is* costly,
And it shall cease forever—
9 That he should continue to live eternally,
And not see the Pit.

48:14 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Syriac; Septuagint and Vulgate read *Forever*.

EXPLORATION
God's Strength for Us—Exodus 15:2; 2 Samuel 22:33; Psalm 28:8; 73:26; 81:1; 89:21.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 47:1—49:20

SITUATION
Psalm 47 is a festive song, celebrating the universal reign of God.

OBSERVATION
God reigns over all the earth and every nation. He deserves our adoration.

INSPIRATION
Moses asked to see it on Sinai.

It billowed through the temple, leaving priests too stunned to minister.

When Ezekiel saw it, he had to bow.

It encircled the angels and starstruck the shepherds in the Bethlehem pasture.

Jesus radiates it.

John beheld it.

Peter witnessed it on Transfiguration Hill.

Christ will return enthroned in it.

Heaven will be illuminated by it.

It gulfstreams the Atlantic of Scripture, touching every person with the potential of changing every life. Including yours. One glimpse, one taste, one sampling, and your faith will never be the same . . .

Glory.

God's glory.

To seek God's glory is to pray, "Thicken the air with Your presence; make it misty with Your majesty. Part heaven's drapes, and let Your nature spill forth. God, show us God."

What the word *Alps* does for the mountains of Europe, *glory* does for God's

nature. *Alps* encompasses a host of beauties: creeks, peaks, falling leaves, running elk. To ask to see the Alps is to ask to see it all. To ask to see God's glory is to ask to see all of God. God's glory carries the full weight of His attributes: His love, His character, His strength, and on and on. . . .

When you think "God's glory," think "preeminence." And, when you think "preeminence," think "priority." For God's glory is God's priority.

God's staff meetings, if He had them, would revolve around one question: "How can we reveal my glory today?" God's to-do list consists of one item: "Reveal my glory." Heaven's framed and mounted purpose statement hangs in the angels' break room just above the angel food cake. It reads: "Declare God's glory."

God exists to showcase God. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

If God deserves our adoration, what are you doing that reflects that? Ask God to put a song of worship in your heart. Start each day by spending a few moments in praise and adoration.

EXPLORATION

Praise and Adoration—Deuteronomy 10:21; 1 Chronicles 16:8–10; Psalm 63:3–5; 66; 71:23; Matthew 11:25–27; Revelation 5:13.

10 For he sees wise men die;
Likewise the fool and the senseless person perish,
And leave their wealth to others.
11 Their inner thought *is that* their houses *will last* forever,[a]
Their dwelling places to all generations;
They call *their* lands after their own names.
12 Nevertheless man, *though* in honor, does not remain;[a]
He is like the beasts *that* perish.

13 This is the way of those who *are* foolish,
And of their posterity who approve their sayings. *Selah*
14 Like sheep they are laid in the grave;
Death shall feed on them;
The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning;
And their beauty shall be consumed in the grave, far from their dwelling.
15 But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave,
For He shall receive me. *Selah*

16 Do not be afraid when one becomes rich,
When the glory of his house is increased;
17 For when he dies he shall carry nothing away;
His glory shall not descend after him.
18 Though while he lives he blesses himself
(For *men* will praise you when you do well for yourself),
19 He shall go to the generation of his fathers;
They shall never see light.
20 A man *who is* in honor, yet does not understand,
Is like the beasts *that* perish.

PSALM 50

God the Righteous Judge

A Psalm of Asaph.

The Mighty One, God the Lord,
Has spoken and called the earth
From the rising of the sun to its going down.
2 Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,
God will shine forth.
3 Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent;
A fire shall devour before Him,
And it shall be very tempestuous all around Him.

4 He shall call to the heavens from above,
And to the earth, that He may judge His people:
5 "Gather My saints together to Me,
Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice."

49:11 [a]Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate read *Their graves shall be their houses forever*. **49:12** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *understand* (compare verse 20).

6 Let the heavens declare His righteousness,
For God Himself *is* Judge. *Selah*

7 "Hear, O My people, and I will speak,
O Israel, and I will testify against you;
I *am* God, your God!
8 I will not rebuke you for your sacrifices
Or your burnt offerings,
Which are continually before Me.
9 I will not take a bull from your house,
Nor goats out of your folds.
10 For every beast of the forest *is* Mine,
And the cattle on a thousand hills.
11 I know all the birds of the mountains,
And the wild beasts of the field *are* Mine.

12 "If I were hungry, I would not tell you;
For the world *is* Mine, and all its fullness.
13 Will I eat the flesh of bulls,
Or drink the blood of goats?
14 Offer to God thanksgiving,
And pay your vows to the Most High.
15 Call upon Me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me."

16 But to the wicked God says:
"What *right* have you to declare My statutes,
Or take My covenant in your mouth,
17 Seeing you hate instruction
And cast My words behind you?
18 When you saw a thief, you consented[a] with him,
And have been a partaker with adulterers.
19 You give your mouth to evil,
And your tongue frames deceit.
20 You sit *and* speak against your brother;
You slander your own mother's son.
21 These *things* you have done, and I kept silent;
You thought that I was altogether like you;
But I will rebuke you,
And set *them* in order before your eyes.

22 "Now consider this, you who forget God,
Lest I tear *you* in pieces,
And *there be* none to deliver:
23 Whoever offers praise glorifies Me;
And to him who orders *his* conduct *aright*
I will show the salvation of God."

50:18 [a]Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate read *ran*.

Life Lessons

Psalms 50:1—52:9

SITUATION
David repented after Nathan confronted him. Nathan rightly pointed to David's sin of adultery and murder (2 Samuel 11–12).

OBSERVATION
David pled for restoration and renewal. He asked that God would purify his heart.

INSPIRATION
If a box of tapes existed documenting every second of your life, which tapes would you burn? Do you have a season in which you indulged, imbibed, or inhaled?

King David did. Could a collapse be more colossal than his? He seduces and impregnates Bathsheba, murders her husband, and deceives his general and soldiers. Then he marries her. She bears the child.

The cover-up appears complete. The casual observer detects no cause for concern. David has a new wife and a happy life. All seems well on the throne. But all is not well in David's heart. Guilt simmers. . . .

It took David a year. It took a surprise pregnancy, the death of a soldier, the persuasion of a preacher, the probing and pressing of God, but David's hard heart finally softened, and he confessed: "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:13).

And God did with the sin what He does with yours and mine—He put it away. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Do you think you have committed too great a sin

for God to forget it? Do you think you have waited too long to ask for His pardon? Read this psalm to God as your own prayer. Experience God's forgiving grace as David did.

EXPLORATION
Confession of Sin—Ezra 9:5–7; 10:1; Nehemiah 1:5–7; Psalm 32:5; 41:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 3:19.

PSALM 51

A Prayer of Repentance

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

Have mercy upon me, O God,
According to Your lovingkindness;
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,
Blot out my transgressions.
2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I acknowledge my transgressions,
And my sin *is* always before me.
4 Against You, You only, have I sinned,
And done *this* evil in Your sight—
That You may be found just when You speak,[a]
And blameless when You judge.

5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.
6 Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts,
And in the hidden *part* You will make me to know wisdom.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
8 Make me hear joy and gladness,
That the bones You have broken may rejoice.
9 Hide Your face from my sins,
And blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
11 Do not cast me away from Your presence,
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me *by Your* generous Spirit.
13 *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners shall be converted to You.

14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
The God of my salvation,
And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.
15 O Lord, open my lips,
And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.
16 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give *it;*
You do not delight in burnt offering.
17 The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit,

51:4 [a]Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate read *in Your words.*

Guilt

Canyons of shame run deep. Gorges of never-ending guilt. Walls ribboned with the greens and grays of death. Unending echoes of screams. Put your hands over your ears. Splash water on your face. Stop looking over your shoulder. Try as you might to outrun yesterday's tragedies—their tentacles are longer than your hope.

Sometimes your shame is private. Pushed over the edge by an abusive spouse. Seduced by a compromising superior. No one else knows. But you know. And that's enough.

Sometimes it's public. Branded by a divorce you didn't want. Contaminated by a disease you never expected. Marked by a handicap you didn't create. And whether it's actually in their eyes or just in your imagination, you have to deal with it—you are marked: a divorcee, an invalid, an orphan, an AIDS patient.

Whether private or public, shame is always painful. And unless you deal with it, it is permanent. Unless you get help—the dawn will never come.

Take him with you to your canyon of shame. Invite Christ to journey with you. Let Him stand beside you as you retell the events of the darkest nights of your soul.

And then listen. Listen carefully. He's speaking.

"I don't judge you guilty."

And watch. Watch carefully. He's writing. He's leaving a message. Not in the sand, but on a cross.

Not with His hand, but with His blood.

His message has two words: Not guilty.

Study Guide

Read Psalm 51.

- Think of a well-known person whose personal failure was covered by the media. How did he or she seem to cope with the shame of failure?
- In our society, what things bring shame on a person?
- How have you seen the church respond to a person living with shame?
- Explain the difference between shame and guilt.
- How can we find comfort when we are dealing with shame in our lives?
- In what area of life do you need to experience healing from shame?
- In what unhealthy ways do some people cope with shame?
- How can we tell the difference between feeling convicted of sin and feeling needlessly shamed?

A broken and a contrite heart—
These, O God, You will not despise.

18 Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion;
Build the walls of Jerusalem.
19 Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness,
With burnt offering and whole burnt offering;
Then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.

PSALM 52

The End of the Wicked and the Peace of the Godly

To the Chief Musician. A Contemplation[a] of David when
Doeg the Edomite went and told Saul, and said to him,
"David has gone to the house of Ahimelech."

Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?
The goodness of God *endures* continually.
2 Your tongue devises destruction,
Like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.
3 You love evil more than good,
Lying rather than speaking righteousness. *Selah*
4 You love all devouring words,
You deceitful tongue.

5 God shall likewise destroy you forever;
He shall take you away, and pluck you out of *your* dwelling place,
And uproot you from the land of the living. *Selah*
6 The righteous also shall see and fear,
And shall laugh at him, *saying,*
7 "Here is the man *who* did not make God his strength,
But trusted in the abundance of his riches,
And strengthened himself in his wickedness."

8 But I *am* like a green olive tree in the house of God;
I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever.
9 I will praise You forever,
Because You have done *it;*
And in the presence of Your saints
I will wait on Your name, for *it is* good.

PSALM 53

Folly of the Godless, and the Restoration of Israel

To the Chief Musician. Set to "Mahalath."
A Contemplation[a] of David.

The fool has said in his heart,
"*There is* no God."
They are corrupt, and have done abominable iniquity;
There is none who does good.

52:title [a]Hebrew *Maschil* **53:title** [a]Hebrew *Maschil*

Life LESSONS

Psalms 53:1—55:23

SITUATION
People who denied God were foolish, for they denied the one who could save them. David prayed for salvation to reach his people. He praised God for giving favor to an unworthy nation.

OBSERVATION
Denying God doesn't

2 God looks down from heaven upon the children of men,
To see if there are *any* who understand, who seek God.
3 Every one of them has turned aside;
They have together become corrupt;
There is none who does good,
No, not one.

4 Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge,
Who eat up my people *as* they eat bread,
And do not call upon God?
5 There they are in great fear
Where no fear was,
For God has scattered the bones of him who encamps against you;
You have put *them* to shame,
Because God has despised them.

6 Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion!
When God brings back the captivity of His people,
Let Jacob rejoice *and* Israel be glad.

PSALM 54

Answered Prayer for Deliverance from Adversaries

To the Chief Musician. With stringed instruments.[a]
A Contemplation[b] of David when the Ziphites went and said to Saul, "Is David not hiding with us?"

Save me, O God, by Your name,
And vindicate me by Your strength.
2 Hear my prayer, O God;
Give ear to the words of my mouth.
3 For strangers have risen up against me,
And oppressors have sought after my life;
They have not set God before them. *Selah*

4 Behold, God *is* my helper;
The Lord *is* with those who uphold my life.
5 He will repay my enemies for their evil.
Cut them off in Your truth.

6 I will freely sacrifice to You;
I will praise Your name, O Lord, for *it is* good.
7 For He has delivered me out of all trouble;
And my eye has seen *its desire* upon my enemies.

54:title [a]Hebrew *neginoth* [b]Hebrew *Maschil*

detract from His majesty, but it does separate you from your divine Father. Avoid this tragedy!

INSPIRATION

The road out of Bethlehem was steep and dangerous. It led him through a lizard-laced desert, an angry Jerusalem, conflict, and peril. Leaders resolved to kill him. His people sought to stone him. His own family chose to mock him.

Some people lifted him up him as king; others cast him down. Jerusalem gates saw him enter as a sovereign and leave like a fugitive. He eventually died a lonely death in the Hebrew capital.

But he is far from dead.

His words still speak. His legacy still lives. Love or hate him, society keeps turning to him, reading his thoughts, pondering his deeds, imagining his face. Scripture gives only scant sentences about his looks, so sculptors and artists have filled galleries with their speculations. Michelangelo. Rembrandt. Da Vinci. Canvas. Stone. Painting. Sculpting.

And books. Books! More pages have been devoted to Bethlehem's prodigy than any other figure in history. We can't stop talking about him. Sand has filled his Judean footprints thousands of times over thousands of years—but still we gather to reflect on his life.

You know whom I'm describing.

You do, don't you? The pasture. The anointing. The childhood call. The lifelong enemies. Wilderness. Jerusalem. Judea. The lonely death. The endless legacy. Who is this boy from Bethlehem?

David, of course.

Or Jesus, perhaps.

Or . . . both? . . .

Jesus understands you.

He understands small-town anonymity and big-city pressure. He's walked pastures of sheep and palaces of kings. He's faced hunger, sorrow, and death and wants to face them with you. Jesus "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:15, 16).

He became one of us. And He did so to redeem all of us. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Humanity has built tall buildings, gone to the moon, and transplanted organs. But we haven't overcome the penalty of sin. Such a challenge escapes us. Who has the cure for sin or for death? Open your heart to God today. Watch God accomplish changes in areas you have not been able to change.

EXPLORATION

Denying God—Exodus 11:9, 10; Matthew 10:32, 33; 2 Timothy 2:12.

PSALM 55

Trust in God Concerning the Treachery of Friends

To the Chief Musician. With stringed instruments.[a]
A Contemplation[b] of David.

Give ear to my prayer, O God,
And do not hide Yourself from my supplication.
2 Attend to me, and hear me;
I am restless in my complaint, and moan noisily,
3 Because of the voice of the enemy,
Because of the oppression of the wicked;
For they bring down trouble upon me,
And in wrath they hate me.

4 My heart is severely pained within me,
And the terrors of death have fallen upon me.
5 Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me,
And horror has overwhelmed me.
6 So I said, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest.
7 Indeed, I would wander far off,
And remain in the wilderness. *Selah*
8 I would hasten my escape
From the windy storm *and* tempest."

9 Destroy, O Lord, *and* divide their tongues,
For I have seen violence and strife in the city.
10 Day and night they go around it on its walls;
Iniquity and trouble *are* also in the midst of it.
11 Destruction *is* in its midst;
Oppression and deceit do not depart from its streets.

12 For *it is* not an enemy *who* reproaches me;
Then I could bear *it.*
Nor *is it* one *who* hates me who has exalted *himself* against me;
Then I could hide from him.
13 But *it was* you, a man my equal,
My companion and my acquaintance.
14 We took sweet counsel together,
And walked to the house of God in the throng.

15 Let death seize them;
Let them go down alive into hell,
For wickedness *is* in their dwellings *and* among them.

16 As for me, I will call upon God,
And the Lord shall save me.
17 Evening and morning and at noon
I will pray, and cry aloud,

55:title [a]Hebrew *neginoth* [b]Hebrew *Maschil*

And He shall hear my voice.
18 He has redeemed my soul in peace from the battle *that was*
against me,
For there were many against me.
19 God will hear, and afflict them,
Even He who abides from of old. *Selah*
Because they do not change,
Therefore they do not fear God.

20 He has put forth his hands against those who were at peace with
him;
He has broken his covenant.
21 *The words* of his mouth were smoother than butter,
But war *was* in his heart;
His words were softer than oil,
Yet they *were* drawn swords.

22 Cast your burden on the Lord,
And He shall sustain you;
He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.

23 But You, O God, shall bring them down to the pit of destruction;
Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days;
But I will trust in You.

PSALM 56

Prayer for Relief from Tormentors

To the Chief Musician. Set to "The Silent Dove in Distant Lands."[a]
A Michtam of David when the Philistines captured him in Gath.

Be merciful to me, O God, for man would swallow me up;
Fighting all day he oppresses me.
2 My enemies would hound *me* all day,
For *there are* many who fight against me, O Most High.

3 Whenever I am afraid,
I will trust in You.
4 In God (I will praise His word),
In God I have put my trust;
I will not fear.
What can flesh do to me?

5 All day they twist my words;
All their thoughts *are* against me for evil.
6 They gather together,
They hide, they mark my steps,
When they lie in wait for my life.
7 Shall they escape by iniquity?
In anger cast down the peoples, O God!

56:title [a]Hebrew *Jonath Elem Rechokim*

Life LESSONS

Psalms 56:1—57:11

SITUATION
David wrote Psalm 56 when the Philistines captured him in Gath (1 Samuel 21:10–15). He wrote Psalm 57 while hiding in a cave.

OBSERVATION
God is trustworthy. He is a rock, a hiding place, a fortress. We have safety and comfort in Him.

INSPIRATION
Can you relate to David's story?

Has your Saul cut you off from the position you had and the people you love?

In an effort to land on your feet, have you stretched the truth? Distorted the facts?

Are you seeking refuge in Gath? Under normal circumstances you would never go there. But these aren't normal circumstances, so you loiter in the breeding ground of giants. The

hometown of trouble. Her arms or that bar. You walk shady streets and frequent questionable places. And, while there, you go crazy. So the crowd will accept you, so the stress won't kill you, you go wild. You wake up in a Dead Sea cave, in the grottoes of Adullam, at the lowest point of your life, feeling as dumb as a roomful of anvils. You stare out at an arid, harsh, unpeopled future and ask, "What do I do now?"

I suggest you let David be your teacher. Sure, he goes wacko for a few verses. But in the cave of Adullam, he gathers himself. The faithful shepherd boy surfaces again. The giant-killer rediscovers courage. Yes, he has a price on his head. Yes, he has no place to lay his head, but somehow he keeps his head.

He returns his focus to God and finds refuge.

Refuge surfaces as a favorite word of David's. Circle its appearances in the Book of Psalms, and you'll count as many as forty-plus appearances in some versions. But never did David use the word more poignantly than in Psalm 57. The introduction to the passage explains its background: "A Michtam of David when he fled from Saul into the cave."

Envision Jesse's son in the dimness: on his knees, perhaps on his face, lost in shadows and thought. He has nowhere to turn. Go home, he endangers his family; to the tabernacle, he imperils the priests. Saul will kill him; Gath won't take him. He lied in the sanctuary and went crazy with the Philistines, and here he sits. All alone.

But then he remembers: he's not. He's not alone. And from the recesses of the cave a sweet voice

8 You number my wanderings;
Put my tears into Your bottle;
Are they not in Your book?
9 When I cry out *to You,*

New Life In Christ

Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.—Psalm 56:3

Trusting God With Your Fears

How did Jesus endure the terror of the crucifixion? He went first to the Father with His fears. He modeled the words of Psalm 56:3: "Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You."

Do the same with yours. Don't avoid life's Gardens of Gethsemane. Enter them. Just don't enter them alone. And while there, be honest. Pounding the ground is permitted. Tears are allowed. And if you sweat blood, you won't be the first. Do what Jesus did; open your heart.

And be specific. Jesus was. "Take this cup," He prayed. Give God the number of the flight. Tell Him the length of the speech. Share the details of the job transfer. He has plenty of time. He also has plenty of compassion.

He doesn't think your fears are foolish or silly. He won't tell you to "buck up" or "get tough." He's been where you are. He knows how you feel.

And he knows what you need. That's why we punctuate our prayers as Jesus did. "If you are willing . . ."

Was God willing? Yes and no. He didn't take away the Cross, but He took the fear. God didn't still the storm, but He calmed the sailor.

Who's to say He won't do the same for you?

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6).

Don't measure the size of the mountain; talk to the One who can move it. Instead of carrying the world on your shoulders, talk to the One who holds the universe on His. Hope is a look away.

Now, what were you looking at? (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

Question: What are some specific fears you are struggling with that you can pray about today to Jesus?

For more on "New Life in Christ," see page 852.

Then my enemies will turn back;
This I know, because God *is* for me.
10 In God (I will praise *His* word),
In the Lord (I will praise *His* word),
11 In God I have put my trust;
I will not be afraid.
What can man do to me?

12 Vows *made* to You *are binding* upon me, O God;
I will render praises to You,
13 For You have delivered my soul from death.
Have You not *kept* my feet from falling,
That I may walk before God
In the light of the living?

PSALM 57

Prayer for Safety from Enemies

To the Chief Musician. Set to "Do Not Destroy."[a]
A Michtam of David when he fled from Saul into the cave.

Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me!
For my soul trusts in You;
And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge,
Until *these* calamities have passed by.

2 I will cry out to God Most High,
To God who performs *all things* for me.
3 He shall send from heaven and save me;
He reproaches the one who would swallow me up. *Selah*
God shall send forth His mercy and His truth.

4 My soul *is* among lions;
I lie *among* the sons of men
Who are set on fire,
Whose teeth *are* spears and arrows,
And their tongue a sharp sword.
5 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
Let Your glory *be* above all the earth.

6 They have prepared a net for my steps;
My soul is bowed down;
They have dug a pit before me;
Into the midst of it they *themselves* have fallen. *Selah*

7 My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast;
I will sing and give praise.
8 Awake, my glory!
Awake, lute and harp!
I will awaken the dawn.

57:title [a]Hebrew *Al Tashcheth*

floats: "Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; and in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, until these calamities have passed by" (v. 1). (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Christians will be persecuted. In what ways are you persecuted? Who opposes you? When life gets hard, look to your refuge—God.

EXPLORATION
God as Refuge—2 Samuel 22:31; Psalm 46:1; 59:16; 62:7; Isaiah 25:4; Jeremiah 16:19; Joel 3:16; Nahum 1:7.

9 I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples;
I will sing to You among the nations.
10 For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens,
And Your truth unto the clouds.

11 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
Let Your glory *be* above all the earth.

PSALM 58

The Just Judgment of the Wicked

To the Chief Musician. Set to "Do Not Destroy."[a] A Michtam of David.

Do you indeed speak righteousness, you silent ones?
Do you judge uprightly, you sons of men?
2 No, in heart you work wickedness;
You weigh out the violence of your hands in the earth.

3 The wicked are estranged from the womb;
They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.
4 Their poison *is* like the poison of a serpent;
They are like the deaf cobra *that* stops its ear,
5 Which will not heed the voice of charmers,
Charming ever so skillfully.

6 Break their teeth in their mouth, O God!
Break out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord!
7 Let them flow away as waters *which* run continually;
When he bends *his bow,*
Let his arrows be as if cut in pieces.
8 *Let them be* like a snail which melts away as it goes,
Like a stillborn child of a woman, that they may not see the sun.

9 Before your pots can feel *the burning* thorns,
He shall take them away as with a whirlwind,
As in His living and burning wrath.
10 The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance;
He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked,
11 So that men will say,
"Surely *there is* a reward for the righteous;
Surely He is God who judges in the earth."

PSALM 59

The Assured Judgment of the Wicked

To the Chief Musician. Set to "Do Not Destroy."[a]
A Michtam of David when Saul sent men,
and they watched the house in order to kill him.

Deliver me from my enemies, O my God;
Defend me from those who rise up against me.

58:title [a]Hebrew *Al Tashcheth* **59:title** [a]Hebrew *Al Tashcheth*

Life Lessons

Psalms 58:1—59:17

SITUATION
David sang to God for His protection and justice. He asked God to stop the assault of evil people on the righteous.

OBSERVATION
God cares for people who try to live a life set apart for His service. He will bring the unrepentant to justice.

INSPIRATION
God guards those who turn to Him. The pounding you feel does not suggest His distance, but proves His nearness. Trust His sovereignty. Hasn't He earned your trust?

Has He ever spoken a word that proved to be false? Given a promise that proved to be a lie? Decades of following God led Joshua to conclude: "Not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken" (Joshua 21:45). Look up *reliability* in heaven's dictionary and read its one-word definition: God. "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13).

Make a list of His mistakes. Pretty short, eh? Now make a list of the times He has forgiven you for yours. Who on earth has such a record? "He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

You can depend on Him. He is "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). And because He is the Lord, He "will be the stability of your times" (Isaiah 33:6).

Trust Him. "Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You" (Psalm 56:3). Join with

2 Deliver me from the workers of iniquity,
And save me from bloodthirsty men.

3 For look, they lie in wait for my life;
The mighty gather against me,
Not *for* my transgression nor *for* my sin, O Lord.
4 They run and prepare themselves through no fault *of mine.*

Awake to help me, and behold!
5 You therefore, O Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel,
Awake to punish all the nations;
Do not be merciful to any wicked transgressors. *Selah*

6 At evening they return,
They growl like a dog,
And go all around the city.
7 Indeed, they belch with their mouth;
Swords *are* in their lips;
For *they say,* "Who hears?"

8 But You, O Lord, shall laugh at them;
You shall have all the nations in derision.
9 I will wait for You, O You his Strength;[a]
For God *is* my defense.
10 My God of mercy[a] shall come to meet me;
God shall let me see *my desire* on my enemies.

11 Do not slay them, lest my people forget;
Scatter them by Your power,
And bring them down,
O Lord our shield.
12 *For* the sin of their mouth *and* the words of their lips,
Let them even be taken in their pride,
And for the cursing and lying *which* they speak.
13 Consume *them* in wrath, consume *them,*
That they *may* not *be;*
And let them know that God rules in Jacob
To the ends of the earth. *Selah*

14 And at evening they return,
They growl like a dog,
And go all around the city.
15 They wander up and down for food,
And howl[a] if they are not satisfied.

16 But I will sing of Your power;
Yes, I will sing aloud of Your mercy in the morning;

59:9 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Syriac; some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate read *my Strength*. **59:10** [a]Following Qere; some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, and Vulgate read *My God, His mercy;* Kethib, some Hebrew manuscripts and Targum read *O God, my mercy;* Syriac reads *O God, Your mercy*. **59:15** [a]Following Septuagint and Vulgate; Masoretic Text, Syriac, and Targum read *spend the night*.

Isaiah, who resolved, "I will trust and not be afraid" (Isaiah 12:2).

God is directing your steps and delighting in every detail of your life (Psalm 37:23, 24). Doesn't matter who you are. Potbellied pig or prized purebred? God sees no difference. But He does see you. In fact, that's His car pulling over to the side of the road. That's God opening the door. And that's you climbing into the passenger seat.

There now, don't you feel safer knowing He is in control? (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Commit your life to Christ. First, appeal to God's mercy in prayer, then ask Jesus to enter your life as Lord and Savior. Develop a relationship with Him.

EXPLORATION

Judgment—Matthew 12:36; Romans 14:10–12; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:11–15.
Salvation—John 3:16; Romans 3:23; 5:8; 6:23; 10:9, 10.

For You have been my defense
And refuge in the day of my trouble.
17 To You, O my Strength, I will sing praises;
For God *is* my defense,
My God of mercy.

PSALM 60

Urgent Prayer for the Restored Favor of God

To the Chief Musician. Set to "Lily of the Testimony."[a]
A Michtam of David. For teaching. When he fought against Mesopotamia and Syria of Zobah, and Joab returned and killed twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.

O God, You have cast us off;
You have broken us down;
You have been displeased;
Oh, restore us again!
2 You have made the earth tremble;
You have broken it;
Heal its breaches, for it is shaking.
3 You have shown Your people hard things;
You have made us drink the wine of confusion.

4 You have given a banner to those who fear You,
That it may be displayed because of the truth. *Selah*
5 That Your beloved may be delivered,
Save *with* Your right hand, and hear me.

6 God has spoken in His holiness:
"I will rejoice;
I will divide Shechem
And measure out the Valley of Succoth.
7 Gilead *is* Mine, and Manasseh *is* Mine;
Ephraim also *is* the helmet for My head;
Judah *is* My lawgiver.
8 Moab *is* My washpot;
Over Edom I will cast My shoe;
Philistia, shout in triumph because of Me."

9 Who will bring me *to* the strong city?
Who will lead me to Edom?
10 *Is it* not You, O God, *who* cast us off?
And You, O God, *who* did not go out with our armies?
11 Give us help from trouble,
For the help of man *is* useless.
12 Through God we will do valiantly,
For *it is* He *who* shall tread down our enemies.[a]

60:title [a]Hebrew *Shushan Eduth* **60:12** [a]Compare verses 5–12 with 108:6–13

Life Lessons

Psalms 60:1—62:12

SITUATION
Life on earth was difficult for David. He found satisfaction only in his relationship with God. God refreshed and fulfilled him.

OBSERVATION
To find joy and fulfillment, we should pursue fellowship with God.

INSPIRATION
It's the expression of Jesus that puzzles us. We've never seen His face like this.

Jesus smiling, yes.

Jesus weeping, absolutely.

Jesus stern, even that.

But Jesus anguished? Cheeks streaked with tears? Face flooded in sweat? Rivulets of blood dripping from His chin? You remember the night.

Jesus "knelt down and prayed, saying, 'Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.' . . . His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:41–44).

Jesus was more than anxious; He was afraid. How remarkable that Jesus felt such fear. But how kind that He told us about it. We tend to do the opposite. Gloss over our fears. Cover them up. Keep our sweaty palms in our pockets, our nausea and dry mouths a secret. Not so with Jesus. We see no mask of strength. But we do hear a request for strength.

"Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me." The first one to hear His fear is His Father. He could have gone to His mother. He could have confided in His disciples.

PSALM 61

Assurance of God's Eternal Protection

To the Chief Musician. On a stringed instrument.[a]
A Psalm of David.

Hear my cry, O God;
Attend to my prayer.
2 From the end of the earth I will cry to You,
When my heart is overwhelmed;
Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

3 For You have been a shelter for me,
A strong tower from the enemy.
4 I will abide in Your tabernacle forever;
I will trust in the shelter of Your wings. *Selah*

5 For You, O God, have heard my vows;
You have given *me* the heritage of those who fear Your name.
6 You will prolong the king's life,
His years as many generations.
7 He shall abide before God forever.
Oh, prepare mercy and truth, *which* may preserve him!

8 So I will sing praise to Your name forever,
That I may daily perform my vows.

PSALM 62

A Calm Resolve to Wait for the Salvation of God

To the Chief Musician. To Jeduthun. A Psalm of David.

Truly my soul silently *waits* for God;
From Him *comes* my salvation.
2 He only *is* my rock and my salvation;
He is my defense;
I shall not be greatly moved.

3 How long will you attack a man?
You shall be slain, all of you,
Like a leaning wall and a tottering fence.
4 They only consult to cast *him* down from his high position;
They delight in lies;
They bless with their mouth,
But they curse inwardly. *Selah*

5 My soul, wait silently for God alone,
For my expectation *is* from Him.
6 He only *is* my rock and my salvation;
He is my defense;
I shall not be moved.

61:title [a]Hebrew *neginah*

He could have assembled a prayer meeting. All would have been appropriate, but none was His priority.

How did Jesus endure the terror of the crucifixion? He went first to the Father with His fears. He modeled the words of Psalm 56:3: "Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You."

Do the same with yours. Don't avoid life's Gardens of Gethsemane. Enter them. Just don't enter them alone. And while there, be honest. Pounding the ground is permitted. Tears are allowed. And if you sweat blood, you won't be the first. Do what Jesus did; open your heart. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Where do you seek fulfillment? Love? Work? Money? Entertainment? Education? Refreshment and contentment can be found only in God. Memorize Psalm 62:1, 2 and share it with a fellow believer.

EXPLORATION

Rest—Psalm 55:22; 91:1; 116:7; Jeremiah 6:16; Matthew 6:25–34; Hebrews 4:9; 1 Peter 5:7; 1 John 3:19, 20.

7 In God *is* my salvation and my glory;
The rock of my strength,
And my refuge, *is* in God.

8 Trust in Him at all times, you people;
Pour out your heart before Him;
God *is* a refuge for us. *Selah*

9 Surely men of low degree *are* a vapor,
Men of high degree *are* a lie;
If they are weighed on the scales,
They *are* altogether *lighter* than vapor.
10 Do not trust in oppression,
Nor vainly hope in robbery;
If riches increase,
Do not set *your* heart *on them.*

11 God has spoken once,
Twice I have heard this:
That power *belongs* to God.
12 Also to You, O Lord, *belongs* mercy;
For You render to each one according to his work.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 63:1—65:13

SITUATION
David expressed joy and praise to God. He also wrote of His hope for God's protection from evil-doers.

OBSERVATION
God meets every need and satisfies fully. You cannot improve on God's work.

INSPIRATION
It is . . . weariness that makes the words of the carpenter so compelling. Listen to them. "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" [Matthew 11:28].

Come to Me. . . . The invitation is to come to Him. Why Him?

He offers the invitation as a penniless rabbi in an oppressed nation. He has no political office, no connections with the authorities in Rome. He hasn't written a best-seller or earned a diploma.

PSALM 63

Joy in the Fellowship of God

A Psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah.

O God, You *are* my God;
Early will I seek You;
My soul thirsts for You;
My flesh longs for You
In a dry and thirsty land
Where there is no water.
2 So I have looked for You in the sanctuary,
To see Your power and Your glory.

3 Because Your lovingkindness *is* better than life,
My lips shall praise You.
4 Thus I will bless You while I live;
I will lift up my hands in Your name.
5 My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness,
And my mouth shall praise *You* with joyful lips.

6 When I remember You on my bed,
I meditate on You in the *night* watches.
7 Because You have been my help,
Therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice.
8 My soul follows close behind You;
Your right hand upholds me.

9 But those *who* seek my life, to destroy *it,*
Shall go into the lower parts of the earth.
10 They shall fall by the sword;
They shall be a portion for jackals.

11 But the king shall rejoice in God;
Everyone who swears by Him shall glory;
But the mouth of those who speak lies shall be stopped.

PSALM 64

Oppressed by the Wicked but Rejoicing in the Lord

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

Hear my voice, O God, in my meditation;
Preserve my life from fear of the enemy.
2 Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked,
From the rebellion of the workers of iniquity,
3 Who sharpen their tongue like a sword,
And bend *their bows to shoot* their arrows—bitter words,
4 That they may shoot in secret at the blameless;
Suddenly they shoot at him and do not fear.

5 They encourage themselves *in* an evil matter;
They talk of laying snares secretly;
They say, "Who will see them?"
6 They devise iniquities:
"We have perfected a shrewd scheme."
Both the inward thought and the heart of man are deep.

7 But God shall shoot at them *with* an arrow;
Suddenly they shall be wounded.
8 So He will make them stumble over their own tongue;
All who see them shall flee away.
9 All men shall fear,
And shall declare the work of God;
For they shall wisely consider His doing.

10 The righteous shall be glad in the Lord, and trust in Him.
And all the upright in heart shall glory.

PSALM 65

Praise to God for His Salvation and Providence

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David. A Song.

Praise is awaiting You, O God, in Zion;
And to You the vow shall be performed.
2 O You who hear prayer,
To You all flesh will come.
3 Iniquities prevail against me;
As for our transgressions,
You will provide atonement for them.

Yet, He dares to look into the leathery faces of farmers and tired faces of housewives and offer rest. He looks into the disillusioned eyes of a preacher or two from Jerusalem. He gazes into the cynical stare of a banker and the hungry eyes of a bartender and makes this paradoxical promise: "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" [Matthew 11:29].

The people came. They came out of the cul-de-sacs and office complexes of their day. They brought Him the burdens of their existence and He gave them, not religion, not doctrine, not systems, but rest.

As a result, they called Him Lord.

As a result, they called Him Savior.

Not so much because of what He said, but because of what He did.

What He did on the Cross during six hours, one Friday. . . .

Jesus was the only man to walk God's earth who claimed to have an answer for man's burdens. "Come to Me," He invited them.

My prayer is that you, too, will find rest. And that you will sleep like a baby. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Make a list of five ways God has provided for you this past week. Go to God and praise Him for those blessings.

EXPLORATION

Provision—Genesis 28:15; Exodus 19:4; Psalm 121; Isaiah 41:10; Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 7:25.

4 Blessed *is the man* You choose,
And cause to approach *You,*
That he may dwell in Your courts.
We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house,
Of Your holy temple.

5 *By* awesome deeds in righteousness You will answer us,
O God of our salvation,
You who are the confidence of all the ends of the earth,
And of the far-off seas;
6 Who established the mountains by His strength,
Being clothed with power;
7 You who still the noise of the seas,
The noise of their waves,
And the tumult of the peoples.
8 They also who dwell in the farthest parts are afraid of Your signs;
You make the outgoings of the morning and evening rejoice.

9 You visit the earth and water it,
You greatly enrich it;
The river of God is full of water;
You provide their grain,
For so You have prepared it.
10 You water its ridges abundantly,
You settle its furrows;
You make it soft with showers,
You bless its growth.

11 You crown the year with Your goodness,
And Your paths drip *with* abundance.
12 They drop *on* the pastures of the wilderness,
And the little hills rejoice on every side.
13 The pastures are clothed with flocks;
The valleys also are covered with grain;
They shout for joy, they also sing.

PSALM 66

Praise to God for His Awesome Works

To the Chief Musician. A Song. A Psalm.

Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth!
2 Sing out the honor of His name;
Make His praise glorious.
3 Say to God,
"How awesome are Your works!
Through the greatness of Your power
Your enemies shall submit themselves to You.
4 All the earth shall worship You
And sing praises to You;
They shall sing praises *to* Your name." *Selah*

Life LESSONS

Psalms 66:1—67:7

SITUATION
This songwriter praised God for blessing the people. The writer promised to praise and offer sacrifice to God because God had always remained faithful.

OBSERVATION
God is worthy of praise. He not only grants us our life, but He guides us as well.

INSPIRATION
Praise is the highest occupation of any being. What happens when we

5 Come and see the works of God;
He is awesome *in His* doing toward the sons of men.
6 He turned the sea into dry *land;*
They went through the river on foot.
There we will rejoice in Him.
7 He rules by His power forever;
His eyes observe the nations;
Do not let the rebellious exalt themselves. *Selah*

8 Oh, bless our God, you peoples!
And make the voice of His praise to be heard,
9 Who keeps our soul among the living,
And does not allow our feet to be moved.
10 For You, O God, have tested us;
You have refined us as silver is refined.
11 You brought us into the net;
You laid affliction on our backs.
12 You have caused men to ride over our heads;
We went through fire and through water;
But You brought us out to rich *fulfillment.*

13 I will go into Your house with burnt offerings;
I will pay You my vows,
14 Which my lips have uttered
And my mouth has spoken when I was in trouble.
15 I will offer You burnt sacrifices of fat animals,
With the sweet aroma of rams;
I will offer bulls with goats. *Selah*

16 Come *and* hear, all you who fear God,
And I will declare what He has done for my soul.
17 I cried to Him with my mouth,
And He was extolled with my tongue.
18 If I regard iniquity in my heart,
The Lord will not hear.
19 *But* certainly God has heard *me;*
He has attended to the voice of my prayer.

20 Blessed *be* God,
Who has not turned away my prayer,
Nor His mercy from me!

PSALM 67

An Invocation and a Doxology

To the Chief Musician. On stringed instruments.[a] A Psalm. A Song.

God be merciful to us and bless us,
And cause His face to shine upon us, *Selah*

67:title [a]Hebrew *neginoth*

praise the Father? We reestablish the proper chain of command; we recognize that the King is on the throne and that He has saved His people.

The whole purpose of coming before the King is to praise Him, to live in recognition of his splendor. Praise—lifting up our heart and hands, exalting with our voices, singing His praises—is the occupation of those who dwell in the kingdom.

I believe that praise and prayer develop us for what we will do when we arrive in heaven. What's your picture of what you'll be doing there—sitting on a cloud? Polishing your halo? Playing your harp? That's not what you're going to be doing. You're going to be involved in the ongoing process of coreigning with God. (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "Praise")

APPLICATION

Make this your "thank God" day. Focus on the blessings, whether they are as simple as a beautiful tree or as profound as peace of mind. Perhaps you could thank Him for your older neighbor, your stubborn child, your gas-guzzling car, your boss—thank God for all things.

EXPLORATION

Praise—1 Chronicles 16:4; 2 Chronicles 5:13; Psalm 61:8; Isaiah 12:1; Acts 16:22–25.

2 That Your way may be known on earth,
Your salvation among all nations.

3 Let the peoples praise You, O God;
Let all the peoples praise You.
4 Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy!
For You shall judge the people righteously,
And govern the nations on earth. *Selah*

5 Let the peoples praise You, O God;
Let all the peoples praise You.
6 *Then* the earth shall yield her increase;
God, our own God, shall bless us.
7 God shall bless us,
And all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.

PSALM 68

The Glory of God in His Goodness to Israel

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David. A Song.

Let God arise,
Let His enemies be scattered;
Let those also who hate Him flee before Him.
2 As smoke is driven away,
So drive *them* away;
As wax melts before the fire,
So let the wicked perish at the presence of God.
3 But let the righteous be glad;
Let them rejoice before God;
Yes, let them rejoice exceedingly.

4 Sing to God, sing praises to His name;
Extol Him who rides on the clouds,[a]
By His name Yah,
And rejoice before Him.

5 A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows,
Is God in His holy habitation.
6 God sets the solitary in families;
He brings out those who are bound into prosperity;
But the rebellious dwell in a dry *land.*

7 O God, when You went out before Your people,
When You marched through the wilderness, *Selah*
8 The earth shook;
The heavens also dropped *rain* at the presence of God;
Sinai itself *was moved* at the presence of God, the God of Israel.
9 You, O God, sent a plentiful rain,
Whereby You confirmed Your inheritance,

68:4 [a]Masoretic Text reads *deserts;* Targum reads *heavens* (compare verse 34 and Isaiah 19:1).

Life LESSONS

Psalms 68:1—69:36

SITUATION
David led a joyful procession when the ark of the Lord came to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:11–15).

OBSERVATION
Praise God for the provision and protection He gives His people throughout all time.

INSPIRATION
David-the-giant-killer becomes David-the-two-stepper. He's the mayor of Dublin on Saint Patrick's Day, hopping and bopping at the head of the parade.

And, if that's not enough, he strips down to the ephod, the linen prayer vest. It covers the same amount of territory as a long T-shirt. Right there in front of God and the altar and everyone else, David removes all but his holy skivvies. (Envision the president escaping the Oval Office and cartwheeling down Pennsylvania Avenue in his Fruit of the Looms.)

David dances and we duck. We hold our breath. We know what's coming. We read about Uzzah. We know what God does to the irreverent and cocky. Apparently, David wasn't paying attention. For here he is, in the full presence of God and God's

When it was weary.
10 Your congregation dwelt in it;
You, O God, provided from Your goodness for the poor.

11 The Lord gave the word;
Great *was* the company of those who proclaimed *it:*
12 "Kings of armies flee, they flee,
And she who remains at home divides the spoil.
13 Though you lie down among the sheepfolds,
You will be like the wings of a dove covered with silver,
And her feathers with yellow gold."
14 When the Almighty scattered kings in it,
It was *white* as snow in Zalmon.

15 A mountain of God *is* the mountain of Bashan;
A mountain *of many* peaks *is* the mountain of Bashan.
16 Why do you fume with envy, you mountains of *many* peaks?
This is the mountain *which* God desires to dwell in;
Yes, the Lord will dwell *in it* forever.

17 The chariots of God *are* twenty thousand,
Even thousands of thousands;
The Lord is among them *as in* Sinai, in the Holy *Place.*
18 You have ascended on high,
You have led captivity captive;
You have received gifts among men,
Even *from* the rebellious,
That the Lord God might dwell *there.*

19 Blessed *be* the Lord,
Who daily loads us *with benefits,*
The God of our salvation! *Selah*
20 Our God *is* the God of salvation;
And to God the Lord *belong* escapes from death.

21 But God will wound the head of His enemies,
The hairy scalp of the one who still goes on in his trespasses.
22 The Lord said, "I will bring back from Bashan,
I will bring *them* back from the depths of the sea,
23 That your foot may crush *them*[a] in blood,
And the tongues of your dogs *may have* their portion from *your* enemies."

24 They have seen Your procession, O God,
The procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary.
25 The singers went before, the players on instruments *followed* after;
Among *them were* the maidens playing timbrels.
26 Bless God in the congregations,
The Lord, from the fountain of Israel.

68:23 [a]Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate read *you may dip your foot.*

children, doing a jig in his undergarment. Hold your breath and call the undertaker. So long, King David. Prepare to be fried, flambéed, and fricasseed.

But nothing happens. The sky is silent, and David keeps twirling, and we are left wondering. Doesn't the dance bother God? What does David have that Uzzah didn't? Why isn't the heavenly Father angered?

For the same reason I wasn't. They don't do it now, but when my daughters were toddlers, they would dance when I came home. My car in the driveway was their signal to strike up the band. "Daddy's here!" they'd declare, bursting through the door. Right there in the front lawn they would dance. Flamboyantly. With chocolate on their faces and diapers on their bottoms, they would promenade about for all the neighbors to see.

Did it bother me? Was I angered? Was I concerned what people would think? Did I tell them to straighten up and act mature? Absolutely not.

Did God tell David to behave? No. He let him dance.

Scripture doesn't portray David dancing at any other time. He did no death dance over Goliath. He never scooted the boot among the Philistines. He didn't inaugurate his term as king with a waltz or dedicate Jerusalem with a ballroom swirl. But when God came to town, he couldn't sit still.

Maybe God wonders how we do. Do we not enjoy what David wanted? The presence of God. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Have you ever praised God for what He has done for

His church? Isn't it easier to present your requests? During the next week, balance specific requests with specific thanks for deeds He has done.

EXPLORATION
God's Power—Exodus 9:16; 15:6; Joshua 4:24; Psalm 111:6; 135:5; Luke 1:37; Romans 4:20, 21; Revelation 4:8.

27 There *is* little Benjamin, their leader,
The princes of Judah *and* their company,
The princes of Zebulun *and* the princes of Naphtali.

28 Your God has commanded[a] your strength;
Strengthen, O God, what You have done for us.
29 Because of Your temple at Jerusalem,
Kings will bring presents to You.
30 Rebuke the beasts of the reeds,
The herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples,
Till everyone submits himself with pieces of silver.
Scatter the peoples *who* delight in war.
31 Envoys will come out of Egypt;
Ethiopia will quickly stretch out her hands to God.

32 Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth;
Oh, sing praises to the Lord, *Selah*
33 To Him who rides on the heaven of heavens, *which were* of old!
Indeed, He sends out His voice, a mighty voice.
34 Ascribe strength to God;
His excellence *is* over Israel,
And His strength *is* in the clouds.
35 O God, *You are* more awesome than Your holy places.
The God of Israel *is* He who gives strength and power to *His* people.

Blessed *be* God!

PSALM 69

An Urgent Plea for Help in Trouble

To the Chief Musician. Set to "The Lilies."[a] *A Psalm* of David.

Save me, O God!
For the waters have come up to *my* neck.
2 I sink in deep mire,
Where *there is* no standing;
I have come into deep waters,
Where the floods overflow me.
3 I am weary with my crying;
My throat is dry;
My eyes fail while I wait for my God.

4 Those who hate me without a cause
Are more than the hairs of my head;
They are mighty who would destroy me,
Being my enemies wrongfully;
Though I have stolen nothing,
I *still* must restore *it.*

68:28 [a]Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate read *Command, O God.*
69:title [a]Hebrew *Shoshannim*

5 O God, You know my foolishness;
And my sins are not hidden from You.
6 Let not those who wait for You, O Lord
God of hosts, be ashamed because
of me;
Let not those who seek You be
confounded because of me, O God
of Israel.
7 Because for Your sake I have borne
reproach;
Shame has covered my face.
8 I have become a stranger to my brothers,
And an alien to my mother's children;
9 Because zeal for Your house has eaten
me up,
And the reproaches of those who
reproach You have fallen on me.
10 When I wept *and chastened* my soul with
fasting,
That became my reproach.
11 I also made sackcloth my garment;
I became a byword to them.
12 Those who sit in the gate speak
against me,
And I *am* the song of the drunkards.

13 But as for me, my prayer *is* to You,
O Lord, *in* the acceptable time;
O God, in the multitude of Your mercy,
Hear me in the truth of Your salvation.
14 Deliver me out of the mire,
And let me not sink;
Let me be delivered from those who
hate me,
And out of the deep waters.
15 Let not the floodwater overflow me,
Nor let the deep swallow me up;
And let not the pit shut its mouth on me.

16 Hear me, O Lord, for Your lovingkindness
is good;
Turn to me according to the multitude of
Your tender mercies.
17 And do not hide Your face from Your
servant,
For I am in trouble;
Hear me speedily.
18 Draw near to my soul, *and* redeem it;
Deliver me because of my enemies.

19 You know my reproach, my shame, and
my dishonor;
My adversaries *are* all before You.
20 Reproach has broken my heart,
And I am full of heaviness;
I looked *for someone* to take pity, but
there was none;
And for comforters, but I found none.
21 They also gave me gall for my food,
And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to
drink.

22 Let their table become a snare before
them,
And their well-being a trap.
23 Let their eyes be darkened, so that they
do not see;
And make their loins shake continually.
24 Pour out Your indignation upon them,
And let Your wrathful anger take hold of
them.
25 Let their dwelling place be desolate;
Let no one live in their tents.
26 For they persecute the *ones* You have
struck,
And talk of the grief of those You have
wounded.
27 Add iniquity to their iniquity,
And let them not come into Your
righteousness.
28 Let them be blotted out of the book of the
living,
And not be written with the righteous.

29 But I *am* poor and sorrowful;
Let Your salvation, O God, set me up on
high.
30 I will praise the name of God with a song,
And will magnify Him with thanksgiving.
31 *This* also shall please the Lord better than
an ox *or* bull,
Which has horns and hooves.
32 The humble shall see *this and* be glad;
And you who seek God, your hearts shall
live.
33 For the Lord hears the poor,
And does not despise His prisoners.

34 Let heaven and earth praise Him,
The seas and everything that moves in
them.
35 For God will save Zion
And build the cities of Judah,
That they may dwell there and possess it.

36 Also, the descendants of His servants shall inherit it,
And those who love His name shall dwell in it.

PSALM 70

Prayer for Relief from Adversaries

To the Chief Musician. *A Psalm* of David. To bring to remembrance.

Make haste, O God, to deliver me!
Make haste to help me, O Lord!

2 Let them be ashamed and confounded
Who seek my life;
Let them be turned back[a] and confused
Who desire my hurt.
3 Let them be turned back because of their shame,
Who say, "Aha, aha!"

4 Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You;
And let those who love Your salvation say continually,
"Let God be magnified!"

5 But I *am* poor and needy;
Make haste to me, O God!
You *are* my help and my deliverer;
O Lord, do not delay.

PSALM 71

God the Rock of Salvation

In You, O Lord, I put my trust;
Let me never be put to shame.
2 Deliver me in Your righteousness, and cause me to escape;
Incline Your ear to me, and save me.
3 Be my strong refuge,
To which I may resort continually;
You have given the commandment to save me,
For You *are* my rock and my fortress.

4 Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked,
Out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man.
5 For You are my hope, O Lord God;
You are my trust from my youth.
6 By You I have been upheld from birth;
You are He who took me out of my mother's womb.
My praise *shall be* continually of You.

7 I have become as a wonder to many,
But You *are* my strong refuge.

70:2 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate; some Hebrew manuscripts and Syriac read *be appalled* (compare 40:15).

Life Lessons

Psalms 70:1—71:24

SITUATION
These psalms were written as a cry for help in old age. Their writers longed to be testimonies of God's faithfulness and useful parts of God's work.

OBSERVATION
In the later years of his life, David looked for God's hand just as surely as He had during His younger years. His dependence on God did not lessen with age.

INSPIRATION
Aging is God's idea. It's one of the ways He keeps us headed homeward. We can't change the process, but we can change our attitude. Here is a thought. What if we looked at the aging body as we look at the growth of a tulip?

Do you ever see anyone mourning over the passing of the tulip bulb? Do gardeners weep as the bulb begins to weaken? Of course not. We don't purchase tulip girdles or petal wrinkle cream or consult plastic-leaf surgeons. We don't mourn the passing of the bulb; we celebrate it. Tulip lovers rejoice the minute the bulb weakens. "Watch that one," they say. "It's about to blossom."

Could it be heaven does the same? The angels point to our bodies. The more frail we become, the more excited they become. "Watch that lady in the hospital," they say. "She's about to blossom." "Keep an eye on the fellow with the bad heart. He'll be coming home soon."

"We ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly

8 Let my mouth be filled *with* Your praise
And with Your glory all the day.

9 Do not cast me off in the time of old age;
Do not forsake me when my strength fails.
10 For my enemies speak against me;
And those who lie in wait for my life take counsel together,
11 Saying, "God has forsaken him;
Pursue and take him, for *there is* none to deliver *him*."

12 O God, do not be far from me;
O my God, make haste to help me!
13 Let them be confounded *and* consumed
Who are adversaries of my life;
Let them be covered *with* reproach and dishonor
Who seek my hurt.

14 But I will hope continually,
And will praise You yet more and more.
15 My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness
And Your salvation all the day,
For I do not know *their* limits.
16 I will go in the strength of the Lord God;
I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only.

17 O God, You have taught me from my youth;
And to this *day* I declare Your wondrous works.
18 Now also when *I am* old and grayheaded,
O God, do not forsake me,
Until I declare Your strength to *this* generation,
Your power to everyone *who* is to come.

19 Also Your righteousness, O God, *is* very high,
You who have done great things;
O God, who *is* like You?
20 *You,* who have shown me great and severe troubles,
Shall revive me again,
And bring me up again from the depths of the earth.
21 You shall increase my greatness,
And comfort me on every side.

22 Also with the lute I will praise You—
And Your faithfulness, O my God!
To You I will sing with the harp,
O Holy One of Israel.
23 My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing to You,
And my soul, which You have redeemed.
24 My tongue also shall talk of Your righteousness all the day long;
For they are confounded,
For they are brought to shame
Who seek my hurt.

waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Romans 8:23).

Are our bodies now free? No. Paul describes them as our "earthy bodies" (Philippians 3:21 MSG). Or as other translations state:

"our lowly body" (NKJV)

"the body of our humble state" (NASB)

"these weak mortal bodies" (NLT)

"our vile body" (KJV)

"our simple bodies" (NCV)

You could add your own adjective, couldn't you? Which word describes your body? My *cancerous* body? My *arthritic* body? My *deformed* body? My *crippled* body? My *addicted* body? My *ever-expanding* body? The word may be different, but the message is the same: these bodies are weak. They began decaying the minute we began breathing.

And, according to God, that's a part of the plan. Every wrinkle and every needle take us one step closer to the last step when Jesus will change our simple bodies into forever bodies. No pain. No depression. No sickness. No end.

This body is not our forever house. It will serve for the time being. But there is nothing like the moment we enter His door. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you young and looking for something to believe in? Are you older and looking for God's hand anew? God answers both needs. Look to Him and no further.

EXPLORATION

Encouragement and Examples for Old and Young—Psalm 119:9; Proverbs 16:31; Ecclesiastes 11:9; 12:1; Isaiah 46:4; Lamentations 3:27; 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:2, 3.

Life LESSONS

Psalm 72:1–20

SITUATION
Solomon asked God to grant his son wisdom. In his prayer, he looked forward to the eternal, perfect reign of Christ.

OBSERVATION
Solomon asked God for sound judgment and goodness. The kings of Israel were called to help the poor. Even Jesus, the King of kings, ministered to those bound by oppression and poverty.

INSPIRATION
It is hard to look suffering in the face. Wouldn't we rather turn away? Stare in a different direction? Fix our gaze on fairer objects? Human hurt is not easy on the eye. The dusty cheeks of the Pakistani refugee. The wide-eyed stare of the Peruvian orphan. Or the salt-and-pepper tangle of a beard worn by the drifter Stanley and I met in Pennsylvania.

Stanley Shipp served as a father to my young faith. He was thirty years my senior and blessed with a hawkish nose, thin lips, a rim of white hair, and a heart as big as the Midwest. His business cards, which he gave to those who requested and those who didn't, read simply, "Stanley Shipp—Your Servant."

I spent my first post-college year under his tutelage. One of our trips took us to a small church in rural Pennsylvania for a conference. He and I happened to be the only two people at the building when a drifter, wearing alcohol like a cheap perfume, knocked

PSALM 72

Glory and Universality of the Messiah's Reign

A Psalm of Solomon.

Give the king Your judgments, O God,
And Your righteousness to the king's Son.
2 He will judge Your people with righteousness,
And Your poor with justice.
3 The mountains will bring peace to the people,
And the little hills, by righteousness.
4 He will bring justice to the poor of the people;
He will save the children of the needy,
And will break in pieces the oppressor.

5 They shall fear You[a]
As long as the sun and moon endure,
Throughout all generations.
6 He shall come down like rain upon the grass before mowing,
Like showers *that* water the earth.
7 In His days the righteous shall flourish,
And abundance of peace,
Until the moon is no more.

8 He shall have dominion also from sea to sea,
And from the River to the ends of the earth.
9 Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before Him,
And His enemies will lick the dust.
10 The kings of Tarshish and of the isles
Will bring presents;
The kings of Sheba and Seba
Will offer gifts.
11 Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him;
All nations shall serve Him.

12 For He will deliver the needy when he cries,
The poor also, and *him* who has no helper.
13 He will spare the poor and needy,
And will save the souls of the needy.
14 He will redeem their life from oppression and violence;
And precious shall be their blood in His sight.

15 And He shall live;
And the gold of Sheba will be given to Him;
Prayer also will be made for Him continually,
And daily He shall be praised.

16 There will be an abundance of grain in the earth,
On the top of the mountains;

72:5 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Septuagint and Vulgate read *They shall continue.*

Its fruit shall wave like Lebanon;
And *those* of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.

17 His name shall endure forever;
His name shall continue as long as the sun.
And *men* shall be blessed in Him;
All nations shall call Him blessed.

18 Blessed *be* the Lord God, the God of Israel,
Who only does wondrous things!
19 And blessed *be* His glorious name forever!
And let the whole earth be filled *with* His glory.
Amen and Amen.

20 The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.

Book Three: Psalms 73—89

PSALM 73

The Tragedy of the Wicked, and the Blessedness of Trust in God

A Psalm of Asaph.

Truly God *is* good to Israel,
To such as are pure in heart.
2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled;
My steps had nearly slipped.
3 For I *was* envious of the boastful,
When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

4 For *there are* no pangs in their death,
But their strength *is* firm.
5 They *are* not in trouble *as other* men,
Nor are they plagued like *other* men.
6 Therefore pride serves as their necklace;
Violence covers them *like* a garment.
7 Their eyes bulge[a] with abundance;
They have more than heart could wish.
8 They scoff and speak wickedly *concerning* oppression;
They speak loftily.
9 They set their mouth against the heavens,
And their tongue walks through the earth.

10 Therefore his people return here,
And waters of a full *cup* are drained by them.
11 And they say, "How does God know?
And is there knowledge in the Most High?"
12 Behold, these *are* the ungodly,
Who are always at ease;
They increase *in* riches.

73:7 [a]Targum reads *face bulges;* Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *iniquity bulges.*

on the door. He recited his victim spiel. Overqualified for work. Unqualified for pension. Lost bus ticket. Bad back. His kids in Kansas didn't care. If bad breaks were rock and roll, this guy was Elvis. I crossed my arms, smirked, and gave Stanley a get-a-load-of-this-guy glance.

Stanley didn't return it. He devoted every optic nerve to the drifter. Stanley saw no one else but him. *How long,* I remember wondering, *since anyone looked this fellow square in the face?*

The meandering saga finally stopped, and Stanley led the man into the church kitchen and prepared him a plate of food and a sack of groceries. As we watched him leave, Stanley blinked back a tear and responded to my unsaid thoughts. "Max, I know he's probably lying. But what if just one part of his story was true?"

We both saw the man. I saw right through him. Stanley saw deep into him. There is something fundamentally good about taking time to see a person. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you following the example of Jesus? Do you reach out to the poor? Find a way to help someone this week in a personal and material way. Take that person out for a meal. Anonymously provide a bag of groceries. Help that person work on his or her car. Watch for an opportunity.

EXPLORATION

Helping the Poor—Proverbs 14:31; 19:17; Matthew 25:35–40; Luke 4:18; 1 John 3:17.

13 Surely I have cleansed my heart *in* vain,
And washed my hands in innocence.
14 For all day long I have been plagued,
And chastened every morning.

15 If I had said, "I will speak thus,"
Behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children.
16 When I thought *how* to understand this,
It *was* too painful for me—
17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God;
Then I understood their end.

18 Surely You set them in slippery places;
You cast them down to destruction.
19 Oh, how they are *brought* to desolation, as in a moment!
They are utterly consumed with terrors.
20 As a dream when *one* awakes,
So, Lord, when You awake,
You shall despise their image.

21 Thus my heart was grieved,
And I was vexed in my mind.
22 I *was* so foolish and ignorant;
I was *like* a beast before You.
23 Nevertheless I *am* continually with You;
You hold *me* by my right hand.
24 You will guide me with Your counsel,
And afterward receive me *to* glory.

25 Whom have I in heaven *but You?*
And *there is* none upon earth *that* I desire besides You.
26 My flesh and my heart fail;
But God *is* the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

27 For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish;
You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry.
28 But *it is* good for me to draw near to God;
I have put my trust in the Lord God,
That I may declare all Your works.

PSALM 74

A Plea for Relief from Oppressors

A Contemplation[a] of Asaph.

O God, why have You cast *us* off forever?
Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture?
2 Remember Your congregation, *which* You have purchased of old,
The tribe of Your inheritance, *which* You have redeemed—

74:title [a]Hebrew *Maschil*

Life Lessons

Psalm 73:1–28

SITUATION
Asaph, a choir director, questioned God's wisdom. Asaph saw the wicked prospering and the righteous suffering.

OBSERVATION
When we are confused by events in our lives, remember to look at circumstances from God's perspective. God welcomes our questions and doubts when we come to Him honestly seeking answers.

INSPIRATION
A misconception people have in dealing with life's troubles is that it's wrong to ask *why*—that a Christian simply accepts and never questions. Abraham, Moses, and David all interceded and struggled to understand God. But the lives of these men model for us a total reliance on God, even in the midst of questioning.

It's not a sin to doubt. Disbelief is sin, but questioning—sincerely seeking—is acceptable to God, because in the presence of God you may ask any question you want.

God never turns His back on those who ask honest questions. He never did in the Old Testament; He never did in the New Testament. So if you are asking honest questions of God, He will not turn away from you.

Perhaps the reason that God doesn't always give us the answer to the *whys* of our existence is that He knows we haven't got the capacity to understand the answer. In learning to depend on God, we must accept that we may not know all the answers,

This Mount Zion where You have dwelt.
3 Lift up Your feet to the perpetual desolations.
The enemy has damaged everything in the sanctuary.
4 Your enemies roar in the midst of Your meeting place;
They set up their banners *for* signs.
5 They seem like men who lift up
Axes among the thick trees.
6 And now they break down its carved work, all at once,
With axes and hammers.
7 They have set fire to Your sanctuary;
They have defiled the dwelling place of Your name to the ground.
8 They said in their hearts,
"Let us destroy them altogether."
They have burned up all the meeting places of God in the land.

9 We do not see our signs;
There is no longer any prophet;
Nor *is there* any among us who knows how long.
10 O God, how long will the adversary reproach?
Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever?
11 Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand?
Take it out of Your bosom and destroy *them*.
12 For God *is* my King from of old,
Working salvation in the midst of the earth.
13 You divided the sea by Your strength;
You broke the heads of the sea serpents in the waters.
14 You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces,
And gave him *as* food to the people inhabiting the wilderness.
15 You broke open the fountain and the flood;
You dried up mighty rivers.
16 The day *is* Yours, the night also *is* Yours;
You have prepared the light and the sun.
17 You have set all the borders of the earth;
You have made summer and winter.

18 Remember this, *that* the enemy has reproached, O Lord,
And *that* a foolish people has blasphemed Your name.
19 Oh, do not deliver the life of Your turtledove to the wild beast!
Do not forget the life of Your poor forever.
20 Have respect to the covenant;
For the dark places of the earth are full of the haunts of cruelty.
21 Oh, do not let the oppressed return ashamed!
Let the poor and needy praise Your name.

22 Arise, O God, plead Your own cause;
Remember how the foolish man reproaches You daily.
23 Do not forget the voice of Your enemies;
The tumult of those who rise up against You increases continually.

but we know who knows the answers. (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "Why?")

APPLICATION
Write down three questions that you are struggling with today. Talk to God about these situations. Ask Him for wisdom to help you see these situations from His perspective.

EXPLORATION
Wisdom—Ecclesiastes 8:17; Isaiah 55:6–9. Guidance—Psalm 48:14; Isaiah 58:11.

Life Lessons

Psalm 74:1–23

SITUATION
Asaph was tired of being stepped on. He felt rejected, defeated, and forgotten. He prayed that God would restore Israel and grant revenge.

OBSERVATION
We want revenge. But only God can bring about justice.

INSPIRATION
Bernhard Goetz was an American fantasy come true. He did what every citizen wants to do. He fought back. He "kicked the bully in the shins." He "punched the villain in the nose." He "clobbered evil over the head." This unassuming hero embodied a nationwide, even worldwide anger: a passion for revenge.

The outpouring of support gives clear evidence. People are mad. People are angry. There is a pent-up, boiling rage that causes us to toast a man who fearlessly says, "I ain't taking it no more!" and then comes out with a hot pistol in each hand. . . .

Anger. It's a peculiar yet predictable emotion. It

begins as a drop of water. An irritant. A frustration. Nothing big, just an aggravation. Someone gets your parking place. Someone pulls in front of you on the freeway. A waitress is slow and you are in a hurry. The toast burns. Drops of water. Drip. Drip. Drip. Drip.

Yet, get enough of these seemingly innocent drops of anger and before long you've got a bucket full of rage. . . .

Reality makes us ask the questions: What good was done? Is that really the way to reduce the crime rate? . . . No. Anger doesn't do that. Anger only feeds a primitive lust for revenge that feeds our anger. . . .

Yet, what do we do? . . . Jesus speaks about the mob that killed. "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Have you ever wondered how Jesus kept from retaliating? . . . Here's the answer. It's the second part of the statement, "for they do not know what they are doing. . . ." It's as if Jesus considered this bloodthirsty, death-hungry crowd not as murderers, but as victims. It's . . . as [if they were] "sheep without a shepherd."

"They don't know what they are doing."

And when you think about it, they didn't . . .

And for the most part, neither do we. We are still, as much as we hate to admit it, shepherdless sheep. All we know is that we were born out of one eternity and are frighteningly close to another. . . .

My point is this: Uncontrolled anger won't better our world, but sympathetic understanding will. Once we see the world and ourselves for what we

PSALM 75

Thanksgiving for God's Righteous Judgment

To the Chief Musician. Set to "Do Not Destroy."[a]
A Psalm of Asaph. A Song.

We give thanks to You, O God, we give thanks!
For Your wondrous works declare *that* Your name is near.

2 "When I choose the proper time,
I will judge uprightly.
3 The earth and all its inhabitants are dissolved;
I set up its pillars firmly. *Selah*

4 "I said to the boastful, 'Do not deal boastfully,'
And to the wicked, 'Do not lift up the horn.
5 Do not lift up your horn on high;
Do *not* speak with a stiff neck.'"

6 For exaltation *comes* neither from the east
Nor from the west nor from the south.
7 But God *is* the Judge:
He puts down one,
And exalts another.
8 For in the hand of the Lord *there is* a cup,
And the wine is red;
It is fully mixed, and He pours it out;
Surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth
Drain *and* drink down.

9 But I will declare forever,
I will sing praises to the God of Jacob.

10 "All the horns of the wicked I will also cut off,
But the horns of the righteous shall be exalted."

PSALM 76

The Majesty of God in Judgment

To the Chief Musician. On stringed instruments.[a]
A Psalm of Asaph. A Song.

In Judah God *is* known;
His name *is* great in Israel.
2 In Salem[a] also is His tabernacle,
And His dwelling place in Zion.
3 There He broke the arrows of the bow,
The shield and sword of battle. *Selah*

4 You *are* more glorious and excellent
Than the mountains of prey.

75:title [a]Hebrew *Al Tashcheth* **76:title** [a]Hebrew *neginoth* **76:2** [a]That is, Jerusalem

5 The stouthearted were plundered;
They have sunk into their sleep;
And none of the mighty men have found the use of their hands.
6 At Your rebuke, O God of Jacob,
Both the chariot and horse were cast into a dead sleep.

7 You, Yourself, *are* to be feared;
And who may stand in Your presence
When once You are angry?
8 You caused judgment to be heard from heaven;
The earth feared and was still,
9 When God arose to judgment,
To deliver all the oppressed of the earth. *Selah*

10 Surely the wrath of man shall praise You;
With the remainder of wrath You shall gird Yourself.

11 Make vows to the Lord your God, and pay *them;*
Let all who are around Him bring presents to Him who ought to be feared.
12 He shall cut off the spirit of princes;
He is awesome to the kings of the earth.

PSALM 77

The Consoling Memory of God's Redemptive Works

To the Chief Musician. To Jeduthun. A Psalm of Asaph.

I cried out to God with my voice—
To God with my voice;
And He gave ear to me.
2 In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord;
My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing;
My soul refused to be comforted.
3 I remembered God, and was troubled;
I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. *Selah*

4 You hold my eyelids *open;*
I am so troubled that I cannot speak.
5 I have considered the days of old,
The years of ancient times.
6 I call to remembrance my song in the night;
I meditate within my heart,
And my spirit makes diligent search.

7 Will the Lord cast off forever?
And will He be favorable no more?
8 Has His mercy ceased forever?
Has *His* promise failed forevermore?
9 Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? *Selah*

are, we can help. Once we understand ourselves, we begin to operate not from a posture of anger but one of compassion and concern. We look at the world not with bitter frowns but with extended hands. We realize that the lights are out and a lot of people are stumbling in the darkness. So we light the candles. . . .

Instead of fighting back we help out. We go to the ghettos. We teach in the schools. We build hospitals and help orphans . . . we put away our guns.

"They do not know what they are doing."

There is something about understanding the world that makes us want to save it, even to die for it. Anger? Anger never did anyone any good. Understanding? Well, the results are not as quick as the vigilante's bullet, but they are certainly much more constructive. (From *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
As you watch the news, what makes you angry? What makes you want to get revenge? Next time you are tempted to seek revenge, stop. See aggressors as people who need God. Pray that God will meet that need.

EXPLORATION
Revenge Is God's—
Deuteronomy 32:43; Psalm 58:10; 94:1; Nahum 1:2.

Psalms 75:1—76:12

SITUATION
Asaph grew in confidence that God would bring the wicked to judgment. God would not let anyone deserving judgment slip free unnoticed.

Brokenness

There is a window in your heart through which you can see God. Once upon a time that window was clear. Your view of God was crisp. You could see God as vividly as you could see a gentle valley or hillside. The glass was clear, the pane unbroken.

Then, suddenly, the window cracked. A pebble broke the window. A pebble of pain.

Perhaps the stone struck when you were a child and a parent left home—forever. Maybe the rock hit in adolescence when your heart was broken. Maybe you made it into adulthood before the window was cracked. But then the pebble came.

Whatever the pebble's form, the result was the same—a shattered window. The pebble missiled into the pane and shattered it. The crash echoed down the halls of your heart . . . and suddenly God was not so easy to see. The view that had been so crisp had changed. You turned to see God, and His figure was distorted. It was hard to see Him through the pain. It was hard to see Him through the fragments of hurt.

You were puzzled. God wouldn't allow something like this to happen, would He? Tragedy and travesty weren't on the agenda of the One you had seen, were they? Had you been fooled? Had you been blind?

The moment the pebble struck, the glass became a reference point for you. From then on, there was life before the pain and life after the pain. Before your pain, the view was clear; God seemed so near. After your pain, well, He was harder to see. He seemed a bit distant…harder to perceive. Your pain distorted the view—not eclipsed it, but distorted it.

Study Guide

Read Psalm 77:1–9.

- What kinds of circumstances cause such pain in our lives that our perception of God is altered?
- Why do painful circumstances sometimes make us doubt God's good intentions toward us?
- Describe the path that you think is necessary to fix a pain-distorted view of God.
- What are some reasons we sometimes assume life should be pain-free?
- What are the emotions we feel when we face great pain in life?
- What else would you compare pain to besides a storm?
- How do you get perspective when you wonder, "Is God doing this to me, or is this just life happening?"
- How long do you think it takes to restore a pain-distorted view of God?
- What kind of painful storm are you riding through right now?

10 And I said, "This *is* my anguish;
But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most
High."
11 I will remember the works of the Lord;
Surely I will remember Your wonders of old.
12 I will also meditate on all Your work,
And talk of Your deeds.
13 Your way, O God, *is* in the sanctuary;
Who *is* so great a God as *our* God?
14 You *are* the God who does wonders;
You have declared Your strength among the peoples.
15 You have with *Your* arm redeemed Your people,
The sons of Jacob and Joseph. *Selah*

16 The waters saw You, O God;
The waters saw You, they were afraid;
The depths also trembled.
17 The clouds poured out water;
The skies sent out a sound;
Your arrows also flashed about.
18 The voice of Your thunder *was* in the whirlwind;
The lightnings lit up the world;
The earth trembled and shook.
19 Your way *was* in the sea,
Your path in the great waters,
And Your footsteps were not known.
20 You led Your people like a flock
By the hand of Moses and Aaron.

PSALM 78

God's Kindness to Rebellious Israel

A Contemplation[a] of Asaph.

Give ear, O my people, *to* my law;
Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
2 I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings of old,
3 Which we have heard and known,
And our fathers have told us.
4 We will not hide *them* from their children,
Telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord,
And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done.

5 For He established a testimony in Jacob,
And appointed a law in Israel,
Which He commanded our fathers,
That they should make them known to their children;
6 That the generation to come might know *them,*
The children *who* would be born,

78:title [a]Hebrew *Maschil*

OBSERVATION
God's holiness contrasts with our sinfulness. Without mercy from God, we all would be judged.

INSPIRATION
According to legend, the first American Indian to see the Grand Canyon tied himself to a tree in terror. According to Scripture, any man privileged to peek at God has felt the same.

Sheer terror. Remember the words of Isaiah after his vision of God? "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5).

Upon seeing God, Isaiah was terrified. Why such fear? Why did he tremble so? Because he was wax before the sun. A candle in a hurricane. A minnow at Niagara. God's glory was too great. His purity too sterling. His power too mighty. (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
God is much more than a cosmic buddy. Be careful not to think too little of God. When you pray, approach Him with a respectful, humble attitude.

EXPLORATION
Cup of God's Judgment—Isaiah 51:17; Jeremiah 25:15; 49:12; Habakkuk 2:16; Revelation 14:10; 16:19; 18:6.

Life LESSONS

Psalm 77:1–20

SITUATION
Asaph reviewed God's past miracles and mighty works on behalf of the Israelites

when they went to the promised land. Asaph needed courage during a time of personal distress.

OBSERVATION
Remembering and meditating upon God's previous works can provide believers with courage during difficult times of struggle and trial.

INSPIRATION
I once rode on horseback with a shepherdess through the Black Mountains of Wales. The green valleys were cotton-puffed with heads of sheep. We came upon one member of the flock that had gotten herself into quite a fix. She was stuck on her back in the rut of a dirt road and couldn't stand up.

When the shepherdess saw her, she dismounted from her horse, looked at me, and chuckled. "They aren't the brightest of beasts." She righted the animal, and off it ran.

We aren't the brightest of beasts either. Yet we have a shepherd who will get us back on our feet. Like a good shepherd, He will not let us go unclothed or unfed. "I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread" (Psalm 37:25). What a welcome reminder! When homes foreclose or pensions evaporate, we need a shepherd. In Christ we have one. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Does stress keep you from sleeping? Next time, when you are awake and miserable, do what Asaph did. Remember God's faithfulness to you and to others. Praise Him for what He has done.

That they may arise and declare *them* to their children,
7 That they may set their hope in God,
And not forget the works of God,
But keep His commandments;
8 And may not be like their fathers,
A stubborn and rebellious generation,
A generation *that* did not set its heart aright,
And whose spirit was not faithful to God.

9 The children of Ephraim, *being* armed *and* carrying bows,
Turned back in the day of battle.
10 They did not keep the covenant of God;
They refused to walk in His law,
11 And forgot His works
And His wonders that He had shown them.

12 Marvelous things He did in the sight of their fathers,
In the land of Egypt, *in* the field of Zoan.
13 He divided the sea and caused them to pass through;
And He made the waters stand up like a heap.
14 In the daytime also He led them with the cloud,
And all the night with a light of fire.
15 He split the rocks in the wilderness,
And gave *them* drink in abundance like the depths.
16 He also brought streams out of the rock,
And caused waters to run down like rivers.

17 But they sinned even more against Him
By rebelling against the Most High in the wilderness.
18 And they tested God in their heart
By asking for the food of their fancy.
19 Yes, they spoke against God:
They said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?
20 Behold, He struck the rock,
So that the waters gushed out,
And the streams overflowed.
Can He give bread also?
Can He provide meat for His people?"

21 Therefore the Lord heard *this* and was furious;
So a fire was kindled against Jacob,
And anger also came up against Israel,
22 Because they did not believe in God,
And did not trust in His salvation.
23 Yet He had commanded the clouds above,
And opened the doors of heaven,
24 Had rained down manna on them to eat,
And given them of the bread of heaven.
25 Men ate angels' food;
He sent them food to the full.

26 He caused an east wind to blow in the heavens;
And by His power He brought in the south wind.

27 He also rained meat on them like the dust,
Feathered fowl like the sand of the seas;
28 And He let *them* fall in the midst of their camp,
All around their dwellings.
29 So they ate and were well filled,
For He gave them their own desire.
30 They were not deprived of their craving;
But while their food *was* still in their mouths,
31 The wrath of God came against them,
And slew the stoutest of them,
And struck down the choice *men* of Israel.

32 In spite of this they still sinned,
And did not believe in His wondrous works.
33 Therefore their days He consumed in futility,
And their years in fear.

34 When He slew them, then they sought Him;
And they returned and sought earnestly for God.
35 Then they remembered that God *was* their rock,
And the Most High God their Redeemer.
36 Nevertheless they flattered Him with their mouth,
And they lied to Him with their tongue;
37 For their heart was not steadfast with Him,
Nor were they faithful in His covenant.
38 But He, *being* full of compassion, forgave *their* iniquity,
And did not destroy *them.*
Yes, many a time He turned His anger away,
And did not stir up all His wrath;
39 For He remembered that they *were but* flesh,
A breath that passes away and does not come again.

40 How often they provoked Him in the wilderness,
And grieved Him in the desert!
41 Yes, again and again they tempted God,
And limited the Holy One of Israel.
42 They did not remember His power:
The day when He redeemed them from the enemy,
43 When He worked His signs in Egypt,
And His wonders in the field of Zoan;
44 Turned their rivers into blood,
And their streams, that they could not drink.
45 He sent swarms of flies among them, which devoured them,
And frogs, which destroyed them.
46 He also gave their crops to the caterpillar,
And their labor to the locust.
47 He destroyed their vines with hail,
And their sycamore trees with frost.
48 He also gave up their cattle to the hail,
And their flocks to fiery lightning.
49 He cast on them the fierceness of His anger,
Wrath, indignation, and trouble,

EXPLORATION
Miracles—Deuteronomy 34:10–12; 1 Kings 18:36–39; Psalm 105:4, 5; John 10:37, 38; 14:11; Hebrews 2:2–4.

Life LESSONS

Psalm 78:1–72

SITUATION
Asaph recounted Israel's history from slavery in Egypt until the reign of King David. He retold the story in order that the Jewish people would remember their past and be reminded of the mercy that God had shown them.

OBSERVATION
While the Israelites continually complained and were unfaithful, God faithfully blessed them. God cared for His people even as they dishonored Him.

INSPIRATION
God notices the grateful heart. Why? Does He have an ego problem? No. But we do. Gratitude lifts our eyes off the things we lack so we might see the blessings we possess. Nothing blows the winter out of the day like the Caribbean breeze of thankfulness. Need some trade winds? . . .

Need spice in your day? Thank God for every problem that comes down the pike. Is any situation so dire that gratitude is eliminated? Some of the ladies at the Women of Faith Conference thought it was. This great organization fills arenas with women, and women with hope. The president, Mary Graham, told me about one particular weekend in which a shortage of space tested everyone's patience.

The floor had 150 fewer

seats than needed. The arena staff tried to solve the problem by using narrow chairs. As a result, every woman had a place to sit, but everyone was crowded. Complaints contaminated like feedlot fragrance. Mary asked Joni Eareckson Tada, a speaker for the evening, if she could calm the crowd. Joni was perfectly qualified to do so. A childhood diving accident has left her wheelchair-bound. The attendants rolled her onto the platform, and Joni addressed the unhappy crowd. "I understand some of you don't like the chair in which you are sitting. Neither do I. But I have about a thousand handicapped friends who would gladly trade places with you in an instant."

The grumbling ceased.

Yours can too. Major in the grace of God. Measure the gifts of God. Who knows what you might record in your journal:

"Mondays, oh boy—my favorite."

"Tax days, oh boy—my favorite."

"Year-end-review day, oh boy—my favorite."

Impossible, you say? How do you know? How do you know until you give every day a chance? (From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Don't forget to praise God and thank Him for what He has done. Prayerfully remember the stepping-stones in your life. Thank God for molding you as He has seen fit throughout the years.

EXPLORATION

God's Unfailing Mercy—
2 Samuel 24:14; Nehemiah 9:31; Psalm 25:6; 57:1; Isaiah 63:9; Ephesians 2:4–7; Hebrews 4:16; 1 Peter 1:3.

By sending angels of destruction *among them.*
50 He made a path for His anger;
He did not spare their soul from death,
But gave their life over to the plague,
51 And destroyed all the firstborn in Egypt,
The first of *their* strength in the tents of Ham.
52 But He made His own people go forth like sheep,
And guided them in the wilderness like a flock;
53 And He led them on safely, so that they did not fear;
But the sea overwhelmed their enemies.
54 And He brought them to His holy border,
This mountain *which* His right hand had acquired.
55 He also drove out the nations before them,
Allotted them an inheritance by survey,
And made the tribes of Israel dwell in their tents.

56 Yet they tested and provoked the Most High God,
And did not keep His testimonies,
57 But turned back and acted unfaithfully like their fathers;
They were turned aside like a deceitful bow.
58 For they provoked Him to anger with their high places,
And moved Him to jealousy with their carved images.
59 When God heard *this,* He was furious,
And greatly abhorred Israel,
60 So that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh,
The tent He had placed among men,
61 And delivered His strength into captivity,
And His glory into the enemy's hand.
62 He also gave His people over to the sword,
And was furious with His inheritance.
63 The fire consumed their young men,
And their maidens were not given in marriage.
64 Their priests fell by the sword,
And their widows made no lamentation.

65 Then the Lord awoke as *from* sleep,
Like a mighty man who shouts because of wine.
66 And He beat back His enemies;
He put them to a perpetual reproach.

67 Moreover He rejected the tent of Joseph,
And did not choose the tribe of Ephraim,
68 But chose the tribe of Judah,
Mount Zion which He loved.
69 And He built His sanctuary like the heights,
Like the earth which He has established forever.
70 He also chose David His servant,
And took him from the sheepfolds;
71 From following the ewes that had young He brought him,
To shepherd Jacob His people,
And Israel His inheritance.

72 So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart,
And guided them by the skillfulness of his hands.

PSALM 79

A Dirge and a Prayer for Israel, Destroyed by Enemies

A Psalm of Asaph.

O God, the nations have come into Your inheritance;
Your holy temple they have defiled;
They have laid Jerusalem in heaps.
2 The dead bodies of Your servants
They have given *as* food for the birds of the heavens,
The flesh of Your saints to the beasts of the earth.
3 Their blood they have shed like water all around Jerusalem,
And *there was* no one to bury *them*.
4 We have become a reproach to our neighbors,
A scorn and derision to those who are around us.

5 How long, Lord?
Will You be angry forever?
Will Your jealousy burn like fire?
6 Pour out Your wrath on the nations that do not know You,
And on the kingdoms that do not call on Your name.
7 For they have devoured Jacob,
And laid waste his dwelling place.

8 Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us!
Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us,
For we have been brought very low.
9 Help us, O God of our salvation,
For the glory of Your name;
And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins,
For Your name's sake!
10 Why should the nations say,
"Where *is* their God?"
Let there be known among the nations in our sight
The avenging of the blood of Your servants *which has been* shed.

11 Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You;
According to the greatness of Your power
Preserve those who are appointed to die;
12 And return to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom
Their reproach with which they have reproached You, O Lord.

13 So we, Your people and sheep of Your pasture,
Will give You thanks forever;
We will show forth Your praise to all generations.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 79:1—80:19

SITUATION
Israel was attacked by a heathen nation. God's people cried out for divine intervention and judgment upon their persecutors.

OBSERVATION
Stress helps us realize how much we need God to steady our lives.

INSPIRATION
When you recognize God as Creator, you will admire Him. When you recognize His wisdom, you will learn from Him. When you discover His strength, you will rely on Him. But only when He saves you will you worship Him.

It's a "before and after" scenario. Before your rescue, you could easily keep God at a distance. Comfortably dismissed. Neatly shelved. Sure He was important, but so was your career. Your status. Your salary. He was high on your priority list, but He shared the spot with others.

Then came the storm . . . the rage . . . the fight . . . the ripped moorings . . . the starless night. Despair fell like a fog; your bearings were gone. In your heart, you knew there was no exit.

Turn to your career for help? Only if you want to hide from the storm . . . not escape it. Lean on your status for strength? A storm isn't impressed with your title. Rely on your salary for rescue? Many try . . . genuinely ask . . . He will come.

And from that moment on, He is not just a deity to admire, a teacher to observe, or a master to obey. He is the Savior. The

Savior to be worshiped. . . . (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Name your current hardships and trials. What lessons could you learn from them? How could God use these circumstances to draw you closer to Him? Make the most of your trials. Let them be opportunities for increased spiritual growth and faith.

EXPLORATION
God is Our Strength and Salvation—Psalm 106:8; 121:1, 2; Jeremiah 3:23; Malachi 4:2.

PSALM 80

Prayer for Israel's Restoration

To the Chief Musician. Set to "The Lilies."[a]
A Testimony[b] of Asaph. A Psalm.

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
You who lead Joseph like a flock;
You who dwell *between* the cherubim, shine forth!
2 Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh,
Stir up Your strength,
And come *and* save us!

3 Restore us, O God;
Cause Your face to shine,
And we shall be saved!

4 O Lord God of hosts,
How long will You be angry
Against the prayer of Your people?
5 You have fed them with the bread of tears,
And given them tears to drink in great measure.
6 You have made us a strife to our neighbors,
And our enemies laugh among themselves.

7 Restore us, O God of hosts;
Cause Your face to shine,
And we shall be saved!

8 You have brought a vine out of Egypt;
You have cast out the nations, and planted it.
9 You prepared *room* for it,
And caused it to take deep root,
And it filled the land.
10 The hills were covered with its shadow,
And the mighty cedars with its boughs.
11 She sent out her boughs to the Sea,[a]
And her branches to the River.[b]

12 Why have You broken down her hedges,
So that all who pass by the way pluck her *fruit?*
13 The boar out of the woods uproots it,
And the wild beast of the field devours it.

14 Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts;
Look down from heaven and see,
And visit this vine
15 And the vineyard which Your right hand has planted,
And the branch *that* You made strong for Yourself.
16 *It is* burned with fire, *it is* cut down;

80:title [a]Hebrew *Shoshannim* [b]Hebrew *Eduth* **80:11** [a]That is, the Mediterranean [b]That is, the Euphrates

They perish at the rebuke of Your countenance.
17 Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand,
Upon the son of man *whom* You made strong for Yourself.
18 Then we will not turn back from You;
Revive us, and we will call upon Your name.

19 Restore us, O Lord God of hosts;
Cause Your face to shine,
And we shall be saved!

PSALM 81

An Appeal for Israel's Repentance

To the Chief Musician. On an instrument of Gath.[a]
A Psalm of Asaph.

Sing aloud to God our strength;
Make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob.
2 Raise a song and strike the timbrel,
The pleasant harp with the lute.

3 Blow the trumpet at the time of the New Moon,
At the full moon, on our solemn feast day.
4 For this *is* a statute for Israel,
A law of the God of Jacob.
5 This He established in Joseph *as* a testimony,
When He went throughout the land of Egypt,
Where I heard a language I did not understand.

6 "I removed his shoulder from the burden;
His hands were freed from the baskets.
7 You called in trouble, and I delivered you;
I answered you in the secret place of thunder;
I tested you at the waters of Meribah. *Selah*

8 "Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you!
O Israel, if you will listen to Me!
9 There shall be no foreign god among you;
Nor shall you worship any foreign god.
10 I *am* the Lord your God,
Who brought you out of the land of Egypt;
Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

11 "But My people would not heed My voice,
And Israel would *have* none of Me.
12 So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart,
To walk in their own counsels.

13 "Oh, that My people would listen to Me,
That Israel would walk in My ways!

81:title [a]Hebrew *Al Gittith*

Life LESSONS

Psalms 81:1—82:8

SITUATION
Asaph called Israel to sing praises to God and to obey God. The song was probably used as a hymn in the temple.

OBSERVATION
"Please listen to me!" God pleaded with Israel to listen, but Israel ignored Him.

INSPIRATION
Do your prayers seem to be unanswered? What you request and what you receive aren't matching up? Don't think God is not listening. Indeed He is. He may have higher plans.

Here is another. Are people strengthened by your struggles? A friend of mine can answer yes. His cancer was consuming more than his body; it was eating away at his faith. Unanswered petitions perplexed him. Well-meaning Christians confused him. "If you have faith," they said, "you will be healed."

No healing came. Just more chemo, nausea, and questions. He assumed the fault was a small faith. I suggested another answer. "It's not about you," I told him. "Your hospital room is a showcase for your Maker. Your faith in the face of suffering cranks up the volume of God's song."

Oh, that you could have seen the relief on his face. To know that he hadn't failed God and God hadn't failed him— this made all the difference. Seeing his sickness in the scope of God's sovereign plan gave his condition a sense of dignity. He accepted his cancer as an assignment

14 I would soon subdue their enemies,
And turn My hand against their adversaries.
15 The haters of the Lord would pretend submission to Him,
But their fate would endure forever.
16 He would have fed them also with the finest of wheat;
And with honey from the rock I would have satisfied you."

PSALM 82

A Plea for Justice

A Psalm of Asaph.

God stands in the congregation of the mighty;
He judges among the gods.[a]
2 How long will you judge unjustly,
And show partiality to the wicked? *Selah*
3 Defend the poor and fatherless;
Do justice to the afflicted and needy.
4 Deliver the poor and needy;
Free *them* from the hand of the wicked.

5 They do not know, nor do they understand;
They walk about in darkness;
All the foundations of the earth are unstable.

6 I said, "You *are* gods,[a]
And all of you *are* children of the Most High.
7 But you shall die like men,
And fall like one of the princes."

8 Arise, O God, judge the earth;
For You shall inherit all nations.

PSALM 83

Prayer to Frustrate Conspiracy Against Israel

A Song. A Psalm of Asaph.

Do not keep silent, O God!
Do not hold Your peace,
And do not be still, O God!
2 For behold, Your enemies make a tumult;
And those who hate You have lifted up their head.
3 They have taken crafty counsel against Your people,
And consulted together against Your sheltered ones.
4 They have said, "Come, and let us cut them off from *being* a nation,
That the name of Israel may be remembered no more."

5 For they have consulted together with one consent;
They form a confederacy against You:

82:1 [a]Hebrew *elohim, mighty ones;* that is, the judges **82:6** [a]Hebrew *elohim, mighty ones;* that is, the judges

from heaven: a missionary to the cancer ward. A week later I saw him again. "I reflected God," he said, smiling through a thin face, "to the nurses, the doctors, my friends. Who knows who needed to see God, but I did my best to make Him seen."

Bingo. His cancer paraded the power of Jesus down the Main Street of his world. He, the blind man, Lazarus, and millions of others form a unique society: selected to suffer for God's glory. His light prisms through their aching lives and spills forth in a cascade of colors. God-glimpses. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Do you take time to listen to God? What is God telling you to do? What is God asking you to change? The Israelites missed God's best for them when they failed to listen. Take time out of each day to study God's Word and listen for His direction.

EXPLORATION
Listen and Obey—Exodus 15:26; Isaiah 65:12; Hosea 9:17; John 14:21–23.

Life Lessons

Psalms 83:1—84:12

SITUATION
These songs celebrated God's strength, grace, and glory.

OBSERVATION
The blessings of God surely come to those who serve and trust in Him.

INSPIRATION
A party was the last thing Mary Magdalene expected as she approached the tomb on that Sunday morning. The last few days had brought nothing to

6 The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites;
Moab and the Hagrites;
7 Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek;
Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre;
8 Assyria also has joined with them;
They have helped the children of Lot. *Selah*

9 Deal with them as *with* Midian,
As *with* Sisera,
As *with* Jabin at the Brook Kishon,
10 Who perished at En Dor,
Who became *as* refuse on the earth.
11 Make their nobles like Oreb and like Zeeb,
Yes, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna,
12 Who said, "Let us take for ourselves
The pastures of God for a possession."

13 O my God, make them like the whirling dust,
Like the chaff before the wind!
14 As the fire burns the woods,
And as the flame sets the mountains on fire,
15 So pursue them with Your tempest,
And frighten them with Your storm.
16 Fill their faces with shame,
That they may seek Your name, O Lord.
17 Let them be confounded and dismayed forever;
Yes, let them be put to shame and perish,
18 That they may know that You, whose name alone *is* the Lord,
Are the Most High over all the earth.

PSALM 84

The Blessedness of Dwelling in the House of God

To the Chief Musician. On an instrument of Gath.[a]
A Psalm of the sons of Korah.

How lovely *is* Your tabernacle,
O Lord of hosts!
2 My soul longs, yes, even faints
For the courts of the Lord;
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

3 Even the sparrow has found a home,
And the swallow a nest for herself,
Where she may lay her young—
Even Your altars, O Lord of hosts,
My King and my God.
4 Blessed *are* those who dwell in Your house;
They will still be praising You. *Selah*

84:title [a]Hebrew *Al Gittith*

celebrate. The Jews could celebrate—Jesus was out of the way. The soldiers could celebrate—their work was done. But Mary couldn't celebrate. To her the last few days had brought nothing but tragedy. . . .

A gray sky gives way to gold as she walks up the narrow trail. As she rounds the final bend, she gasps. The rock in front of the grave is pushed back.

"Someone took the body." She runs to awaken Peter and John. They rush to see for themselves. She tries to keep up with them but can't.

Peter comes out of the tomb bewildered and John comes out believing, but Mary just sits in front of it weeping. The two men go home and leave her alone with her grief.

But something tells her she is not alone. Maybe she hears a noise. Maybe she hears a whisper. Or maybe she just hears her own heart tell her to take a look for herself.

Whatever the reason, she does. She stoops down, sticks her head into the hewn entrance and waits for her eyes to adjust to the dark.

"Why are you crying?" She sees what looks to be a man, but He's white—radiantly white. He is one of two lights on either end of the vacant slab. Two candles blazing on an altar.

"Why are you crying?" An uncommon question to be asked in a cemetery. In fact, the question is rude. That is, unless the questioner knows something the questionee doesn't. . . .

"Why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

He doesn't leave her wondering long, just long enough to remind us that

He loves to surprise us. He waits for us to despair of human strength and then intervenes with heavenly. God waits for us to give up and then—surprise!

And listen to the surprise as Mary's name is spoken by a man she loved—a man she had buried.

"Miriam."

God appearing at the strangest of places. . . . "Miriam," He said softly, "surprise!"

Mary was shocked. It's not often you hear your name spoken by an eternal tongue. But when she did, she recognized it. And when she did, she responded correctly. She worshiped Him.

The scene had all the elements of a surprise party—secrecy, wide eyes, amazement, gratitude. But this celebration is timid in comparison with the one that is being planned for the future. It will be similar to Mary's but a lot bigger. Many more graves will open. Many more names will be called. Many more knees will bow. And many more seekers will celebrate.

It's going to be some party. I plan to make sure my name is on the guest list. How about you? (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Praise God! Every day we have reason to celebrate because of all that God has done and because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Join the party!

EXPLORATION

Joy in God Our Strength—Exodus 15:2; 2 Samuel 22:33; Psalm 28:8; 46:1; 73:26; 81:1; 89:21.

5 Blessed *is* the man whose strength *is* in You,
Whose heart *is* set on pilgrimage.
6 *As they* pass through the Valley of Baca,
They make it a spring;
The rain also covers it with pools.
7 They go from strength to strength;
Each one appears before God in Zion.[a]

8 O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer;
Give ear, O God of Jacob! *Selah*
9 O God, behold our shield,
And look upon the face of Your anointed.

10 For a day in Your courts *is* better than a thousand.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.
11 For the Lord God *is* a sun and shield;
The Lord will give grace and glory;
No good *thing* will He withhold
From those who walk uprightly.

12 O Lord of hosts,
Blessed *is* the man who trusts in You!

PSALM 85

Prayer that the Lord Will Restore Favor to the Land

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of the sons of Korah.

Lord, You have been favorable to Your land;
You have brought back the captivity of Jacob.
2 You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people;
You have covered all their sin. *Selah*
3 You have taken away all Your wrath;
You have turned from the fierceness of Your anger.

4 Restore us, O God of our salvation,
And cause Your anger toward us to cease.
5 Will You be angry with us forever?
Will You prolong Your anger to all generations?
6 Will You not revive us again,
That Your people may rejoice in You?
7 Show us Your mercy, Lord,
And grant us Your salvation.

8 I will hear what God the Lord will speak,
For He will speak peace
To His people and to His saints;
But let them not turn back to folly.

84:7 [a]Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *The God of gods shall be seen.*

9 Surely His salvation *is* near to those who fear Him,
That glory may dwell in our land.

10 Mercy and truth have met together;
Righteousness and peace have kissed.
11 Truth shall spring out of the earth,
And righteousness shall look down from heaven.
12 Yes, the Lord will give *what is* good;
And our land will yield its increase.
13 Righteousness will go before Him,
And shall make His footsteps *our* pathway.

PSALM 86

Prayer for Mercy, with Meditation on the Excellencies of the Lord

A Prayer of David.

Bow down Your ear, O Lord, hear me;
For I *am* poor and needy.
2 Preserve my life, for I *am* holy;
You are my God;
Save Your servant who trusts in You!
3 Be merciful to me, O Lord,
For I cry to You all day long.
4 Rejoice the soul of Your servant,
For to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
5 For You, Lord, *are* good, and ready to forgive,
And abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You.

6 Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer;
And attend to the voice of my supplications.
7 In the day of my trouble I will call upon You,
For You will answer me.

8 Among the gods *there is* none like You, O Lord;
Nor *are there any works* like Your works.
9 All nations whom You have made
Shall come and worship before You, O Lord,
And shall glorify Your name.
10 For You *are* great, and do wondrous things;
You alone *are* God.

11 Teach me Your way, O Lord;
I will walk in Your truth;
Unite my heart to fear Your name.
12 I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart,
And I will glorify Your name forevermore.
13 For great *is* Your mercy toward me,
And You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 85:1—86:17

SITUATION
God confirmed that He had plans for Israel's future. No matter how difficult the circumstances, He promised to support them.

OBSERVATION
God faithfully restores His people after times of difficulty. We must be diligent by reading God's Word.

INSPIRATION
You're acquainted with physical thirst. Your body, according to some estimates, is 80 percent fluid. That means a man my size lugs around 160 pounds of water. Apart from brains, bones, and a few organs, we're walking water balloons.

We need to be. Stop drinking and see what happens. Coherent thoughts vanish, skin grows clammy, and vital organs wrinkle. Your eyes need fluid to cry; your mouth needs moisture to swallow; your glands need sweat to keep your body cool; your cells need blood to carry them; your joints need fluid to lubricate them. Your body needs water the same way a tire needs air.

In fact, your Maker wired you with thirst—a "low-fluid indicator." Let your fluid level grow low, and watch the signals flare. Dry mouth. Thick tongue. Achy head. Weak knees. Deprive your body of necessary fluid, and your body will tell you. . . .

What H_2O can do for your body, Jesus can do for your heart. Lubricate it. Aquify it. Soften what is

crusty, flush what is rusty. How?

Like water, Jesus goes where we can't. Throw a person against a wall, his body thuds and drops. Splash water against a wall, and the liquid conforms and spreads. Its molecular makeup grants water great flexibility: one moment separating and seeping into a crack, another collecting and thundering over Victoria Falls. Water goes where we cannot.

So does Jesus. He is a spirit and, although He forever has a body, He is not bound by a body. In fact, John parenthetically explains, "This He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39). The Spirit of Jesus threads down the throat of your soul, flushing fears, dislodging regrets. He does for your soul what water does for your body. And, thankfully, we don't have to give Him directions.

We give none to water, do we? Before swallowing, do you look at the liquid and say, "Ten drops of you go to my spleen. I need fifty on cardiovascular detail. The rest of you head north to my scalp. It's really itchy today." Water somehow knows where to go.

Jesus knows the same. Your directions are not needed, but your permission is. (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

The world trains you to think that success comes from demonstrating personal power and desire, and by networking with the right people. God says true success comes from knowing, contemplating, and memorizing his Word.

14 O God, the proud have risen against me,
And a mob of violent *men* have sought my life,
And have not set You before them.
15 But You, O Lord, *are* a God full of compassion, and gracious,
Longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.

16 Oh, turn to me, and have mercy on me!
Give Your strength to Your servant,
And save the son of Your maidservant.
17 Show me a sign for good,
That those who hate me may see *it* and be ashamed,
Because You, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

PSALM 87

The Glories of the City of God

A Psalm of the sons of Korah. A Song.

His foundation *is* in the holy mountains.
2 The Lord loves the gates of Zion
More than all the dwellings of Jacob.
3 Glorious things are spoken of you,
O city of God! *Selah*

4 "I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to those who know Me;
Behold, O Philistia and Tyre, with Ethiopia:
'This *one* was born there.'"

5 And of Zion it will be said,
"This *one* and that *one* were born in her;
And the Most High Himself shall establish her."
6 The Lord will record,
When He registers the peoples:
"This *one* was born there." *Selah*

7 Both the singers and the players on instruments *say,*
"All my springs *are* in you."

PSALM 88

A Prayer for Help in Despondency

A Song. A Psalm of the sons of Korah. To the Chief Musician. Set to "Mahalath Leannoth." A Contemplation[a] of Heman the Ezrahite.

O Lord, God of my salvation,
I have cried out day and night before You.
2 Let my prayer come before You;
Incline Your ear to my cry.

3 For my soul is full of troubles,
And my life draws near to the grave.

88:title [a]Hebrew *Maschil*

4 I am counted with those who go down to the pit;
I am like a man *who has* no strength,
5 Adrift among the dead,
Like the slain who lie in the grave,
Whom You remember no more,
And who are cut off from Your hand.

6 You have laid me in the lowest pit,
In darkness, in the depths.
7 Your wrath lies heavy upon me,
And You have afflicted *me* with all Your waves. *Selah*
8 You have put away my acquaintances far from me;
You have made me an abomination to them;
I am shut up, and I cannot get out;
9 My eye wastes away because of affliction.

Lord, I have called daily upon You;
I have stretched out my hands to You.
10 Will You work wonders for the dead?
Shall the dead arise *and* praise You? *Selah*
11 Shall Your lovingkindness be declared in the grave?
Or Your faithfulness in the place of destruction?
12 Shall Your wonders be known in the dark?
And Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

13 But to You I have cried out, O Lord,
And in the morning my prayer comes before You.
14 Lord, why do You cast off my soul?
Why do You hide Your face from me?
15 I *have been* afflicted and ready to die from *my* youth;
I suffer Your terrors;
I am distraught.
16 Your fierce wrath has gone over me;
Your terrors have cut me off.
17 They came around me all day long like water;
They engulfed me altogether.
18 Loved one and friend You have put far from me,
And my acquaintances into darkness.

PSALM 89

Remembering the Covenant with David, and Sorrow for Lost Blessings

A Contemplation[a] of Ethan the Ezrahite.

I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever;
With my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations.
2 For I have said, "Mercy shall be built up forever;
Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens."

89:title [a]Hebrew *Maschil*

Choose the best time for you to read your Bible and pray. Thirst for it as you do for water.

EXPLORATION
Restoration—Psalm 91:14–16; Isaiah 40:10, 11; 58:11; 1 Corinthians 1:8, 9; Philippians 1:6.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 87:1—88:18

SITUATION
God was devoted to Jerusalem (Psalm 87). This psalm of celebration contrasted the heavy and sad tone of the subsequent psalm, which spoke of death and despair (Psalm 88).

OBSERVATION
God will hear your tearful prayers and heal your deepest wounds. His perfect love will reduce or take away anxiety.

INSPIRATION
I have a friend named Joy who teaches underprivileged children in an inner city church. Her class is a lively group of nine-year-olds who love life and aren't afraid of God. There is one exception, however—a timid girl by the name of Barbara.

Her difficult home life had left her afraid and insecure. For the weeks that my friend was teaching the class, Barbara never spoke. Never. While the other children talked, she sat. While the others sang, she was silent. While the others giggled, she was quiet.

Always present. Always listening. Always speechless.

Until the day Joy gave a class on heaven. Joy talked about seeing God. She talked about tearless eyes and deathless lives.

Barbara was fascinated. She wouldn't release Joy from her stare.

She listened with hunger. Then she raised her hand. "Mrs. Joy?"

Joy was stunned. Barbara had never asked a question. "Yes, Barbara?"

"Is heaven for girls like me?"

I would give a thousand sunsets to have seen Jesus' face as this tiny prayer reached His throne. For indeed that is what it was—a prayer.

An earnest prayer that a good God in heaven would remember a forgotten soul on earth. A prayer that God's grace would seep into the cracks and cover one the church let slip through. A prayer to take a life that no one else could use and use it as no one else could.

Not a prayer from a pulpit, but one from a bed in a convalescent home. Not a prayer prayed confidently by a black-robed seminarian, but one whispered fearfully by a recovering alcoholic.

A prayer to do what God does best: take the common and make it spectacular. To once again take the rod and divide the sea. To take a pebble and kill a Goliath. To take water and make sparkling wine. To take a peasant boy's lunch and feed a multitude. To take mud and restore sight. To take three spikes and a wooden beam and make them the hope of humanity. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Picture yourself climbing up into God's lap, feeling His arms wrap around you, and receiving His hug. Tell Him of your grief, anger, and despair. Share with one other trusted friend this week what you told God in the darkness.

3 "I have made a covenant with My chosen,
I have sworn to My servant David:
4 'Your seed I will establish forever,
And build up your throne to all generations.'" *Selah*

5 And the heavens will praise Your wonders, O Lord;
Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the saints.
6 For who in the heavens can be compared to the Lord?
Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the Lord?
7 God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints,
And to be held in reverence by all *those* around Him.
8 O Lord God of hosts,
Who *is* mighty like You, O Lord?
Your faithfulness also surrounds You.
9 You rule the raging of the sea;
When its waves rise, You still them.
10 You have broken Rahab in pieces, as one who is slain;
You have scattered Your enemies with Your mighty arm.

11 The heavens *are* Yours, the earth also *is* Yours;
The world and all its fullness, You have founded them.
12 The north and the south, You have created them;
Tabor and Hermon rejoice in Your name.
13 You have a mighty arm;
Strong is Your hand, *and* high is Your right hand.
14 Righteousness and justice *are* the foundation of Your throne;
Mercy and truth go before Your face.
15 Blessed *are* the people who know the joyful sound!
They walk, O Lord, in the light of Your countenance.
16 In Your name they rejoice all day long,
And in Your righteousness they are exalted.
17 For You *are* the glory of their strength,
And in Your favor our horn is exalted.
18 For our shield *belongs* to the Lord,
And our king to the Holy One of Israel.

19 Then You spoke in a vision to Your holy one,[a]
And said: "I have given help to *one who is* mighty;
I have exalted one chosen from the people.
20 I have found My servant David;
With My holy oil I have anointed him,
21 With whom My hand shall be established;
Also My arm shall strengthen him.
22 The enemy shall not outwit him,
Nor the son of wickedness afflict him.
23 I will beat down his foes before his face,
And plague those who hate him.

89:19 [a]Following many Hebrew manuscripts; Masoretic Text, Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate read *holy ones*.

24 "But My faithfulness and My mercy *shall be* with him,
And in My name his horn shall be exalted.
25 Also I will set his hand over the sea,
And his right hand over the rivers.
26 He shall cry to Me, 'You *are* my Father,
My God, and the rock of my salvation.'
27 Also I will make him *My* firstborn,
The highest of the kings of the earth.
28 My mercy I will keep for him forever,
And My covenant shall stand firm with him.
29 His seed also I will make *to endure* forever,
And his throne as the days of heaven.

30 "If his sons forsake My law
And do not walk in My judgments,
31 If they break My statutes
And do not keep My commandments,
32 Then I will punish their transgression with the rod,
And their iniquity with stripes.
33 Nevertheless My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him,
Nor allow My faithfulness to fail.
34 My covenant I will not break,
Nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips.
35 Once I have sworn by My holiness;
I will not lie to David:
36 His seed shall endure forever,
And his throne as the sun before Me;
37 It shall be established forever like the moon,
Even *like* the faithful witness in the sky." *Selah*

38 But You have cast off and abhorred,
You have been furious with Your anointed.
39 You have renounced the covenant of Your servant;
You have profaned his crown *by casting it* to the ground.
40 You have broken down all his hedges;
You have brought his strongholds to ruin.
41 All who pass by the way plunder him;
He is a reproach to his neighbors.
42 You have exalted the right hand of his adversaries;
You have made all his enemies rejoice.
43 You have also turned back the edge of his sword,
And have not sustained him in the battle.
44 You have made his glory cease,
And cast his throne down to the ground.
45 The days of his youth You have shortened;
You have covered him with shame. *Selah*

46 How long, Lord?
Will You hide Yourself forever?
Will Your wrath burn like fire?
47 Remember how short my time is;
For what futility have You created all the children of men?

EXPLORATION
Overcoming Spiritual Depression—Job 42:1–6; Psalm 42–43; Romans 8:18–39; 1 Corinthians 15:12–19; 2 Corinthians 1:3–11; 1 Peter 1; Revelation 21:1–8.

Life LESSONS

Psalm 89:1–52

SITUATION
This psalm celebrated David's glorious reign. David's reign was successful because God sustained him.

OBSERVATION
One of David's descendants (Jesus Christ) would reign over God's people forever.

INSPIRATION
Children love to swing. There's nothing like it. Thrusting your feet toward the sky, leaning so far backward that everything looks upside down. Spinning trees, a stomach that jumps into your throat. Ah, swinging. . . .

I learned a lot about trust on a swing. As a child, I only trusted certain people to push my swing. If I was being pushed by people I trusted (like Dad or Mom), they could do anything they wanted. They could twist me, turn me, stop me . . . But let a stranger push my swing (which often happened at family reunions and Fourth of July picnics), and it was *hang on, baby!* Who knew what this newcomer would do? When a stranger pushes your swing, you tense up, ball up, and hang on. . . .

We live in a stormy world. At this writing, wars rage in both hemispheres of our globe. World conflict is threatening all humanity. Jobs are getting scarce.

48 What man can live and not see death?
Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave? *Selah*

49 Lord, where *are* Your former lovingkindnesses,
Which You swore to David in Your truth?
50 Remember, Lord, the reproach of Your servants—
How I bear in my bosom *the reproach of* all the many peoples,
51 With which Your enemies have reproached, O Lord,
With which they have reproached the footsteps of Your anointed.

52 Blessed *be* the Lord forevermore!
Amen and Amen.

Book Four: Psalms 90—106

PSALM 90

The Eternity of God, and Man's Frailty

A Prayer of Moses the man of God.

Lord, You have been our dwelling place[a] in all generations.
2 Before the mountains were brought forth,
Or ever You had formed the earth and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting, You *are* God.

3 You turn man to destruction,
And say, "Return, O children of men."
4 For a thousand years in Your sight
Are like yesterday when it is past,
And *like* a watch in the night.
5 You carry them away *like* a flood;
They are like a sleep.
In the morning they are like grass *which* grows up:
6 In the morning it flourishes and grows up;
In the evening it is cut down and withers.

7 For we have been consumed by Your anger,
And by Your wrath we are terrified.
8 You have set our iniquities before You,
Our secret *sins* in the light of Your countenance.
9 For all our days have passed away in Your wrath;
We finish our years like a sigh.
10 The days of our lives *are* seventy years;
And if by reason of strength *they are* eighty years,
Yet their boast *is* only labor and sorrow;
For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.
11 Who knows the power of Your anger?
For as the fear of You, *so is* Your wrath.
12 So teach *us* to number our days,
That we may gain a heart of wisdom.

90:1 [a]Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate read *refuge*.

Money continues to get tight. Families are coming apart at the seams. . . .

We must remember who is pushing the swing. We must put our trust in Him. We can't grow fearful. He won't let us tumble out. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
When do you feel safe? When your spouse is with you? When the doors are locked? When the alarm is on? When you have enough money for any situation? All of these securities can fail. Ask God to help you depend on Him for your security.

EXPLORATION
God as Security—Genesis 15:1; Deuteronomy 33:29; 2 Samuel 22:3; Psalm 7:10; 28:7; 33:20; 59:11; 84:11; 115:9; 144:2; Proverbs 30:5.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 90:1—91:16

SITUATION
In the only psalm attributed to him, Moses remembered his pain over the sins of the people (see Exodus 32:9–14).

OBSERVATION
Psalm 90 reminds us that we are only here for a brief time and that we should ask God to help us wisely make use of each day.

INSPIRATION
We sometimes act as if the Christian life is a retirement cruise. We have little fuel but lots of entertainment. We are more concerned with looking snappy than with being prepared. We give more thought to table settings than to surviving the journey. We give little thought to the destination,

13 Return, O Lord!
How long?
And have compassion on Your servants.
14 Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy,
That we may rejoice and be glad all our days!
15 Make us glad according to the days *in which* You have afflicted us,
The years *in which* we have seen evil.
16 Let Your work appear to Your servants,
And Your glory to their children.
17 And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us,
And establish the work of our hands for us;
Yes, establish the work of our hands.

PSALM 91

Safety of Abiding in the Presence of God

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High
Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.
2 I will say of the Lord, "*He is* my refuge and my fortress;
My God, in Him I will trust."

3 Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler[a]
And from the perilous pestilence.
4 He shall cover you with His feathers,
And under His wings you shall take refuge;
His truth *shall be your* shield and buckler.
5 You shall not be afraid of the terror by night,
Nor of the arrow *that* flies by day,
6 *Nor* of the pestilence *that* walks in darkness,
Nor of the destruction *that* lays waste at noonday.

7 A thousand may fall at your side,
And ten thousand at your right hand;
But it shall not come near you.
8 Only with your eyes shall you look,
And see the reward of the wicked.

9 Because you have made the Lord, *who is* my refuge,
Even the Most High, your dwelling place,
10 No evil shall befall you,
Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling;
11 For He shall give His angels charge over you,
To keep you in all your ways.
12 In *their* hands they shall bear you up,
Lest you dash your foot against a stone.
13 You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra,
The young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot.

91:3 [a]That is, one who catches birds in a trap or snare

but we make sure there's plenty of silver to go around . . .

Your Father is preparing a place for you. A place with many rooms. An ample place. A place with space for you. There is a special room for you. You will be welcome.

We don't always feel welcome here on earth. We wonder if there is a place here for us. People can make us feel unwanted. Tragedy leaves us feeling like intruders. Strangers. Interlopers in a land not ours. We don't always feel welcome here.

We shouldn't. This isn't our home. To feel unwelcome is no tragedy. Indeed it is healthy. We are not home here. This language we speak, it's not ours. This body we wear, it isn't us. And the world we live in, this isn't home.

Ours isn't finished yet.

But when it is, our brother will come and take us home. "If it were not so, I would have told you. . . . I will come again," he said before he left, "and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2, 3).

General William Nelson was a Union general in the Civil War. Though he faced death every day, he never prepared for his own. Who knows what he was thinking as he rode into battle after battle? Maybe he was too busy staying alive to prepare for death.

All that changed, however, one day as he was relaxing in a house with his men. A brawl broke out, and he was shot in the chest. Knowing he was dying, he had only one request: "Send for a clergyman."

What had happened? Why the urgency? Did the general suddenly learn

something about God that he had never known? No. But he did learn something about himself. He realized death was near. Suddenly only one thing mattered.

Why hadn't it mattered before? Couldn't he have said yes to God the week before or that very morning? Absolutely. Why didn't he? Why was the salvation of his soul so urgent after the shot and so optional before it? Why had he postponed his decision to accept Christ until his deathbed?

Because he assumed he had time.

A dangerous assumption. "Teach us to number our days," prayed Moses, "that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12).

What fear strikes a man when the end is near and he's not prepared. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What would you like to do before you die? What fulfillment will it bring you? When you die, what lasting effects, if any, will it have? Invest your time in people and projects that will last. Be a friend, share the gospel, mentor a young person, donate time or money to a Christian ministry or charity.

EXPLORATION

Humans Are Finite—Genesis 6:3; Job 34:14, 15; Psalm 78:39; Isaiah 40:6–8; Matthew 26:41.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 92:1—93:5

SITUATION

As king, David discerned between evil and righteousness by using God's character as the criterion.

14 "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him;
I will set him on high, because he has known My name.
15 He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him;
I *will be* with him in trouble;
I will deliver him and honor him.
16 With long life I will satisfy him,
And show him My salvation."

PSALM 92

Praise to the Lord for His Love and Faithfulness

A Psalm. A Song for the Sabbath day.

It *is* good to give thanks to the Lord,
And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High;
2 To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning,
And Your faithfulness every night,
3 On an instrument of ten strings,
On the lute,
And on the harp,
With harmonious sound.
4 For You, Lord, have made me glad through Your work;
I will triumph in the works of Your hands.

5 O Lord, how great are Your works!
Your thoughts are very deep.
6 A senseless man does not know,
Nor does a fool understand this.
7 When the wicked spring up like grass,
And when all the workers of iniquity flourish,
It is that they may be destroyed forever.

8 But You, Lord, *are* on high forevermore.
9 For behold, Your enemies, O Lord,
For behold, Your enemies shall perish;
All the workers of iniquity shall be scattered.

10 But my horn You have exalted like a wild ox;
I have been anointed with fresh oil.
11 My eye also has seen *my desire* on my enemies;
My ears hear *my desire* on the wicked
Who rise up against me.

12 The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree,
He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
13 Those who are planted in the house of the Lord
Shall flourish in the courts of our God.
14 They shall still bear fruit in old age;
They shall be fresh and flourishing,
15 To declare that the Lord is upright;
He is my rock, and *there is* no unrighteousness in Him.

PSALM 93

The Eternal Reign of the Lord

The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty;
The Lord is clothed,
He has girded Himself with strength.
Surely the world is established, so that it cannot be moved.
2 Your throne *is* established from of old;
You *are* from everlasting.

3 The floods have lifted up, O Lord,
The floods have lifted up their voice;
The floods lift up their waves.
4 The Lord on high *is* mightier
Than the noise of many waters,
Than the mighty waves of the sea.

5 Your testimonies are very sure;
Holiness adorns Your house,
O Lord, forever.

PSALM 94

God the Refuge of the Righteous

O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongs—
O God, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth!
2 Rise up, O Judge of the earth;
Render punishment to the proud.
3 Lord, how long will the wicked,
How long will the wicked triumph?

4 They utter speech, *and* speak insolent things;
All the workers of iniquity boast in themselves.
5 They break in pieces Your people, O Lord,
And afflict Your heritage.
6 They slay the widow and the stranger,
And murder the fatherless.
7 Yet they say, "The Lord does not see,
Nor does the God of Jacob understand."

8 Understand, you senseless among the people;
And *you* fools, when will you be wise?
9 He who planted the ear, shall He not hear?
He who formed the eye, shall He not see?
10 He who instructs the nations, shall He not correct,
He who teaches man knowledge?
11 The Lord knows the thoughts of man,
That they *are* futile.

12 Blessed *is* the man whom You instruct, O Lord,
And teach out of Your law,
13 That You may give him rest from the days of adversity,

OBSERVATION
God rules His creation perfectly. We must be thankful and faithful to Him.

INSPIRATION
Worry betrays a fragile faith. . . . We don't intentionally doubt God, but don't we, when we worry, essentially doubt God? We assume the attitude of a kid asking Michelangelo, "You sure you know what to do with that rock?" No wonder the apostle urges us to "be anxious for nothing" (Philippians 4:6). Paul is not promoting an irresponsible, careless life. We are not to be like the procrastinating minister. *I won't worry,* he told himself. *The Holy Spirit will give me my message.* All week long he avoided his work, saying, *The Holy Spirit will give me my message.* Finally, on Sunday, he stood before the church and prayed aloud, "All right, Lord. Give me a message." Much to the surprise of the church, a heavenly voice filled the sanctuary. "Tell the people you didn't study."

Manage your problems? Of course. But let your problems manage you? The worrisome heart does.

And the worrisome heart pays a high price for doing so. *Worry* comes from the Greek word that means "to divide the mind." Anxiety splits us right down the middle, creating a double-minded thinker. Rather than take away tomorrow's trouble, worry voids today's strength. Perception is divided, distorting your vision. Strength is divided, wasting your energy. Who can afford to lose power?

But how can we stop doing so? Paul offers a two-pronged answer: God's part and our part. Our part includes prayer and gratitude. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by *prayer and supplication,*

with *thanksgiving*, let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6, emphasis mine). (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Where in your life do you insist on calling the shots? In the kind of movies you watch? The employees you hire? Your spouse's behavior? Every choice your children make? Hand your need to control (and all the accompanying worries) over to God—you'll be relieved by His loving administration!

EXPLORATION
Sovereignty—Psalm 1; 103:19–22; Romans 11:33–36; Revelation 1:5.

Life LESSONS

Psalm 94:1–23

SITUATION
The psalm writer felt surrounded by people who did not seek after God. He rejoiced that God would protect and care for the righteous.

OBSERVATION
It is easy to grow weary and discouraged when we are surrounded by those who do not seek God. But God promises to be a shelter to those who are His children.

INSPIRATION
Ceaseless communion satisfies thirsty souls.

Toward this end, I give you this tool: a prayer for the thirsty heart. Carry it just as a cyclist carries a water bottle. The prayer outlines four essential fluids for soul hydration: God's work, God's energy, His lordship, and His love. You'll find the prayer easy to remember. Just think of the word *W-E-L-L.*

Until the pit is dug for the wicked.
14 For the Lord will not cast off His people,
Nor will He forsake His inheritance.
15 But judgment will return to righteousness,
And all the upright in heart will follow it.

16 Who will rise up for me against the evildoers?
Who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?
17 Unless the Lord *had been* my help,
My soul would soon have settled in silence.
18 If I say, "My foot slips,"
Your mercy, O Lord, will hold me up.
19 In the multitude of my anxieties within me,
Your comforts delight my soul.

20 Shall the throne of iniquity, which devises evil by law,
Have fellowship with You?
21 They gather together against the life of the righteous,
And condemn innocent blood.
22 But the Lord has been my defense,
And my God the rock of my refuge.
23 He has brought on them their own iniquity,
And shall cut them off in their own wickedness;
The Lord our God shall cut them off.

PSALM 95

A Call to Worship and Obedience

Oh come, let us sing to the Lord!
Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation.
2 Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving;
Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.
3 For the Lord *is* the great God,
And the great King above all gods.
4 In His hand *are* the deep places of the earth;
The heights of the hills *are* His also.
5 The sea *is* His, for He made it;
And His hands formed the dry *land.*

6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.
7 For He *is* our God,
And we *are* the people of His pasture,
And the sheep of His hand.

Today, if you will hear His voice:
8 "Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion,[a]
As *in* the day of trial[b] in the wilderness,
9 When your fathers tested Me;
They tried Me, though they saw My work.

95:8 [a]Or *Meribah* [b]Or *Massah*

10 For forty years I was grieved with *that* generation,
And said, 'It *is* a people who go astray in their hearts,
And they do not know My ways.'
11 So I swore in My wrath,
'They shall not enter My rest.'"

PSALM 96

A Song of Praise to God Coming in Judgment

Oh, sing to the Lord a new song!
Sing to the Lord, all the earth.
2 Sing to the Lord, bless His name;
Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day.
3 Declare His glory among the nations,
His wonders among all peoples.

4 For the Lord *is* great and greatly to be praised;
He *is* to be feared above all gods.
5 For all the gods of the peoples *are* idols,
But the Lord made the heavens.
6 Honor and majesty *are* before Him;
Strength and beauty *are* in His sanctuary.

7 Give to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
Give to the Lord glory and strength.
8 Give to the Lord the glory *due* His name;
Bring an offering, and come into His courts.
9 Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!
Tremble before Him, all the earth.

10 Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns;
The world also is firmly established,
It shall not be moved;
He shall judge the peoples righteously."

11 Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
Let the sea roar, and all its fullness;
12 Let the field be joyful, and all that *is* in it.
Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice
13 before the Lord.
For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth.
He shall judge the world with righteousness,
And the peoples with His truth.

PSALM 97

A Song of Praise to the Sovereign Lord

The Lord reigns;
Let the earth rejoice;
Let the multitude of isles be glad!

2 Clouds and darkness surround Him;
Righteousness and justice *are* the foundation of His throne.

"Lord, I come thirsty. I come to drink, to receive. I receive Your *work* on the Cross and in Your resurrection. My sins are pardoned, and my death is defeated. I receive your *energy.* Empowered by your Holy Spirit, I can do all things through Christ, who gives me strength. I receive your *lordship.* I belong to you. Nothing comes to me that hasn't passed through you. And I receive your *love.* Nothing can separate me from Your love."

Don't you need regular sips from God's reservoir? I do. I've offered this prayer in countless situations: stressful meetings, dull days, long drives, demanding trips, character-testing decisions. Many times a day I step to the underground spring of God and receive anew His work for my sin and death, the energy of his Spirit, His lordship, and His love.

Drink with me from His bottomless well. You don't have to live with a dehydrated heart.

Receive Christ's *work* on the Cross,
the *energy* of His Spirit,
His *lordship* over your life,
His unending, unfailing *love.*

Drink deeply and often. And out of you will flow rivers of living water. (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you ever feel alone and discouraged in your faith? Drink deeply from God's W-E-L-L. Become a part of a church and befriend a few other believers—people who will shelter you when you're facing life's storms.

EXPLORATION

God's Protection—
Deuteronomy 33:27;
2 Samuel 22:3; Psalm 17:8; 91:4; Proverbs 14:26; Luke 13:34.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 95:1—96:13

SITUATION
Everything that has been created gives glory to God. The psalm writer encouraged the people to bring an offering of worship to God.

OBSERVATION
As Creator, God calls for submission from His creation.

INSPIRATION
Valuable surprises are discovered in unlikely sources. True in flea markets and true in life. Make an investment in the people the world has cast off—the homeless, the AIDS patient, the orphan, the divorcee—and you may discover the source of your independence.

Jesus' message is stirring: "The way you treat them is the way you treat Me."

Of all the teachings during the last week of Christ, this one is for me the most penetrating. I wish He hadn't said what He said. I wish He'd said that the sign of the saved is the books they have written, for I've written several. I wish He'd said the sign of the saved was the numbers of sermons they've preached, for I've preached hundreds. I wish He'd said the sign of the saved was the audiences they've amassed, for I've spoken to thousands.

But He didn't. His words reminded me that the person who sees Christ is the one who sees the hurting person. To see Jesus, go to the convalescent home, sit down beside the elderly woman, and steady her hand as she puts the spoon in her mouth. To see

3 A fire goes before Him,
And burns up His enemies round about.
4 His lightnings light the world;
The earth sees and trembles.
5 The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the Lord,
At the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.
6 The heavens declare His righteousness,
And all the peoples see His glory.

7 Let all be put to shame who serve carved images,
Who boast of idols.
Worship Him, all *you* gods.
8 Zion hears and is glad,
And the daughters of Judah rejoice
Because of Your judgments, O Lord.
9 For You, Lord, *are* most high above all the earth;
You are exalted far above all gods.

10 You who love the Lord, hate evil!
He preserves the souls of His saints;
He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked.
11 Light is sown for the righteous,
And gladness for the upright in heart.
12 Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous,
And give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name.[a]

PSALM 98

A Song of Praise to the Lord for His Salvation and Judgment

A Psalm.

Oh, sing to the Lord a new song!
For He has done marvelous things;
His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory.
2 The Lord has made known His salvation;
His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations.
3 He has remembered His mercy and His faithfulness to the house of Israel;
All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

4 Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth;
Break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises.
5 Sing to the Lord with the harp,
With the harp and the sound of a psalm,
6 With trumpets and the sound of a horn;
Shout joyfully before the Lord, the King.

7 Let the sea roar, and all its fullness,
The world and those who dwell in it;

97:12 [a]Or *His holiness*

8 Let the rivers clap *their* hands;
Let the hills be joyful together
9 before the Lord,
For He is coming to judge the earth.
With righteousness He shall judge the world,
And the peoples with equity.

PSALM 99

Praise to the Lord for His Holiness

The Lord reigns;
Let the peoples tremble!
He dwells *between* the cherubim;
Let the earth be moved!
2 The Lord *is* great in Zion,
And He *is* high above all the peoples.
3 Let them praise Your great and awesome name—
He *is* holy.

4 The King's strength also loves justice;
You have established equity;
You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.
5 Exalt the Lord our God,
And worship at His footstool—
He *is* holy.

6 Moses and Aaron were among His priests,
And Samuel was among those who called upon His name;
They called upon the Lord, and He answered them.
7 He spoke to them in the cloudy pillar;
They kept His testimonies and the ordinance He gave them.

8 You answered them, O Lord our God;
You were to them God-Who-Forgives,
Though You took vengeance on their deeds.
9 Exalt the Lord our God,
And worship at His holy hill;
For the Lord our God *is* holy.

PSALM 100

A Song of Praise for the Lord's Faithfulness to His People

A Psalm of Thanksgiving.

Make a joyful shout to the Lord, all you lands!
2 Serve the Lord with gladness;
Come before His presence with singing.
3 Know that the Lord, He *is* God;
It is He *who* has made us, and not we ourselves;[a]
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

100:3 [a]Following Kethib, Septuagint, and Vulgate; Qere, many Hebrew manuscripts, and Targum read *we are His*.

Jesus, go to the community hospital and ask the nurse to take you to see one who has received no visits. To see Jesus, leave your office and go down the hall and talk to the man who is regretting his divorce and missing his children. To see Jesus, go to the inner city and give a sandwich—not a sermon, but a sandwich—to the bag lady who's made a home out of an overpass.

To see Jesus . . . see the unattractive and forgotten.

You might say it is a test. A test to measure the depth of our character. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Read an episode from the life of Christ. What were some of His character traits? Try to be more like Christ in these areas.

EXPLORATION
Submission—Isaiah 66:1, 2; Matthew 26:57–63; James 4:7–10; 1 Peter 5:6.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 97:1—98:9

SITUATION
Like many psalms used at Jewish festivals, these psalms are a call to worship God our King, who reigns over all.

OBSERVATION
As we consider God's goodness, His justice, power, and sovereignty in our lives and in the world, we respond with worship that is meaningful and life changing.

INSPIRATION
You'll discover the purpose of worship—to change the face of the worshiper. This is exactly what happened to Christ on the mountain. Jesus' appearance was

changed: "His face shone like the sun" (Matthew 17:2).

The connection between the face and worship is more than coincidental. Our face is the most public part of our bodies, covered less than any other area. It is also the most recognizable part of our bodies. We don't fill a school annual with photos of people's feet but rather with photos of faces. God desires to take our faces, this exposed and memorable part of our bodies, and use them to reflect His goodness. Paul writes: "We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

God invites us to see His face so He can change ours. He uses our uncovered faces to display His glory. The transformation isn't easy. The sculptor of Mount Rushmore faced a lesser challenge than does God. But our Lord is up to the task. He loves to change the faces of His children. By His fingers, wrinkles of worry are rubbed away. Shadows of shame and doubt become portraits of grace and trust. He relaxes clenched jaws and smoothes furrowed brows. His touch can remove the bags of exhaustion from beneath the eyes and turn tears of despair into tears of peace.

How? Through worship.

We'd expect something more complicated, more demanding. A forty-day fast or the memorization of Leviticus perhaps. No. God's plan is simpler. He changes our faces through worship.

Exactly what is worship? I like King David's definition. "Oh, magnify the Lord

4 Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,
And into His courts with praise.
Be thankful to Him, *and* bless His name.
5 For the Lord *is* good;
His mercy *is* everlasting,
And His truth *endures* to all generations.

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: A Good Shepherd Tends to His Sheep

Like the sheep, the rest of our wounds come just from living in the pasture. The pasture of the sheep, however, is much more appealing. The sheep have to face wounds from thorns and thistles. We have to face aging, loss, and illness. Some of us face betrayal and injustice. Live long enough in this world, and most of us will face deep, deep hurts of some kind or another.

So we, like the sheep, get wounded. And we, like the sheep, have a shepherd. Remember the words we read? "We are His people and the sheep of His pasture" (Psalm 100:3). He will do for you what the shepherd does for the sheep. He will tend to you.

If the Gospels teach us anything, they teach us that Jesus is a Good Shepherd. "I am the good shepherd," Jesus announces. "The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

Didn't Jesus spread the oil of prevention on His disciples? He prayed for them. He equipped them before he sent them out. He revealed to them the secrets of the parables. He interrupted their arguments and calmed their fears. Because He was a good shepherd, He protected them against disappointments.

Not only did Jesus prevent wounds, He healed them. He touched the eyes of the blind man. He touched the disease of the leper. He touched the body of the dead girl. Jesus tends to His sheep. He touched the searching heart of Nicodemus. He touched the open heart of Zacchaeus. He touched the broken heart of Mary Magdalene. He touched the confused heart of Cleopas. And He touched the stubborn heart of Paul and the repentant heart of Peter. Jesus tends to His sheep. And He will tend to you. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 937.

PSALM 101

Promised Faithfulness to the Lord

A Psalm of David.

I will sing of mercy and justice;
To You, O Lord, I will sing praises.

2 I will behave wisely in a perfect way.
Oh, when will You come to me?
I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.

3 I will set nothing wicked before my eyes;
I hate the work of those who fall away;
It shall not cling to me.
4 A perverse heart shall depart from me;
I will not know wickedness.

5 Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor,
Him I will destroy;
The one who has a haughty look and a proud heart,
Him I will not endure.

6 My eyes *shall be* on the faithful of the land,
That they may dwell with me;
He who walks in a perfect way,
He shall serve me.
7 He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house;
He who tells lies shall not continue in my presence.
8 Early I will destroy all the wicked of the land,
That I may cut off all the evildoers from the city of the Lord.

PSALM 102

The Lord's Eternal Love

A Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed and pours out his complaint before the Lord.

Hear my prayer, O Lord,
And let my cry come to You.
2 Do not hide Your face from me in the day of my trouble;
Incline Your ear to me;
In the day that I call, answer me speedily.

3 For my days are consumed like smoke,
And my bones are burned like a hearth.
4 My heart is stricken and withered like grass,
So that I forget to eat my bread.
5 Because of the sound of my groaning
My bones cling to my skin.
6 I am like a pelican of the wilderness;
I am like an owl of the desert.

with me, and let us exalt His name together" (Psalm 34:3). Worship is the act of magnifying God. Enlarging our vision of Him. Stepping into the cockpit to see where He sits and observe how He works. Of course, His size doesn't change, but our perception of Him does. As we draw nearer, He seems larger. Isn't that what we need? A big view of God? Don't we have big problems, big worries, big questions? Of course we do. Hence we need a big view of God.

Worship offers that. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Next time you are in church, be purposeful about your worship. Allow the songs, the prayers, and the words spoken to change your attitude, your thoughts, your face. Ask God to help transform you as you worship Him.

EXPLORATION
Worship—Exodus 34:14; Luke 4:8; John 4:20–24.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 99:1—101:8

SITUATION
Although Psalms 99–100 have unknown authors, Psalm 101 was written by David. Early in his reign, he recorded the standards of conduct he wanted to follow.

OBSERVATION
God can be praised and trusted by believers because He is holy, good, and perfect. All believers should be motivated to honorable conduct.

INSPIRATION
Is God's grandness good news? When Isaiah saw it,

he came unraveled: "Woe is me, for I am undone!" (Isaiah 6:5). Competent pilots boot sick people off the plane. An all-powerful God might do likewise. Shouldn't the immensity of His universe intimidate us? . . .

God, who has no needs, age, or sin. Bouncing in the back of the plane: Max. Burger dependent. Half-asleep. Compared to God, I have the life span of a fruit fly. And sinless? I can't maintain a holy thought for my two-minute morning commute. Is God's greatness good news? Not without the next four words of John 3:16: "For God *so loved the world.*"

Try that mantra on for size. The one who holds the aces holds your heart. The one who formed you pulls for you. Untrumpable power stoked by unstoppable love. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Take time to assess and write down your priorities and what they reveal about your trust in God.

EXPLORATION

God Is Trustworthy—Deuteronomy 7:9; 1 Kings 8:56; Psalm 33:4; 89:2; 138:8; Lamentations 3:22, 23; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24; Hebrews 10:23.

Life Lessons

Psalm 102:1–28

SITUATION

The psalmist's distress is not hopeless. Through faith he saw a glorious future for unborn generations.

7 I lie awake,
And am like a sparrow alone on the housetop.

8 My enemies reproach me all day long;
Those who deride me swear an oath against me.
9 For I have eaten ashes like bread,
And mingled my drink with weeping,
10 Because of Your indignation and Your wrath;
For You have lifted me up and cast me away.
11 My days *are* like a shadow that lengthens,
And I wither away like grass.

12 But You, O Lord, shall endure forever,
And the remembrance of Your name to all generations.
13 You will arise *and* have mercy on Zion;
For the time to favor her,
Yes, the set time, has come.
14 For Your servants take pleasure in her stones,
And show favor to her dust.
15 So the nations shall fear the name of the Lord,
And all the kings of the earth Your glory.
16 For the Lord shall build up Zion;
He shall appear in His glory.
17 He shall regard the prayer of the destitute,
And shall not despise their prayer.

18 This will be written for the generation to come,
That a people yet to be created may praise the Lord.
19 For He looked down from the height of His sanctuary;
From heaven the Lord viewed the earth,
20 To hear the groaning of the prisoner,
To release those appointed to death,
21 To declare the name of the Lord in Zion,
And His praise in Jerusalem,
22 When the peoples are gathered together,
And the kingdoms, to serve the Lord.

23 He weakened my strength in the way;
He shortened my days.
24 I said, "O my God,
Do not take me away in the midst of my days;
Your years *are* throughout all generations.
25 Of old You laid the foundation of the earth,
And the heavens *are* the work of Your hands.
26 They will perish, but You will endure;
Yes, they will all grow old like a garment;
Like a cloak You will change them,
And they will be changed.
27 But You *are* the same,
And Your years will have no end.
28 The children of Your servants will continue,
And their descendants will be established before You."

PSALM 103

Praise for the Lord's Mercies

A Psalm of David.

Bless the Lord, O my soul;
And all that is within me, *bless* His holy name!
2 Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And forget not all His benefits:
3 Who forgives all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases,
4 Who redeems your life from destruction,
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,
5 Who satisfies your mouth with good *things,*
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

6 The Lord executes righteousness
And justice for all who are oppressed.
7 He made known His ways to Moses,
His acts to the children of Israel.
8 The Lord *is* merciful and gracious,
Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.
9 He will not always strive *with us,*
Nor will He keep *His anger* forever.
10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
Nor punished us according to our iniquities.

11 For as the heavens are high above the earth,
So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;
12 As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.
13 As a father pities *his* children,
So the Lord pities those who fear Him.
14 For He knows our frame;
He remembers that we *are* dust.

15 *As for* man, his days *are* like grass;
As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.
16 For the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
And its place remembers it no more.[a]
17 But the mercy of the Lord *is* from everlasting to everlasting
On those who fear Him,
And His righteousness to children's children,
18 To such as keep His covenant,
And to those who remember His commandments to do them.

19 The Lord has established His throne in heaven,
And His kingdom rules over all.

103:16 [a]Compare Job 7:10

OBSERVATION
God will never die or forget about us. He will protect and restore His people today as in the past.

INSPIRATION
God will always be the same.

No one else will. Lovers call you today and scorn you tomorrow. Companies follow pay raises with pink slips. Friends applaud you when you drive a classic and dismiss you when you drive a dud. Not God. God is always "the same" (Psalm 102:27). With Him "no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

Catch God in a bad mood? Won't happen. Fear exhausting His grace? A sardine will swallow the Atlantic first. Think He's given up on you? Wrong. Did He not make a promise to you? "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19). He's never sullen or sour, sulking or stressed. His strength, truth, ways, and love never change. He is "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). And because He is, the Lord "will be the stability of your times" (Isaiah 33:6). (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Don't suffer alone. When you feel attacked or overwhelmed, tell God. Then, look to another friend or family member who will help carry you through.

EXPLORATION
Restoration—Exodus 30:11–16; Numbers 5:5–8; Psalm 126:5, 6; Matthew 8:2, 3; 2 Corinthians 2:5–11.

20 Bless the Lord, you His angels,
Who excel in strength, who do His word,
Heeding the voice of His word.
21 Bless the Lord, all *you* His hosts,
You ministers of His, who do His pleasure.
22 Bless the Lord, all His works,
In all places of His dominion.

Bless the Lord, O my soul!

PSALM 104

Praise to the Sovereign Lord for His Creation and Providence

Bless the Lord, O my soul!

O Lord my God, You are very great:
You are clothed with honor and majesty,
2 Who cover *Yourself* with light as *with* a garment,
Who stretch out the heavens like a curtain.

3 He lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters,
Who makes the clouds His chariot,
Who walks on the wings of the wind,
4 Who makes His angels spirits,
His ministers a flame of fire.

5 *You who* laid the foundations of the earth,
So *that* it should not be moved forever,
6 You covered it with the deep as *with* a garment;
The waters stood above the mountains.
7 At Your rebuke they fled;
At the voice of Your thunder they hastened away.
8 They went up over the mountains;
They went down into the valleys,
To the place which You founded for them.
9 You have set a boundary that they may not pass over,
That they may not return to cover the earth.

10 He sends the springs into the valleys;
They flow among the hills.
11 They give drink to every beast of the field;
The wild donkeys quench their thirst.
12 By them the birds of the heavens have their home;
They sing among the branches.
13 He waters the hills from His upper chambers;
The earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works.

14 He causes the grass to grow for the cattle,
And vegetation for the service of man,
That he may bring forth food from the earth,
15 And wine *that* makes glad the heart of man,

Life Lessons

Psalm 103:1–22

SITUATION
David urged everyone to praise God. He told of God's faithfulness and praised Him.

OBSERVATION
The first few verses set the tone for this psalm. David urged the reader to avoid allowing God to become so commonplace that he forgot to praise Him.

INSPIRATION
How do we explain tragedy?

Maybe God messed up. Cancer cells crept into your DNA when He wasn't looking. He was so occupied with the tornado in Kansas that he forgot the famine in Uganda. He tried to change the stubborn streak in your spouse but just couldn't get him to budge. Honestly. A bumbling Creator? An absentminded Maker? What evidence does Scripture provide to support such a view? What evidence does creation offer? Can't the Maker of heaven and earth handle bad traffic and prevent bad marriages? Of course He can. Then why doesn't He?

Perhaps He is mad. Have we so exhausted the mercy of God's bank account that every prayer bounces like a bad check? Did humanity cross the line millenniums ago, and now we're getting what we deserve? Such an argument carries a dash of merit. God does leave us to the consequences of our stupid decisions. Think Egyptian soldiers in Red Sea, Hebrews in Babylon, Peter weeping with the sound of a crowing rooster in his ears. Bang your head

Oil to make *his* face shine,
And bread *which* strengthens man's heart.
16 The trees of the Lord are full *of sap,*
The cedars of Lebanon which He planted,
17 Where the birds make their nests;
The stork has her home in the fir trees.
18 The high hills *are* for the wild goats;
The cliffs are a refuge for the rock badgers.[a]

19 He appointed the moon for seasons;
The sun knows its going down.
20 You make darkness, and it is night,
In which all the beasts of the forest creep about.
21 The young lions roar after their prey,
And seek their food from God.
22 *When* the sun rises, they gather together
And lie down in their dens.
23 Man goes out to his work
And to his labor until the evening.

24 O Lord, how manifold are Your works!
In wisdom You have made them all.
The earth is full of Your possessions—
25 This great and wide sea,
In which *are* innumerable teeming things,
Living things both small and great.
26 There the ships sail about;
There is that Leviathan
Which You have made to play there.

27 These all wait for You,
That You may give *them* their food in due season.
28 *What* You give them they gather in;
You open Your hand, they are filled with good.
29 You hide Your face, they are troubled;
You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.
30 You send forth Your Spirit, they are created;
And You renew the face of the earth.

31 May the glory of the Lord endure forever;
May the Lord rejoice in His works.
32 He looks on the earth, and it trembles;
He touches the hills, and they smoke.

33 I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.
34 May my meditation be sweet to Him;
I will be glad in the Lord.
35 May sinners be consumed from the earth,
And the wicked be no more.

104:18 [a]Or *rock hyrax* (compare Leviticus 11:5)

against the wall, and expect a headache. God lets us endure the fruit of sin. But to label Him peeved and impatient? To do so you need to scissor from your Bible some tender passages such as: "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him" (Psalm 103:8–11). (From *It's Not About Me*, by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Make Psalm 103 your prayer. Pray this prayer throughout the day. Maintain an attitude of praise in all your activities.

EXPLORATION
Cautions About Forgetting God—Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:10–12; Psalm 9:17; 50:22; Isaiah 17:10; 51:13; Jeremiah 3:21.

Life LESSONS

Psalm 104:1–35

SITUATION
This anonymous songwriter appreciated God's creation. God created and sustains the universe.

OBSERVATION
The universe bears witness to God's majesty, splendor, and lordship.

INSPIRATION
Nature is God's workshop. The sky is His resume. The universe is His calling card. You want to know who God is? See what He has done. You want to know

His power? Take a look at His creation. Curious about His strength? Pay a visit to His home address: 1 Billion Starry Sky Avenue. Want to know His size? Step out into the night and stare at starlight emitted one million years ago and then read 2 Chronicles 2:6, "Who is able to build Him a temple, since heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him?"

He is untainted by the atmosphere of sin, unbridled by the time line of history, unhindered by the weariness of the body.

What controls you doesn't control Him. What troubles you doesn't trouble Him. What fatigues you doesn't fatigue Him. Is an eagle disturbed by traffic? No, he rises above it. Is the whale perturbed by a hurricane? Of course not, he plunges beneath it. Is the lion flustered by the mouse standing directly in his way? No, he steps over it.

How much more is God able to soar above, plunge beneath, and step over the troubles of the earth! "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Take a walk in the park. Gaze out the window at the clouds. Get away from the noise and listen to the sounds of nature. As you enjoy the beauty of creation, thank and praise God for His handiwork.

EXPLORATION

God the Creator—Genesis 1—2; Nehemiah 9:6; Job 26:7; 38, 39; Psalm 8:3, 4; 102:25; Acts 14:15; Hebrews 11:3.

Bless the Lord, O my soul!
Praise the Lord!

PSALM 105

The Eternal Faithfulness of the Lord

Oh, give thanks to the Lord!
Call upon His name;
Make known His deeds among the peoples!
2 Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him;
Talk of all His wondrous works!
3 Glory in His holy name;
Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the Lord!
4 Seek the Lord and His strength;
Seek His face evermore!
5 Remember His marvelous works which He has done,
His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth,
6 O seed of Abraham His servant,
You children of Jacob, His chosen ones!

7 He *is* the Lord our God;
His judgments *are* in all the earth.
8 He remembers His covenant forever,
The word *which* He commanded, for a thousand generations,
9 *The covenant* which He made with Abraham,
And His oath to Isaac,
10 And confirmed it to Jacob for a statute,
To Israel *as* an everlasting covenant,
11 Saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan
As the allotment of your inheritance,"
12 When they were few in number,
Indeed very few, and strangers in it.

13 When they went from one nation to another,
From *one* kingdom to another people,
14 He permitted no one to do them wrong;
Yes, He rebuked kings for their sakes,
15 *Saying*, "Do not touch My anointed ones,
And do My prophets no harm."

16 Moreover He called for a famine in the land;
He destroyed all the provision of bread.
17 He sent a man before them—
Joseph—*who* was sold as a slave.
18 They hurt his feet with fetters,
He was laid in irons.
19 Until the time that his word came to pass,
The word of the Lord tested him.
20 The king sent and released him,
The ruler of the people let him go free.

21 He made him lord of his house,
And ruler of all his possessions,
22 To bind his princes at his pleasure,
And teach his elders wisdom.

23 Israel also came into Egypt,
And Jacob dwelt in the land of Ham.
24 He increased His people greatly,
And made them stronger than their enemies.
25 He turned their heart to hate His people,
To deal craftily with His servants.

26 He sent Moses His servant,
And Aaron whom He had chosen.
27 They performed His signs among them,
And wonders in the land of Ham.
28 He sent darkness, and made *it* dark;
And they did not rebel against His word.
29 He turned their waters into blood,
And killed their fish.
30 Their land abounded with frogs,
Even in the chambers of their kings.
31 He spoke, and there came swarms of flies,
And lice in all their territory.
32 He gave them hail for rain,
And flaming fire in their land.
33 He struck their vines also, and their fig trees,
And splintered the trees of their territory.
34 He spoke, and locusts came,
Young locusts without number,
35 And ate up all the vegetation in their land,
And devoured the fruit of their ground.
36 He also destroyed all the firstborn in their land,
The first of all their strength.

37 He also brought them out with silver and gold,
And *there was* none feeble among His tribes.
38 Egypt was glad when they departed,
For the fear of them had fallen upon them.
39 He spread a cloud for a covering,
And fire to give light in the night.
40 *The people* asked, and He brought quail,
And satisfied them with the bread of heaven.
41 He opened the rock, and water gushed out;
It ran in the dry places *like* a river.

42 For He remembered His holy promise,
And Abraham His servant.
43 He brought out His people with joy,
His chosen ones with gladness.
44 He gave them the lands of the Gentiles,
And they inherited the labor of the nations,

Life Lessons

Psalm 105:1–45

SITUATION
David reminded the people of God's mighty deeds. God's past miracles encouraged Believers to remain loyal to Him.

OBSERVATION
By recounting God's work in history, Christians can be encouraged to praise God—because He is trustworthy.

INSPIRATION
"In the beginning God *created* the heavens and the earth." It doesn't say, "God *made* the heavens and the earth." Nor does it say that He "Xeroxed" the heavens and the earth. Or "built" or "developed" or "mass-produced." No, the word is "created."

And that one word says a lot. Creating is something far different than constructing. The difference is pretty obvious. Constructing something engages only the hands while creating engages the heart and the soul. . . .

Now, imagine God's creativity. Of all we don't know about the creation, there is one thing we do know—He did it with a smile. He must've had a blast. Painting the stripes on the zebra, hanging the stars in the sky, putting the gold in the sunset. What creativity! Stretching the neck of the giraffe, putting the flutter in the mockingbird's wings, planting the giggle in the hyena.

What a time He had. Like a whistling carpenter in his workshop, He loved every bit of it. He poured Himself into the work. . . .

And then, as a finale to

a brilliant performance, He made man. With His typical creative flair, He began with a useless mound of dirt and ended up with an invaluable species called a human. A human who had the unique honor to bear the stamp, "in His Image."

At this point in the story one would be tempted to jump and clap. "Bravo!" "Encore!" "Unmatchable!" "Beautiful!"

But the applause would be premature. The Divine Artist has yet to unveil His greatest creation.

As the story unfolds, a devil of a snake feeds man a line and an apple, and gullible Adam swallows them both. This one act of rebellion sets in motion a dramatic and erratic courtship between God and man. Though the characters and scenes change, the scenario repeats itself endlessly. God, still the compassionate Creator, woos His creation. Man, the creation, alternately reaches out in repentance and runs in rebellion.

It is within this simple script that God's creativity flourishes. If you thought He was imaginative with the sea and stars, just wait until you read what He does to get His creation to listen to Him!

For example:

A ninety-year-old woman gets pregnant.

Another woman turns to salt.

A flood blankets the earth.

A bush burns (but doesn't burn up!)

The Red Sea splits in two.

The walls of Jericho fall.

The sky rains fire.

A donkey talks.

You talk about special effects! But these acts, be they very ingenious, still couldn't compare with what was to come.

45 That they might observe His statutes
And keep His laws.

Praise the Lord!

PSALM 106

Joy in Forgiveness of Israel's Sins

Praise the Lord!

Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for *He is* good!
For His mercy *endures* forever.

2 Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord?
Who can declare all His praise?
3 Blessed *are* those who keep justice,
And he who does[a] righteousness at all times!

4 Remember me, O Lord, with the favor *You have toward* Your people.
Oh, visit me with Your salvation,
5 That I may see the benefit of Your chosen ones,
That I may rejoice in the gladness of Your nation,
That I may glory with Your inheritance.

6 We have sinned with our fathers,
We have committed iniquity,
We have done wickedly.
7 Our fathers in Egypt did not understand Your wonders;
They did not remember the multitude of Your mercies,
But rebelled by the sea—the Red Sea.

8 Nevertheless He saved them for His name's sake,
That He might make His mighty power known.
9 He rebuked the Red Sea also, and it dried up;
So He led them through the depths,
As through the wilderness.
10 He saved them from the hand of him who hated *them,*
And redeemed them from the hand of the enemy.
11 The waters covered their enemies;
There was not one of them left.
12 Then they believed His words;
They sang His praise.

13 They soon forgot His works;
They did not wait for His counsel,
14 But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness,
And tested God in the desert.
15 And He gave them their request,
But sent leanness into their soul.

106:3 [a]Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate read *those who do.*

16 When they envied Moses in the camp,
And Aaron the saint of the Lord,
17 The earth opened up and swallowed Dathan,
And covered the faction of Abiram.
18 A fire was kindled in their company;
The flame burned up the wicked.

19 They made a calf in Horeb,
And worshiped the molded image.
20 Thus they changed their glory
Into the image of an ox that eats grass.
21 They forgot God their Savior,
Who had done great things in Egypt,
22 Wondrous works in the land of Ham,
Awesome things by the Red Sea.
23 Therefore He said that He would destroy them,
Had not Moses His chosen one stood before Him in the breach,
To turn away His wrath, lest He destroy *them.*

24 Then they despised the pleasant land;
They did not believe His word,
25 But complained in their tents,
And did not heed the voice of the Lord.
26 Therefore He raised His hand *in an oath* against them,
To overthrow them in the wilderness,
27 To overthrow their descendants among the nations,
And to scatter them in the lands.

28 They joined themselves also to Baal of Peor,
And ate sacrifices made to the dead.
29 Thus they provoked *Him* to anger with their deeds,
And the plague broke out among them.
30 Then Phinehas stood up and intervened,
And the plague was stopped.
31 And that was accounted to him for righteousness
To all generations forevermore.

32 They angered *Him* also at the waters of strife,[a]
So that it went ill with Moses on account of them;
33 Because they rebelled against His Spirit,
So that he spoke rashly with his lips.

34 They did not destroy the peoples,
Concerning whom the Lord had commanded them,
35 But they mingled with the Gentiles
And learned their works;
36 They served their idols,
Which became a snare to them.
37 They even sacrificed their sons
And their daughters to demons,

106:32 [a]Or *Meribah*

Nearing the climax of the story, God, motivated by love and directed by divinity, surprised everyone. He became a man. In an untouchable mystery, He disguised Himself as a carpenter and lived in a dusty Judean village. Determined to prove His love for His creation, he walked incognito through His own world. His callused hands touched wounds and His compassionate tongue touched hearts. He became one of us. (From *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Take a blank piece of paper and write "God is faithful" at the top. Then write as many instances as you can remember that show God's faithfulness to you. Use biblical examples and personal experiences. Don't stop until your page is full. Praise God for His faithfulness to you!

EXPLORATION
Praise the Faithful God—Psalm 31:21; 57:9; 59:16; 63:3; 86:12; 89:1; 100:4; 108:3; 117; 138:2.

Life LESSONS

Psalm 106:1–48

SITUATION
Israel's rebellion and Divine patience. This common theme in the Old Testament is detailed in Psalm 106.

OBSERVATION
Because God forgives us, we can rejoice and sing about it.

INSPIRATION
When I was ten years old, I had a puppy named Tina. You would have loved her. She was the perfect pet. An irresistible, pug-nosed Pekingese pup. One ear fell

over and the other ear stood straight up. She never tired of playing and yet never got in the way.

Her mother died when she was born so the rearing of the puppy fell to me. I fed her milk from a doll bottle and used to sneak out at night to see if she was warm. I'll never forget the night I took her to bed with me only to have her mess on my pillow. We made quite a pair. My first brush with parenthood.

One day I went into the backyard to give Tina her dinner. I looked around and spotted her in a corner near the fence. She had cornered a butterfly (as much as a butterfly can be cornered) and was playfully yelping and jumping in the air trying to catch the butterfly in her mouth. Amused, I watched her for a few minutes and then called to her.

"Tina! Come here, girl! It's time to eat!"

What happened next surprised me. Tina stopped her playing and looked at me. But instead of immediately scampering in my direction, she sat back on her haunches. Then she tilted her head back toward the butterfly, looked back at me, then back to the butterfly, and then back to me. For the first time in her life, she had to make a decision. . . .

And do you know what she did? She chased the butterfly! Scurrying and barking, she ignored my call and chased that silly thing until it flew over the fence.

That is when the guilt hit.

She stopped at the fence for a long time, sitting back on her hind legs looking up in the air where the butterfly had made its exit. Slowly, the excitement of the chase was overshadowed by the guilt of disobedience.

38 And shed innocent blood,
The blood of their sons and daughters,
Whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan;
And the land was polluted with blood.
39 Thus they were defiled by their own works,
And played the harlot by their own deeds.

40 Therefore the wrath of the Lord was kindled against His people,
So that He abhorred His own inheritance.
41 And He gave them into the hand of the Gentiles,
And those who hated them ruled over them.
42 Their enemies also oppressed them,
And they were brought into subjection under their hand.
43 Many times He delivered them;
But they rebelled in their counsel,
And were brought low for their iniquity.

44 Nevertheless He regarded their affliction,
When He heard their cry;
45 And for their sake He remembered His covenant,
And relented according to the multitude of His mercies.
46 He also made them to be pitied
By all those who carried them away captive.

47 Save us, O Lord our God,
And gather us from among the Gentiles,
To give thanks to Your holy name,
To triumph in Your praise.

48 Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel
From everlasting to everlasting!
And let all the people say, "Amen!"

Praise the Lord!

Book Five: Psalms 107—150

PSALM 107

Thanksgiving to the Lord for His Great Works of Deliverance

Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for *He is* good!
For His mercy *endures* forever.
2 Let the redeemed of the Lord say *so,*
Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy,
3 And gathered out of the lands,
From the east and from the west,
From the north and from the south.

4 They wandered in the wilderness in a desolate way;
They found no city to dwell in.
5 Hungry and thirsty,

Their soul fainted in them.
6 Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble,
And He delivered them out of their distresses.
7 And He led them forth by the right way,
That they might go to a city for a dwelling place.
8 Oh, that *men* would give thanks to the Lord *for* His goodness,
And *for* His wonderful works to the children of men!
9 For He satisfies the longing soul,
And fills the hungry soul with goodness.

10 Those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death,
Bound in affliction and irons—
11 Because they rebelled against the words of God,
And despised the counsel of the Most High,
12 Therefore He brought down their heart with labor;
They fell down, and *there was* none to help.
13 Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble,
And He saved them out of their distresses.
14 He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death,
And broke their chains in pieces.
15 Oh, that *men* would give thanks to the Lord *for* His goodness,
And *for* His wonderful works to the children of men!
16 For He has broken the gates of bronze,
And cut the bars of iron in two.

17 Fools, because of their transgression,
And because of their iniquities, were afflicted.
18 Their soul abhorred all manner of food,
And they drew near to the gates of death.
19 Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble,
And He saved them out of their distresses.
20 He sent His word and healed them,
And delivered *them* from their destructions.
21 Oh, that *men* would give thanks to the Lord *for* His goodness,
And *for* His wonderful works to the children of men!
22 Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving,
And declare His works with rejoicing.

23 Those who go down to the sea in ships,
Who do business on great waters,
24 They see the works of the Lord,
And His wonders in the deep.
25 For He commands and raises the stormy wind,
Which lifts up the waves of the sea.
26 They mount up to the heavens,
They go down again to the depths;
Their soul melts because of trouble.
27 They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man,
And are at their wits' end.
28 Then they cry out to the Lord in their trouble,
And He brings them out of their distresses.
29 He calms the storm,

She turned painfully and walked back to encounter her owner. (To be honest, I was a little miffed.) Her head was ducked as she regretfully trudged across the yard.

For the first time in her life, she felt guilty.

She had violated her "should" and had given in to her "want." My heart melted, however, and I called her name again. Sensing forgiveness, Tina darted into my hands. (I always was a softy.)

Now, I may be overdoing it a bit. I don't know if a dog can really feel guilty or not. But I do know a human can. And whether the sin is as slight as chasing a butterfly or as serious as sleeping with another man's wife, the effects are the same. . . .

Man cannot cope with guilt alone. . . .

. . . I don't care how many worship services you attend or good deeds you do, your goodness is insufficient. You *can't* be good enough to deserve forgiveness. No one bats a thousand. No one bowls three hundred. No one. Not you, not me, not anyone. . . .

. . . Listen. Quit trying to quench your own guilt. You can't do it. There's no way. Not with a bottle of whiskey or perfect Sunday School attendance. Sorry. I don't care how bad you are. You can't be bad enough to forget it. And I don't care how good you are. You can't be good enough to overcome it.

You need a Savior. (From *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Confess your sins to God. Accept His forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Respond to His mercy with heart-filled praise. Find a new way to worship God

by singing a song or writing a poem.

EXPLORATION
God's Forgiveness—Psalm 78:38; 103:3; Isaiah 43:25; Joel 2:13; Micah 7:18, 19; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:13, 14; 1 John 1:9.

Life LESSONS

Psalm 107:1–43

SITUATION
Wanderers, prisoners, sick and storm-tossed people all suffered but were saved when they called upon God. This psalm tells why people should give thanks and praise to their Savior and Deliverer.

OBSERVATION
God will rescue us from trials if we are faithful to ask Him for help.

INSPIRATION
For many people, life is—well, life is a jungle. Not a jungle of trees and beasts. Would that it were so simple. Would that our jungles could be cut with a machete or our adversaries trapped in a cage. But our jungles are comprised of the thicker thickets of failing health, broken hearts, and empty wallets. Our forests are framed with hospital walls and divorce courts. We don't hear the screeching of birds or the roaring of lions, but we do hear the complaints of neighbors and the demands of bosses. Our predators are our creditors, and the brush that surrounds us is the rush that exhausts us.

It's a jungle out there.

And for some, even for many, hope is in short supply. Hopelessness is an odd bag. Unlike the others, it isn't full. It is empty, and its emptiness creates the

So that its waves are still.
30 Then they are glad because they are quiet;
So He guides them to their desired haven.
31 Oh, that *men* would give thanks to the Lord *for* His goodness,
And *for* His wonderful works to the children of men!
32 Let them exalt Him also in the assembly of the people,
And praise Him in the company of the elders.

33 He turns rivers into a wilderness,
And the watersprings into dry ground;
34 A fruitful land into barrenness,
For the wickedness of those who dwell in it.
35 He turns a wilderness into pools of water,
And dry land into watersprings.
36 There He makes the hungry dwell,
That they may establish a city for a dwelling place,
37 And sow fields and plant vineyards,
That they may yield a fruitful harvest.
38 He also blesses them, and they multiply greatly;
And He does not let their cattle decrease.

39 When they are diminished and brought low
Through oppression, affliction, and sorrow,
40 He pours contempt on princes,
And causes them to wander in the wilderness *where there is* no way;
41 Yet He sets the poor on high, far from affliction,
And makes *their* families like a flock.
42 The righteous see *it* and rejoice,
And all iniquity stops its mouth.

43 Whoever *is* wise will observe these *things,*
And they will understand the lovingkindness of the Lord.

PSALM 108

Assurance of God's Victory over Enemies

A Song. A Psalm of David.

O God, my heart is steadfast;
I will sing and give praise, even with my glory.
2 Awake, lute and harp!
I will awaken the dawn.
3 I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples,
And I will sing praises to You among the nations.
4 For Your mercy *is* great above the heavens,
And Your truth *reaches* to the clouds.

5 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens,
And Your glory above all the earth;
6 That Your beloved may be delivered,
Save *with* Your right hand, and hear me.

7 God has spoken in His holiness:
"I will rejoice;
I will divide Shechem
And measure out the Valley of Succoth.
8 Gilead *is* Mine; Manasseh *is* Mine;
Ephraim also *is* the helmet for My head;
Judah *is* My lawgiver.
9 Moab *is* My washpot;
Over Edom I will cast My shoe;
Over Philistia I will triumph."

10 Who will bring me *into* the strong city?
Who will lead me to Edom?
11 *Is it* not *You,* O God, *who* cast us off?
And *You,* O God, *who* did not go out with our armies?
12 Give us help from trouble,
For the help of man is useless.
13 Through God we will do valiantly,
For *it is* He *who* shall tread down our enemies.[a]

PSALM 109

Plea for Judgment of False Accusers

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

Do not keep silent,
O God of my praise!
2 For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful
Have opened against me;
They have spoken against me with a lying tongue.
3 They have also surrounded me with words of hatred,
And fought against me without a cause.
4 In return for my love they are my accusers,
But I *give myself to* prayer.
5 Thus they have rewarded me evil for good,
And hatred for my love.

6 Set a wicked man over him,
And let an accuser[a] stand at his right hand.
7 When he is judged, let him be found guilty,
And let his prayer become sin.
8 Let his days be few,
And let another take his office.
9 Let his children be fatherless,
And his wife a widow.
10 Let his children continually be vagabonds, and beg;
Let them seek *their bread*[a] also from their desolate places.
11 Let the creditor seize all that he has,
And let strangers plunder his labor.

108:13 [a]Compare verses 6–13 with 60:5–12 **109:6** [a]Hebrew *satan*
109:10 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Septuagint and Vulgate read *be cast out.*

burden. Unzip the top and examine all the pockets. Turn it upside down and shake it hard. The bag of hopelessness is painfully empty.

Not a very pretty picture, is it? Let's see if we can brighten it up. We've imagined the emotions of being lost; you think we can do the same with being rescued? What would it take to restore your hope? What would you need to reenergize your journey?

Though the answers are abundant, three come quickly to mind.

The first would be a person. Not just any person. You don't need someone equally confused. You need someone who knows the way out.

And from him you need some vision. You need someone to lift your spirits. You need someone to look you in the face and say, "This isn't the end. Don't give up. There is a better place than this. And I'll lead you there."

And, perhaps most important, you need direction. If you have only a person but no renewed vision, all you have is company. If he has a vision but no direction, you have a dreamer for company. But if you have a person with direction—who can take you from this place to the right place—ah, then you have one who can restore your hope.

Or, to use David's words, "He restores my soul."

Our Shepherd majors in restoring hope to the soul. Whether you are a lamb lost on a craggy ledge or a city slicker alone in a deep jungle, everything changes when your rescuer appears.

Your loneliness diminishes, because you have fellowship.

Your despair decreases, because you have vision.

Your confusion begins to lift, because you have direction. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are any of the trials in this psalm yours? Are you without money for food? Are you discouraged? Miserable? In jail? In trouble? Find your answer in the psalm, too. Let God save you, give you peace, and work a miracle in your life.

EXPLORATION

God's Faithfulness—Deuteronomy 7:9; 1 Kings 8:56; Lamentations 3:22, 23.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 108:1—109:31

SITUATION

Psalm 57:7–11 and Psalm 60:5–12 were combined to form Psalm 108. David celebrated his victory. He knew that without God, he would have been defeated.

OBSERVATION

With God on our side, we can do more than we think possible. God provides victory. We ought to praise God in both victory and defeat.

INSPIRATION

The Greek word for worry, *merimnao*, stems from the verb *merizo* (divide) and *nous* (mind). Worry cleavers the mind, splitting thoughts between today and tomorrow. Today stands no chance against it. Fretting over tomorrow's problems today siphons the strength you need for now, leaving you anemic and weak.

Worry gives small problems big shadows. . . .

12 Let there be none to extend mercy to him,
Nor let there be any to favor his fatherless children.
13 Let his posterity be cut off,
And in the generation following let their name be blotted out.

14 Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord,
And let not the sin of his mother be blotted out.
15 Let them be continually before the Lord,
That He may cut off the memory of them from the earth;
16 Because he did not remember to show mercy,
But persecuted the poor and needy man,
That he might even slay the broken in heart.
17 As he loved cursing, so let it come to him;
As he did not delight in blessing, so let it be far from him.
18 As he clothed himself with cursing as with his garment,
So let it enter his body like water,
And like oil into his bones.
19 Let it be to him like the garment which covers him,
And for a belt with which he girds himself continually.
20 *Let* this *be* the Lord's reward to my accusers,
And to those who speak evil against my person.

21 But You, O God the Lord,
Deal with me for Your name's sake;
Because Your mercy *is* good, deliver me.
22 For I *am* poor and needy,
And my heart is wounded within me.
23 I am gone like a shadow when it lengthens;
I am shaken off like a locust.
24 My knees are weak through fasting,
And my flesh is feeble from lack of fatness.
25 I also have become a reproach to them;
When they look at me, they shake their heads.

26 Help me, O Lord my God!
Oh, save me according to Your mercy,
27 That they may know that this *is* Your hand—
That You, Lord, have done it!
28 Let them curse, but You bless;
When they arise, let them be ashamed,
But let Your servant rejoice.
29 Let my accusers be clothed with shame,
And let them cover themselves with their own disgrace as with a mantle.

30 I will greatly praise the Lord with my mouth;
Yes, I will praise Him among the multitude.
31 For He shall stand at the right hand of the poor,
To save *him* from those who condemn him.

PSALM 110

Announcement of the Messiah's Reign

A Psalm of David.

The Lord said to my Lord,
"Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool."
2 The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion.
Rule in the midst of Your enemies!

3 Your people *shall be* volunteers
In the day of Your power;
In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning,
You have the dew of Your youth.
4 The Lord has sworn
And will not relent,
"You *are* a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek."

5 The Lord *is* at Your right hand;
He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath.
6 He shall judge among the nations,
He shall fill *the places* with dead bodies,
He shall execute the heads of many countries.
7 He shall drink of the brook by the wayside;
Therefore He shall lift up the head.

PSALM 111

Praise to God for His Faithfulness and Justice

Praise the Lord!

I will praise the Lord with *my* whole heart,
In the assembly of the upright and *in* the congregation.

2 The works of the Lord *are* great,
Studied by all who have pleasure in them.
3 His work *is* honorable and glorious,
And His righteousness endures forever.
4 He has made His wonderful works to be remembered;
The Lord *is* gracious and full of compassion.
5 He has given food to those who fear Him;
He will ever be mindful of His covenant.
6 He has declared to His people the power of His works,
In giving them the heritage of the nations.

7 The works of His hands *are* verity and justice;
All His precepts *are* sure.
8 They stand fast forever and ever,
And are done in truth and uprightness.
9 He has sent redemption to His people;

Worry scuttles our lives, hurts us, and most sadly, dishonors God. . . .

Worry wages war on your faith. You know that. You hate to worry. But what can you do to stop it? These three worry stoppers deserve your consideration:

Pray more. No one can pray and worry at the same time. When we worry, we aren't praying. When we pray, we aren't worrying. "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:3).

When you pray, you "stay" your mind on Christ, resulting in peace. Bow your knees and banish anxiety.

Want less. Most anxiety stems, not from what we need, but from what we want. . . . "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). If God is enough for you, then you'll always have enough, because you'll always have God.

Live for today. Heaven still has her manna house. The bushes still hide quail. And you still have today. Don't sacrifice it on the altar of anxiety. . . .

"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16, emphasis mine). (From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

When were you worried last? When you received relief, did you praise God? Next time God gives you a victory, give Him praise.

EXPLORATION

Victory—1 Samuel 4:5–8; 1 Chronicles 18:13; Psalm 98:1–3; Ephesians 4:8; Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 11:32–35; 1 John 3:8, 9; 4:4; 5:4.

He has commanded His covenant forever:
Holy and awesome *is* His name.

10 The fear of the Lord *is* the beginning of wisdom;
A good understanding have all those who do *His commandments.*
His praise endures forever.

PSALM 112

The Blessed State of the Righteous

Praise the Lord!

Blessed *is* the man *who* fears the Lord,
Who delights greatly in His commandments.

2 His descendants will be mighty on earth;
The generation of the upright will be blessed.
3 Wealth and riches *will be* in his house,
And his righteousness endures forever.
4 Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness;
He is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous.
5 A good man deals graciously and lends;
He will guide his affairs with discretion.
6 Surely he will never be shaken;
The righteous will be in everlasting remembrance.
7 He will not be afraid of evil tidings;
His heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord.
8 His heart *is* established;
He will not be afraid,
Until he sees *his desire* upon his enemies.

9 He has dispersed abroad,
He has given to the poor;
His righteousness endures forever;
His horn will be exalted with honor.
10 The wicked will see *it* and be grieved;
He will gnash his teeth and melt away;
The desire of the wicked shall perish.

PSALM 113

The Majesty and Condescension of God

Praise the Lord!

Praise, O servants of the Lord,
Praise the name of the Lord!
2 Blessed be the name of the Lord
From this time forth and forevermore!
3 From the rising of the sun to its going down
The Lord's name *is* to be praised.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 110:1—112:10

SITUATION
Although the Jews lived near nations that worshiped idols, God reminded Israel to worship Him only. God promised to send the Messiah, indicating that full deliverance was yet to come. Psalms 111 and 112 begin each phrase with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

OBSERVATION
Praise the true God! Reading Scripture helps us know God better. When we know Him better, we are equipped to worship Him more earnestly.

INSPIRATION
Several hundred feet beneath my chair is a lake, an underground cavern of crystalline water known as the Edwards Aquifer. We South Texans know much about this aquifer. We know its length (175 miles).We know its layout (west to east except under San Antonio, where it runs north to south). We know the water is pure. Fresh. It irrigates farms and waters lawns and fills pools and quenches thirst. We know much about the aquifer.

But for all the facts we do know, there is an essential one we don't. We don't know its size. The depth of the cavern? A mystery. Number of gallons? Unmeasured. No one knows the amount of water the aquifer contains.

Watch the nightly weather report, and you'd think otherwise. Meteorologists give regular updates on the aquifer level. You get the impression that the amount of water is

4 The Lord *is* high above all nations,
His glory above the heavens.
5 Who *is* like the Lord our God,
Who dwells on high,
6 Who humbles Himself to behold
The things that are in the heavens and in the earth?

7 He raises the poor out of the dust,
And lifts the needy out of the ash heap,
8 That He may seat *him* with princes—
With the princes of His people.
9 He grants the barren woman a home,
Like a joyful mother of children.

Praise the Lord!

PSALM 114

The Power of God in His Deliverance of Israel

When Israel went out of Egypt,
The house of Jacob from a people of strange language,
2 Judah became His sanctuary,
And Israel His dominion.

3 The sea saw *it* and fled;
Jordan turned back.
4 The mountains skipped like rams,
The little hills like lambs.
5 What ails you, O sea, that you fled?
O Jordan, *that* you turned back?
6 O mountains, *that* you skipped like rams?
O little hills, like lambs?

7 Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord,
At the presence of the God of Jacob,
8 Who turned the rock *into* a pool of water,
The flint into a fountain of waters.

PSALM 115

The Futility of Idols and the Trustworthiness of God

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us,
But to Your name give glory,
Because of Your mercy,
Because of Your truth.
2 Why should the Gentiles say,
"So where *is* their God?"

3 But our God *is* in heaven;
He does whatever He pleases.
4 Their idols *are* silver and gold,
The work of men's hands.
5 They have mouths, but they do not speak;

calculated. "The truth is," a friend told me, "no one knows how much water is down there."

Could this be? I decided to find out. I called a water conservationist. "That's right," he affirmed. "We estimate. We try to measure. But the exact quantity? No one knows." Remarkable. We use it, depend upon it, would perish without it… but measure it? We can't.

Bring to mind another unmeasured pool? It might. Not a pool of water but a pool of love. God's love. Aquifer fresh. Pure as April snow. One swallow slackens the thirsty throat and softens the crusty heart. Immerse a life in God's love, and watch it emerge cleansed and changed. We know the impact of God's love.

But the volume? No person has ever measured it. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Who is God? Answer the question by making a list of God's attributes from these psalms. Today think about His love. As the day goes by, discover how this reality about God affects you.

EXPLORATION

Knowing God—Hosea 6:3; Matthew 22:29; John 4:24; 7:16, 17; 8:31, 32; Romans 1:21–25; Ephesians 4:14, 15, 18; 2 Peter 3:18.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 113:1—115:18

SITUATION

The next six psalms were used during the Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles, and other traditional Jewish festivals.

OBSERVATION
Although the Israelites set aside one day a week to revere God, they used many scriptures to encourage them to have a thankful, loving attitude toward God.

INSPIRATION
Make no mistake. God has no ego problem. *He does not reveal his glory for his good. We need to witness it for ours.* We need a strong hand to pull us into a safe boat. And, once aboard, what becomes our priority?

Simple. Promote God. We declare His preeminence, "Hey! Strong boat over here! Able pilot! He can pull you out!"

Passengers promote the pilot. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, because of Your truth" (Psalm 115:1). If we boast at all, we "glory in the Lord" (2 Corinthians 10:17).

The breath you took as you read that last sentence was given to you for one reason, that you might for another moment "mirror the glory of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18). God awoke you and me this morning for one purpose: "Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples" (1 Chronicles 16:24).

"For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever" (Romans 11:36). "There is only one God, the Father, who created everything, and *we exist for him*" (1 Corinthians 8:6 NLT, emphasis mine).

Why does the earth spin? For Him.

Why do you have talents and abilities? For Him.

Why do you have money or poverty? For Him.

Strength or struggles? For Him.

Everything and everyone exists to reveal His glory.

Eyes they have, but they do not see;
6 They have ears, but they do not hear;
Noses they have, but they do not smell;
7 They have hands, but they do not handle;
Feet they have, but they do not walk;
Nor do they mutter through their throat.
8 Those who make them are like them;
So is everyone who trusts in them.

9 O Israel, trust in the Lord;
He *is* their help and their shield.
10 O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord;
He *is* their help and their shield.
11 You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord;
He *is* their help and their shield.

12 The Lord has been mindful of *us;*
He will bless us;
He will bless the house of Israel;
He will bless the house of Aaron.
13 He will bless those who fear the Lord,
Both small and great.

14 May the Lord give you increase more and more,
You and your children.
15 *May* you *be* blessed by the Lord,
Who made heaven and earth.

16 The heaven, *even* the heavens, *are* the Lord's;
But the earth He has given to the children of men.
17 The dead do not praise the Lord,
Nor any who go down into silence.
18 But we will bless the Lord
From this time forth and forevermore.

Praise the Lord!

PSALM 116

Thanksgiving for Deliverance from Death

I love the Lord, because He has heard
My voice *and* my supplications.
2 Because He has inclined His ear to me,
Therefore I will call *upon Him* as long as I live.

3 The pains of death surrounded me,
And the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me;
I found trouble and sorrow.
4 Then I called upon the name of the Lord:
"O Lord, I implore You, deliver my soul!"

5 Gracious *is* the Lord, and righteous;
Yes, our God *is* merciful.
6 The Lord preserves the simple;
I was brought low, and He saved me.
7 Return to your rest, O my soul,
For the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.

8 For You have delivered my soul from death,
My eyes from tears,
And my feet from falling.
9 I will walk before the Lord
In the land of the living.
10 I believed, therefore I spoke,
"I am greatly afflicted."
11 I said in my haste,
"All men *are* liars."

12 What shall I render to the Lord
For all His benefits toward me?
13 I will take up the cup of salvation,
And call upon the name of the Lord.
14 I will pay my vows to the Lord
Now in the presence of all His people.

15 Precious in the sight of the Lord
Is the death of His saints.

16 O Lord, truly I *am* Your servant;
I *am* Your servant, the son of Your maidservant;
You have loosed my bonds.
17 I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving,
And will call upon the name of the Lord.

18 I will pay my vows to the Lord
Now in the presence of all His people,
19 In the courts of the Lord's house,
In the midst of you, O Jerusalem.

Praise the Lord!

PSALM 117

Let All Peoples Praise the Lord

Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles!
Laud Him, all you peoples!
2 For His merciful kindness is great toward us,
And the truth of the Lord *endures* forever.

Praise the Lord!

Including you. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Learn to continually praise God. Praise God while you do dishes and while you drive your car. Fill everyday moments with praise.

EXPLORATION
Unceasing Praise—Psalm 71:14; Romans 12:1; Colossians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18; Hebrews 13:15; Revelation 4:8.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 116:1—117:2

SITUATION
After a close call with death, this unknown psalmist thanked God for answering his prayers and praised God for his deliverance.

OBSERVATION
Praise should be the natural result of answered prayer.

INSPIRATION
Fear corrodes our confidence in God's goodness. We begin to wonder if love lives in heaven. If God can sleep in our storms, if His eyes stay shut when our eyes grow wide, if He permits storms after we get on His boat, does He care? Fear unleashes a swarm of doubts, anger-stirring doubts.

And it turns us into control freaks. "Do something about the storm!" is the implicit demand of the question. "Fix it or . . . or . . . or else!" Fear, at its center, is a perceived loss of control. When life spins wildly, we grab for a component of

life we can manage: our diet, the tidiness of a house, the armrest of a plane, or, in many cases, people. The more insecure we feel, the meaner we become. We growl and bare our fangs. Why? Because we are bad? In part. But also because we feel cornered. . . .

Fear releases the tyrant within.

It also deadens our recall. The disciples had reason to trust Jesus. By now they'd seen Him "healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people" (Matthew 4:23). They had witnessed Him heal a leper with a touch and a servant with a command (Matthew 8:3, 13). Peter saw his sick mother-in-law recover (Matthew 8:14, 15), and they all saw demons scatter like bats out of a cave. "He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick" (Matthew 8:16).

Shouldn't someone mention Jesus' track record or review His résumé? Do they remember the accomplishments of Christ? They may not. Fear creates a form of spiritual amnesia. It dulls our miracle memory. It makes us forget what Jesus has done and how good God is. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Have you ever been in a desperate situation? Did you ever thank God for saving you? It is never too late. Thank Him. If you are at a loss for words, read this psalm as your prayer to God.

EXPLORATION

Thankfulness—2 Chronicles 7:3; Psalm 8:2; 30:11, 12; 107:31, 32; Luke 17:15, 16; 1 Corinthians 15:56, 57; 2 Corinthians 1:10, 11; Ephesians 5:19, 20.

PSALM 118

Praise to God for His Everlasting Mercy

Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for *He is* good!
For His mercy *endures* forever.

2 Let Israel now say,
"His mercy *endures* forever."
3 Let the house of Aaron now say,
"His mercy *endures* forever."
4 Let those who fear the Lord now say,
"His mercy *endures* forever."

5 I called on the Lord in distress;
The Lord answered me *and set me* in a broad place.
6 The Lord *is* on my side;
I will not fear.
What can man do to me?
7 The Lord is for me among those who help me;
Therefore I shall see *my desire* on those who hate me.
8 *It is* better to trust in the Lord
Than to put confidence in man.
9 *It is* better to trust in the Lord
Than to put confidence in princes.

10 All nations surrounded me,
But in the name of the Lord I will destroy them.
11 They surrounded me,
Yes, they surrounded me;
But in the name of the Lord I will destroy them.
12 They surrounded me like bees;
They were quenched like a fire of thorns;
For in the name of the Lord I will destroy them.
13 You pushed me violently, that I might fall,
But the Lord helped me.
14 The Lord *is* my strength and song,
And He has become my salvation.[a]

15 The voice of rejoicing and salvation
Is in the tents of the righteous;
The right hand of the Lord does valiantly.
16 The right hand of the Lord is exalted;
The right hand of the Lord does valiantly.
17 I shall not die, but live,
And declare the works of the Lord.
18 The Lord has chastened me severely,
But He has not given me over to death.

19 Open to me the gates of righteousness;
I will go through them,

118:14 [a]Compare Exodus 15:2

And I will praise the Lord.
20 This is the gate of the Lord,
Through which the righteous shall enter.

21 I will praise You,
For You have answered me,
And have become my salvation.

22 The stone *which* the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone.
23 This was the Lord's doing;
It *is* marvelous in our eyes.
24 This *is* the day the Lord has made;
We will rejoice and be glad in it.

25 Save now, I pray, O Lord;
O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity.
26 Blessed *is* he who comes in the name of the Lord!
We have blessed you from the house of the Lord.
27 God *is* the Lord,
And He has given us light;
Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar.
28 You *are* my God, and I will praise You;
You are my God, I will exalt You.

29 Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for *He is* good!
For His mercy *endures* forever.

PSALM 119

Meditations on the Excellencies of the Word of God

א ALEPH

Blessed *are* the undefiled in the way,
Who walk in the law of the Lord!
2 Blessed *are* those who keep His testimonies,
Who seek Him with the whole heart!
3 They also do no iniquity;
They walk in His ways.
4 You have commanded *us*
To keep Your precepts diligently.
5 Oh, that my ways were directed
To keep Your statutes!
6 Then I would not be ashamed,
When I look into all Your commandments.
7 I will praise You with uprightness of heart,
When I learn Your righteous judgments.
8 I will keep Your statutes;
Oh, do not forsake me utterly!

ב BETH

9 How can a young man cleanse his way?
By taking heed according to Your word.

Life LESSONS

Psalm 118:1–29

SITUATION
The psalmist understood that in the midst of calamity, God was with him. God promised to guard and cherish His people forever.

OBSERVATION
We can live in assurance and calm. Despite troubles around us, if we love and trust God, He will be with us. We have nothing to fear if we put our trust in our Guardian.

INSPIRATION
Sand soft to the feet, breeze cool on the skin. An apron of Pacific turquoise precedes one of deeper blue. Waves lap and slap. Birds whistle and coo. Islands loom on the horizon. Palm trees sway against the sky.

I found myself relishing the morning. . . . *What easier way to give a day a chance*, I mused, *than starting it right here?* I leaned back into a beach chair, interlaced my fingers behind my head, and closed my eyes.

That's when a bird chose my chest for target practice. No warning. No sirens. No "Bombs away!" Just *plop*.

I looked up just in time to see a seagull giving high feathers to his bird buddies on the branch. Yuck. I poured water on my shirt three times. I moved to a chair away from the trees. I did all I could to regain the magic of the morning, but I couldn't get my mind off the bird flyby.

It should have been easy. Waves still rolled. Clouds still floated. The ocean lost no blue; the sand lost no white. Islands still beckoned, and wind still whispered. But I

couldn't quit thinking about the seagull grenade.

Stupid bird.

Birds have a way of messing things up, don't they? Count on it: into every day a bird will plop.

Traffic will snarl.

Airports will close.

Friends will forget.

Spouses will complain.

And lines. Oh, the lines. Deadlines, long lines, receding hairlines, luggage-losing airlines, nauseating pickup lines, wrinkle lines, unemployment lines, and those ever-elusive bottom lines.

And what of those days of double shadows? Those days when hope is Hindenberged by crisis? You never leave the hospital bed or wheelchair. You wake up and bed down in the same prison cell or war zone. The cemetery dirt is still fresh, the pink slip still folded in your pocket, the other side of the bed still empty…who has a good day on these days?

Most don't . . . but couldn't we try? Such days warrant an opportunity. A shot. A tryout. An audition. A swing at the plate. Doesn't every day deserve a chance to be a good day?

After all, "this is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24). (From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What will you depend on today for your needs? Although you may be tempted to trust earthly means more than God, have more confidence in God than anything else.

EXPLORATION

Assurance—Psalm 46:1–3; Isaiah 43:1–7; Jeremiah 1:6–8; 1 Corinthians 2:4.

10 With my whole heart I have sought You;
Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!
11 Your word I have hidden in my heart,
That I might not sin against You.
12 Blessed *are* You, O Lord!
Teach me Your statutes.
13 With my lips I have declared
All the judgments of Your mouth.
14 I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies,
As *much as* in all riches.
15 I will meditate on Your precepts,
And contemplate Your ways.
16 I will delight myself in Your statutes;
I will not forget Your word.

ג GIMEL

17 Deal bountifully with Your servant,
That I may live and keep Your word.
18 Open my eyes, that I may see
Wondrous things from Your law.
19 I *am* a stranger in the earth;
Do not hide Your commandments from me.
20 My soul breaks with longing
For Your judgments at all times.
21 You rebuke the proud—the cursed,
Who stray from Your commandments.
22 Remove from me reproach and contempt,
For I have kept Your testimonies.
23 Princes also sit *and* speak against me,
But Your servant meditates on Your statutes.
24 Your testimonies also *are* my delight
And my counselors.

ד DALETH

25 My soul clings to the dust;
Revive me according to Your word.
26 I have declared my ways, and You answered me;
Teach me Your statutes.
27 Make me understand the way of Your precepts;
So shall I meditate on Your wonderful works.
28 My soul melts from heaviness;
Strengthen me according to Your word.
29 Remove from me the way of lying,
And grant me Your law graciously.
30 I have chosen the way of truth;
Your judgments I have laid *before me.*
31 I cling to Your testimonies;
O Lord, do not put me to shame!
32 I will run the course of Your commandments,
For You shall enlarge my heart.

ה HE

33 Teach me, O Lord, the way of Your statutes,
And I shall keep it *to* the end.
34 Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law;
Indeed, I shall observe it with *my* whole heart.
35 Make me walk in the path of Your commandments,
For I delight in it.
36 Incline my heart to Your testimonies,
And not to covetousness.
37 Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things,
And revive me in Your way.[a]
38 Establish Your word to Your servant,
Who *is devoted* to fearing You.
39 Turn away my reproach which I dread,
For Your judgments *are* good.
40 Behold, I long for Your precepts;
Revive me in Your righteousness.

ו WAW

41 Let Your mercies come also to me, O Lord—
Your salvation according to Your word.
42 So shall I have an answer for him who reproaches me,
For I trust in Your word.
43 And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth,
For I have hoped in Your ordinances.
44 So shall I keep Your law continually,
Forever and ever.
45 And I will walk at liberty,
For I seek Your precepts.
46 I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings,
And will not be ashamed.
47 And I will delight myself in Your commandments,
Which I love.
48 My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments,
Which I love,
And I will meditate on Your statutes.

ז ZAYIN

49 Remember the word to Your servant,
Upon which You have caused me to hope.
50 This *is* my comfort in my affliction,
For Your word has given me life.
51 The proud have me in great derision,
Yet I do not turn aside from Your law.
52 I remembered Your judgments of old, O Lord,
And have comforted myself.
53 Indignation has taken hold of me
Because of the wicked, who forsake Your law.
54 Your statutes have been my songs
In the house of my pilgrimage.

119:37 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Septuagint, and Vulgate; Targum reads *Your words*.

Life Lessons

Psalm 119:1–176

SITUATION
This testimony exalted the Word of God—the complete and perfect standard of truth, values, reality, and behavior.

OBSERVATION
God's Word is wholly sufficient for godly living. By grasping its powerful message, God's children can be pure.

INSPIRATION
God hasn't changed. He still promises to guide us:

The Lord says, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye" (Psalm 32:8).

"In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:6).

"Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left'" (Isaiah 30:21).

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27).

The God who guided David guides you. You simply need to consult your Maker. I wish I'd sought counsel before I made a recent decision. I awoke early one morning for a meeting. When searching for some breakfast, I spotted a plastic bag of cookies in the kitchen. Denalyn and our daughter Sara had just attended a school bake sale, so I thought, *What great luck! Breakfast cookies. Denalyn must have set them out for me.*

I ate one and found it very chewy, almost gummy.

55 I remember Your name in the night, O Lord,
And I keep Your law.
56 This has become mine,
Because I kept Your precepts.

ח HETH

57 *You are* my portion, O Lord;
I have said that I would keep Your words.
58 I entreated Your favor with *my* whole heart;
Be merciful to me according to Your word.
59 I thought about my ways,
And turned my feet to Your testimonies.
60 I made haste, and did not delay
To keep Your commandments.
61 The cords of the wicked have bound me,
But I have not forgotten Your law.
62 At midnight I will rise to give thanks to You,
Because of Your righteous judgments.
63 I *am* a companion of all who fear You,
And of those who keep Your precepts.
64 The earth, O Lord, is full of Your mercy;
Teach me Your statutes.

ט TETH

65 You have dealt well with Your servant,
O Lord, according to Your word.
66 Teach me good judgment and knowledge,
For I believe Your commandments.
67 Before I was afflicted I went astray,
But now I keep Your word.
68 You *are* good, and do good;
Teach me Your statutes.
69 The proud have forged a lie against me,
But I will keep Your precepts with *my* whole heart.
70 Their heart is as fat as grease,
But I delight in Your law.
71 *It is* good for me that I have been afflicted,
That I may learn Your statutes.
72 The law of Your mouth *is* better to me
Than thousands of *coins of* gold and silver.

י YOD

73 Your hands have made me and fashioned me;
Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments.
74 Those who fear You will be glad when they see me,
Because I have hoped in Your word.
75 I know, O Lord, that Your judgments *are* right,
And *that* in faithfulness You have afflicted me.
76 Let, I pray, Your merciful kindness be for my comfort,
According to Your word to Your servant.
77 Let Your tender mercies come to me, that I may live;
For Your law *is* my delight.

Interesting texture, I thought. *Reminds me of pita bread.* I ate a second. The taste was a bit subtle for my preference, but when mixed with coffee, it made for an interesting option. I grabbed a third for the road. I would have grabbed the fourth, but only one remained, so I left it for Denalyn.

Later in the day she phoned. "Looks like someone has been in the bag."

"It was me," I admitted. "I've had better breakfast cookies, but those weren't bad."

"Those weren't breakfast cookies, Max."

"They weren't?"

"No."

"What were they?"

"Homemade dog biscuits."

"Oh . . ." That explained a lot. I should've consulted the maker. We need to consult ours.

You have a Bible? Read it. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God's Word teaches us sound doctrine. When was the last time you memorized a verse? Memorize Psalm 119:105. Consider memorizing one verse a week.

EXPLORATION

God's Word—2 Samuel 22:31; Psalm 12:6; Proverbs 30:5; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; Hebrews 4:12.

78 Let the proud be ashamed,
For they treated me wrongfully with falsehood;
But I will meditate on Your precepts.
79 Let those who fear You turn to me,
Those who know Your testimonies.
80 Let my heart be blameless regarding Your statutes,
That I may not be ashamed.

כ KAPH

81 My soul faints for Your salvation,
But I hope in Your word.
82 My eyes fail *from searching* Your word,
Saying, "When will You comfort me?"
83 For I have become like a wineskin in smoke,
Yet I do not forget Your statutes.
84 How many *are* the days of Your servant?
When will You execute judgment on those who persecute me?
85 The proud have dug pits for me,
Which *is* not according to Your law.
86 All Your commandments *are* faithful;
They persecute me wrongfully;
Help me!
87 They almost made an end of me on earth,
But I did not forsake Your precepts.
88 Revive me according to Your lovingkindness,
So that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth.

ל LAMED

89 Forever, O Lord,
Your word is settled in heaven.
90 Your faithfulness *endures* to all generations;
You established the earth, and it abides.
91 They continue this day according to Your ordinances,
For all *are* Your servants.
92 Unless Your law *had been* my delight,
I would then have perished in my affliction.
93 I will never forget Your precepts,
For by them You have given me life.
94 I *am* Yours, save me;
For I have sought Your precepts.
95 The wicked wait for me to destroy me,
But I will consider Your testimonies.
96 I have seen the consummation of all perfection,
But Your commandment *is* exceedingly broad.

מ MEM

97 Oh, how I love Your law!
It *is* my meditation all the day.
98 You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies;
For they *are* ever with me.
99 I have more understanding than all my teachers,
For Your testimonies *are* my meditation.
100 I understand more than the ancients,
Because I keep Your precepts.
101 I have restrained my feet from every evil way,
That I may keep Your word.
102 I have not departed from Your judgments,
For You Yourself have taught me.
103 How sweet are Your words to my taste,
Sweeter than honey to my mouth!
104 Through Your precepts I get understanding;
Therefore I hate every false way.

נ NUN

105 Your word *is* a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path.
106 I have sworn and confirmed
That I will keep Your righteous judgments.
107 I am afflicted very much;
Revive me, O Lord, according to Your word.
108 Accept, I pray, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O Lord,
And teach me Your judgments.
109 My life *is* continually in my hand,
Yet I do not forget Your law.
110 The wicked have laid a snare for me,
Yet I have not strayed from Your precepts.
111 Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever,
For they *are* the rejoicing of my heart.
112 I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes
Forever, to the very end.

ס SAMEK

113 I hate the double-minded,
But I love Your law.
114 You *are* my hiding place and my shield;

I hope in Your word.
115 Depart from me, you evildoers,
For I will keep the commandments of my God!
116 Uphold me according to Your word, that I may live;
And do not let me be ashamed of my hope.
117 Hold me up, and I shall be safe,
And I shall observe Your statutes continually.
118 You reject all those who stray from Your statutes,
For their deceit *is* falsehood.
119 You put away all the wicked of the earth *like* dross;
Therefore I love Your testimonies.
120 My flesh trembles for fear of You,
And I am afraid of Your judgments.

ע AYIN

121 I have done justice and righteousness;
Do not leave me to my oppressors.
122 Be surety for Your servant for good;
Do not let the proud oppress me.
123 My eyes fail *from seeking* Your salvation
And Your righteous word.
124 Deal with Your servant according to Your mercy,
And teach me Your statutes.
125 I *am* Your servant;
Give me understanding,
That I may know Your testimonies.
126 *It is* time for *You* to act, O Lord,
For they have regarded Your law as void.
127 Therefore I love Your commandments
More than gold, yes, than fine gold!
128 Therefore all *Your* precepts *concerning* all *things*
I consider *to be* right;
I hate every false way.

פ PE

129 Your testimonies are wonderful;
Therefore my soul keeps them.
130 The entrance of Your words gives light;
It gives understanding to the simple.
131 I opened my mouth and panted,
For I longed for Your commandments.
132 Look upon me and be merciful to me,
As Your custom *is* toward those who love Your name.
133 Direct my steps by Your word,
And let no iniquity have dominion over me.
134 Redeem me from the oppression of man,
That I may keep Your precepts.
135 Make Your face shine upon Your servant,
And teach me Your statutes.
136 Rivers of water run down from my eyes,
Because *men* do not keep Your law.

צ TSADDE

137 Righteous *are* You, O Lord,
And upright *are* Your judgments.
138 Your testimonies, *which* You have commanded,
Are righteous and very faithful.
139 My zeal has consumed me,
Because my enemies have forgotten Your words.
140 Your word *is* very pure;
Therefore Your servant loves it.
141 I *am* small and despised,
Yet I do not forget Your precepts.
142 Your righteousness *is* an everlasting righteousness,
And Your law *is* truth.
143 Trouble and anguish have overtaken me,
Yet Your commandments *are* my delights.
144 The righteousness of Your testimonies *is* everlasting;
Give me understanding, and I shall live.

ק QOPH

145 I cry out with *my* whole heart;
Hear me, O Lord!
I will keep Your statutes.
146 I cry out to You;
Save me, and I will keep Your testimonies.
147 I rise before the dawning of the morning,
And cry for help;
I hope in Your word.
148 My eyes are awake through the *night* watches,
That I may meditate on Your word.
149 Hear my voice according to Your lovingkindness;
O Lord, revive me according to Your justice.
150 They draw near who follow after wickedness;
They are far from Your law.
151 You *are* near, O Lord,

And all Your commandments *are* truth.
152 Concerning Your testimonies,
I have known of old that You have
founded them forever.

ר RESH

153 Consider my affliction and deliver me,
For I do not forget Your law.
154 Plead my cause and redeem me;
Revive me according to Your word.
155 Salvation *is* far from the wicked,
For they do not seek Your statutes.
156 Great *are* Your tender mercies, O Lord;
Revive me according to Your judgments.
157 Many *are* my persecutors and my
enemies,
Yet I do not turn from Your testimonies.
158 I see the treacherous, and am disgusted,
Because they do not keep Your word.
159 Consider how I love Your precepts;
Revive me, O Lord, according to Your
lovingkindness.
160 The entirety of Your word *is* truth,
And every one of Your righteous
judgments *endures* forever.

ש SHIN

161 Princes persecute me without a cause,
But my heart stands in awe of Your word.
162 I rejoice at Your word
As one who finds great treasure.
163 I hate and abhor lying,
But I love Your law.
164 Seven times a day I praise You,
Because of Your righteous judgments.
165 Great peace have those who love Your
law,
And nothing causes them to stumble.
166 Lord, I hope for Your salvation,
And I do Your commandments.
167 My soul keeps Your testimonies,
And I love them exceedingly.
168 I keep Your precepts and Your
testimonies,
For all my ways *are* before You.

ת TAU

169 Let my cry come before You, O Lord;
Give me understanding according to Your
word.
170 Let my supplication come before You;
Deliver me according to Your word.
171 My lips shall utter praise,
For You teach me Your statutes.
172 My tongue shall speak of Your word,
For all Your commandments *are*
righteousness.
173 Let Your hand become my help,
For I have chosen Your precepts.
174 I long for Your salvation, O Lord,
And Your law *is* my delight.
175 Let my soul live, and it shall praise You;
And let Your judgments help me.
176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep;
Seek Your servant,
For I do not forget Your commandments.

PSALM 120

Plea for Relief from Bitter Foes

A Song of Ascents.

In my distress I cried to the Lord,
And He heard me.
2 Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips
And from a deceitful tongue.

3 What shall be given to you,
Or what shall be done to you,
You false tongue?
4 Sharp arrows of the warrior,
With coals of the broom tree!

5 Woe is me, that I dwell in Meshech,
That I dwell among the tents of Kedar!
6 My soul has dwelt too long
With one who hates peace.
7 I *am for* peace;
But when I speak, they *are* for war.

PSALM 121

God the Help of Those Who Seek Him

A Song of Ascents.

I will lift up my eyes to the hills—
From whence comes my help?
2 My help *comes* from the Lord,
Who made heaven and earth.

3 He will not allow your foot to be moved;
He who keeps you will not slumber.
4 Behold, He who keeps Israel
Shall neither slumber nor sleep.

5 The Lord *is* your keeper;
The Lord *is* your shade at your right hand.
6 The sun shall not strike you by day,
Nor the moon by night.

7 The Lord shall preserve you from all evil;
He shall preserve your soul.
8 The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in
From this time forth, and even forevermore.

PSALM 122

The Joy of Going to the House of the Lord

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

I was glad when they said to me,
"Let us go into the house of the Lord."
2 Our feet have been standing
Within your gates, O Jerusalem!

3 Jerusalem is built
As a city that is compact together,
4 Where the tribes go up,
The tribes of the Lord,
To the Testimony of Israel,
To give thanks to the name of the Lord.
5 For thrones are set there for judgment,
The thrones of the house of David.

6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
"May they prosper who love you.
7 Peace be within your walls,
Prosperity within your palaces."
8 For the sake of my brethren and companions,
I will now say, "Peace *be* within you."
9 Because of the house of the Lord our God
I will seek your good.

PSALM 123

Prayer for Relief from Contempt

A Song of Ascents.

Unto You I lift up my eyes,
O You who dwell in the heavens.
2 Behold, as the eyes of servants *look* to the hand of their masters,
As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress,
So our eyes *look* to the Lord our God,
Until He has mercy on us.

3 Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us!
For we are exceedingly filled with contempt.
4 Our soul is exceedingly filled

Life LESSONS

Psalms 120:1—123:4

SITUATION
Psalms 120—135 were sung during annual feasts. Pilgrims would also recite these psalms as they journeyed to the temple in Jerusalem.

OBSERVATION
The writer (some believe Hezekiah) asked God to rescue him from false accusers and those who ridiculed him.

INSPIRATION
Theresa Briones is a tender, loving mother. She also has a stout left hook that she used to punch a lady in a coin laundry. Why'd she do it?

Some kids were making fun of Theresa's daughter, Alicia.

Alicia is bald. Her knees are arthritic. Her nose is pinched. Her hips are creaky. Her hearing is bad. She has the stamina of a seventy-year-old. And she is only ten.

"Mom," the kids taunted, "come and look at the monster!"

Alicia weighs only twenty-two pounds and is shorter than most preschoolers. She suffers from progeria—a genetic aging disease that strikes one child in eight million. The life expectancy of progeria victims is twenty years. There are only fifteen known cases of this disease in the world.

"She is not an alien. She is not a monster," Theresa defended. "She is just like you and me."

Mentally, Alicia is a bubbly, fun-loving third grader. She has a long list of friends. She watches television in a toddler-sized rocking chair. She plays with

With the scorn of those who are at ease,
With the contempt of the proud.

PSALM 124

The Lord the Defense of His People

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

"If it had not been the Lord who was on our side,"
Let Israel now say—
2 "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side,
When men rose up against us,
3 Then they would have swallowed us alive,
When their wrath was kindled against us;
4 Then the waters would have overwhelmed us,
The stream would have gone over our soul;
5 Then the swollen waters
Would have gone over our soul."

6 Blessed *be* the Lord,
Who has not given us *as* prey to their teeth.
7 Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers;[a]
The snare is broken, and we have escaped.
8 Our help *is* in the name of the Lord,
Who made heaven and earth.

PSALM 125

The Lord the Strength of His People

A Song of Ascents.

Those who trust in the Lord
Are like Mount Zion,
Which cannot be moved, *but* abides forever.
2 As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
So the Lord surrounds His people
From this time forth and forever.

3 For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest
On the land allotted to the righteous,
Lest the righteous reach out their hands to iniquity.

4 Do good, O Lord, to *those who are* good,
And to *those who are* upright in their hearts.

5 As for such as turn aside to their crooked ways,
The Lord shall lead them away
With the workers of iniquity.

Peace *be* upon Israel!

124:7 [a]That is, persons who catch birds in a trap or snare

Barbie dolls and teases her younger brother.

Theresa has grown accustomed to the glances and questions. She is patient with the constant curiosity. Genuine inquiries she accepts. Insensitive slanders she does not.

The mother of the finger-pointing children came to investigate. "I see 'it,'" she told the kids.

"My child is not an 'it,'" Theresa stated. Then she decked the woman.

Who could blame her? Such is the nature of parental love. Mothers and fathers have a God-given ability to love their children regardless of imperfections. Not because the parents are blind. Just the opposite. They see vividly.

Theresa sees Alicia's inability as clearly as anyone. But she also sees Alicia's value.

So does God.

God sees us with the eyes of a Father. He sees our defects, errors, and blemishes. But he also sees our value.

. . . What did Jesus know that enabled him to do what he did?

Here's part of the answer. He knew the value of people. He knew that each human being is a treasure. And because he did, people were not a source of stress, but a source of joy. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you know someone who stirs up trouble? Do you see people who ridicule others? What can you do to step in? How can you show the value God places on all people?

EXPLORATION

God's Love—Deuteronomy 7:8; Jeremiah 31:3; John 3:16; Romans 5:8; Ephesians 2:4,5; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 3:1.

Life Lessons

Psalms 124:1—127:5

SITUATION
God rescued the Israelites from their enemies. Although the odds were against God's people, He saved them.

OBSERVATION
We should not seek strength in weapons, economic might, or political strength. Real power comes from God.

INSPIRATION
Don't make the mistake of the fly I encountered in the airplane. That's right, on a recent flight a fly buzzed about in the cabin. How odd. A fly flying inside a flying plane. Why would a fly fly during a flight? Was he helping the plane? Doing his part to keep the craft airborne? Why did the fly in the plane fly in the plane?

I asked him. Catching his attention, I inquired, "Mr. Fly, why do you fly? Why don't you sit down and enjoy the journey?"

His reply smacked of smugness. "And let the plane crash? Why, this craft needs me. My wings are essential to our safety." And with a puff of the chest he flew toward the front of the plane. As he returned some moments later, he didn't look so confident. Fear flickered in his tiny eyes. "I don't think I can keep it up!"

"Keep what up?"

"The plane! I don't think I can keep the plane up. I'm flying as furiously as I can. But my wings are weary. I don't know how long I can do this."

I opted for frankness. "Don't you know it's not up to you? You are surrounded

PSALM 126

A Joyful Return to Zion

A Song of Ascents.

When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion,
We were like those who dream.
2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
And our tongue with singing.
Then they said among the nations,
"The Lord has done great things for them."
3 The Lord has done great things for us,
And we are glad.

4 Bring back our captivity, O Lord,
As the streams in the South.

5 Those who sow in tears
Shall reap in joy.
6 He who continually goes forth weeping,
Bearing seed for sowing,
Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing,
Bringing his sheaves *with him.*

PSALM 127

Laboring and Prospering with the Lord

A Song of Ascents. Of Solomon.

Unless the Lord builds the house,
They labor in vain who build it;
Unless the Lord guards the city,
The watchman stays awake in vain.
2 *It is* vain for you to rise up early,
To sit up late,
To eat the bread of sorrows;
For so He gives His beloved sleep.

3 Behold, children *are* a heritage from the Lord,
The fruit of the womb *is* a reward.
4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
So *are* the children of one's youth.
5 Happy *is* the man who has his quiver full of them;
They shall not be ashamed,
But shall speak with their enemies in the gate.

PSALM 128

Blessings of Those Who Fear the Lord

A Song of Ascents.

Blessed *is* every one who fears the Lord,
Who walks in His ways.

2 When you eat the labor of your hands,
You *shall be* happy, and *it shall be* well with you.
3 Your wife *shall be* like a fruitful vine
In the very heart of your house,
Your children like olive plants
All around your table.
4 Behold, thus shall the man be blessed
Who fears the Lord.

5 The Lord bless you out of Zion,
And may you see the good of Jerusalem
All the days of your life.
6 Yes, may you see your children's children.

Peace *be* upon Israel!

PSALM 129

Song of Victory over Zion's Enemies

A Song of Ascents.

"Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth,"
Let Israel now say—
2 "Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth;
Yet they have not prevailed against me.
3 The plowers plowed on my back;
They made their furrows long."
4 The Lord *is* righteous;
He has cut in pieces the cords of the wicked.

5 Let all those who hate Zion
Be put to shame and turned back.
6 Let them be as the grass *on* the housetops,
Which withers before it grows up,
7 With which the reaper does not fill his hand,
Nor he who binds sheaves, his arms.
8 Neither let those who pass by them say,
"The blessing of the Lord *be* upon you;
We bless you in the name of the Lord!"

PSALM 130

Waiting for the Redemption of the Lord

A Song of Ascents.

Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord;
2 Lord, hear my voice!
Let Your ears be attentive
To the voice of my supplications.

3 If You, Lord, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?

by strength, held aloft by power that is not yours. Stop flying! It's not up to you to get this plane home."

He looked at me as if I were crazy and told me to buzz off.

I so hope you won't. Some of you need to sit down. You fly furiously back and forth, ever busy, always thinking the success of this journey is up to you. Do you fear letting up?

Look out the windows. God's wings sustain you. God's engines empower you. You can flap like a fly and not accelerate this flight. It's your job to sit and trust: to receive. (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
How do you relieve stress? Do you take a nap, reach for a drink, read a book, or play a round of golf? Put a bookmark in this psalm. When you feel swamped with problems, call on a friend to help you avoid inappropriate ways to relieve stress. Review this psalm when you feel pressured. Then face the problem with God's help.

EXPLORATION
Deliverance—Exodus 12:17, 23; 14:21–31; Judges 4:3; Mark 4:38–40.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 128:1—131:3

SITUATION
Possibly written by King Hezekiah, these lyrics were often sung at Israelite weddings.

OBSERVATION
If you allow God to be head of your home, He will bless your family life.

INSPIRATION
David did so much so well. He unified the twelve tribes into one nation. He masterminded military conquests. He founded the capital city and elevated God as the Lord of the people, bringing the ark to Jerusalem and paving the way for the temple. He wrote poetry we still read and psalms we still sing. But when it came to his family, David blew it.

Going AWOL on his family was David's greatest failure. Seducing Bathsheba was an inexcusable but explicable act of passion. Murdering Uriah was a ruthless yet predictable deed from a desperate heart. But passive parenting and widespread philandering? These were not sins of a slothful afternoon or the deranged reactions of self-defense. David's family foul-up was a lifelong stupor that cost him dearly. . . .

David succeeded everywhere except at home. And if you don't succeed at home, do you succeed at all? David would have benefited from the counsel of Paul the apostle: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Do you look forward to going home or do you dread it? Is God the head of your home? Pray for your family daily. Memorize a favorite psalm as a family. After dinner, read a chapter from the Bible every day for a month.

EXPLORATION
Marriage and Family—Genesis 2:18–25; Exodus 20:12; Matthew 19:5, 6; Mark 7:9–13; Ephesians 5:22–33.

4 But *there is* forgiveness with You,
That You may be feared.

5 I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
And in His word I do hope.
6 My soul *waits* for the Lord
More than those who watch for the morning—
Yes, more than those who watch for the morning.

7 O Israel, hope in the Lord;
For with the Lord *there is* mercy,
And with Him *is* abundant redemption.
8 And He shall redeem Israel
From all his iniquities.

PSALM 131

Simple Trust in the Lord

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

Lord, my heart is not haughty,
Nor my eyes lofty.
Neither do I concern myself with great matters,
Nor with things too profound for me.

2 Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul,
Like a weaned child with his mother;
Like a weaned child *is* my soul within me.

3 O Israel, hope in the Lord
From this time forth and forever.

PSALM 132

The Eternal Dwelling of God in Zion

A Song of Ascents.

Lord, remember David
And all his afflictions;
2 How he swore to the Lord,
And vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob:
3 "Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house,
Or go up to the comfort of my bed;
4 I will not give sleep to my eyes
Or slumber to my eyelids,
5 Until I find a place for the Lord,
A dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob."

6 Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah;
We found it in the fields of the woods.[a]
7 Let us go into His tabernacle;

132:6 [a]Hebrew *Jaar*

Let us worship at His footstool.
8 Arise, O Lord, to Your resting place,
You and the ark of Your strength.
9 Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness,
And let Your saints shout for joy.

10 For Your servant David's sake,
Do not turn away the face of Your Anointed.

11 The Lord has sworn *in* truth to David;
He will not turn from it:
"I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body.
12 If your sons will keep My covenant
And My testimony which I shall teach them,
Their sons also shall sit upon your throne forevermore."

13 For the Lord has chosen Zion;
He has desired *it* for His dwelling place:
14 "This *is* My resting place forever;
Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.
15 I will abundantly bless her provision;
I will satisfy her poor with bread.
16 I will also clothe her priests with salvation,
And her saints shall shout aloud for joy.
17 There I will make the horn of David grow;
I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed.
18 His enemies I will clothe with shame,
But upon Himself His crown shall flourish."

PSALM 133

Blessed Unity of the People of God

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is*
For brethren to dwell together in unity!

2 *It is* like the precious oil upon the head,
Running down on the beard,
The beard of Aaron,
Running down on the edge of his garments.
3 *It is* like the dew of Hermon,
Descending upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the Lord commanded the blessing—
Life forevermore.

PSALM 134

Praising the Lord in His House at Night

A Song of Ascents.

Behold, bless the Lord,
All *you* servants of the Lord,

Life LESSONS

Psalms 132:1—134:3

SITUATION
These songs of worship, written by various writers, were also sung by pilgrims on their way to the temple.

OBSERVATION
Honoring and worshiping God not only causes God's people to rejoice, it also unifies them.

INSPIRATION
We cannot say, "I have no need of you." The megachurch needs the smaller church. The liberal needs the conservative. The pastor needs the missionary. Cooperation is more than a good idea; it is a command. "Keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Unity matters to God. There is "one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16).

What if the missing ingredient for changing the world is teamwork? "When two of you get together on anything at all on earth and make a prayer of it, my Father in heaven goes into action. And when two or three of you are together because of me, you can be sure that I'll be there" (Matthew 18:19, 20 MSG).

This is an astounding promise. When believers agree, Jesus takes notice, shows up, and hears our prayers. . . .

The Jerusalem church found a way to work together. They found common ground in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Because they did, lives were changed.

And as you and I do, the same will happen. (From

Who by night stand in the house of the Lord!
2 Lift up your hands *in* the sanctuary,
And bless the Lord.

3 The Lord who made heaven and earth
Bless you from Zion!

PSALM 135

Praise to God in Creation and Redemption

Praise the Lord!

Praise the name of the Lord;
Praise *Him,* O you servants of the Lord!
2 You who stand in the house of the Lord,
In the courts of the house of our God,
3 Praise the Lord, for the Lord *is* good;
Sing praises to His name, for *it is* pleasant.
4 For the Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself,
Israel for His special treasure.

5 For I know that the Lord *is* great,
And our Lord *is* above all gods.
6 Whatever the Lord pleases He does,
In heaven and in earth,
In the seas and in all deep places.
7 He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth;
He makes lightning for the rain;
He brings the wind out of His treasuries.

8 He destroyed the firstborn of Egypt,
Both of man and beast.
9 He sent signs and wonders into the midst of you, O Egypt,
Upon Pharaoh and all his servants.
10 He defeated many nations
And slew mighty kings—
11 Sihon king of the Amorites,
Og king of Bashan,
And all the kingdoms of Canaan—
12 And gave their land *as* a heritage,
A heritage to Israel His people.

13 Your name, O Lord, *endures* forever,
Your fame, O Lord, throughout all generations.
14 For the Lord will judge His people,
And He will have compassion on His servants.

15 The idols of the nations *are* silver and gold,
The work of men's hands.
16 They have mouths, but they do not speak;
Eyes they have, but they do not see;
17 They have ears, but they do not hear;

Outlive Your Life by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Work to become unified. Don't avoid conversations that are necessary to make peace, but resist the temptation to become angry. Be quick to forgive and careful in your response. Hear the whole story first, then respond. Your opinions may differ, but part as friends.

EXPLORATION
God as Potter—Isaiah 64:8. God's People as Clay—2 Corinthians 4:7–11. God's Love and Ours—1 John 4:7–21.

Life LESSONS

Psalm 135:1–21

SITUATION
This writer praised God because God chose Israel as His people, God created a beautiful world, and God has greater power than any other god.

OBSERVATION
God's children worship only Him, while the heathen worship idols in vain.

INSPIRATION
Are you wondering, *My business needs attention, my children need dinner, my bills need paying. How can I stay in a place of prayer?* Unceasing prayer may sound complicated, but it needn't be that way.

Do this. Change your definition of prayer. Think of prayers less as an activity for God and more as an awareness of God. Seek to live in uninterrupted awareness. Acknowledge His presence everywhere you go. As you stand in line to register your car, think, *Thank you, Lord, for being*

Nor is there *any* breath in their mouths.
18 Those who make them are like them;
So is everyone who trusts in them.

19 Bless the Lord, O house of Israel!
Bless the Lord, O house of Aaron!
20 Bless the Lord, O house of Levi!
You who fear the Lord, bless the Lord!
21 Blessed be the Lord out of Zion,
Who dwells in Jerusalem!

Praise the Lord!

PSALM 136

Thanksgiving to God for His Enduring Mercy

Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for *He is* good!
For His mercy *endures* forever.
2 Oh, give thanks to the God of gods!
For His mercy *endures* forever.
3 Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords!
For His mercy *endures* forever:

4 To Him who alone does great wonders,
For His mercy *endures* forever;
5 To Him who by wisdom made the heavens,
For His mercy *endures* forever;
6 To Him who laid out the earth above the waters,
For His mercy *endures* forever;
7 To Him who made great lights,
For His mercy *endures* forever—
8 The sun to rule by day,
For His mercy *endures* forever;
9 The moon and stars to rule by night,
For His mercy *endures* forever.

10 To Him who struck Egypt in their firstborn,
For His mercy *endures* forever;
11 And brought out Israel from among them,
For His mercy *endures* forever;
12 With a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm,
For His mercy *endures* forever;
13 To Him who divided the Red Sea in two,
For His mercy *endures* forever;
14 And made Israel pass through the midst of it,
For His mercy *endures* forever;
15 But overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea,
For His mercy *endures* forever;
16 To Him who led His people through the wilderness,
For His mercy *endures* forever;
17 To Him who struck down great kings,
For His mercy *endures* forever;

here. In the grocery as you shop, *Your presence, my King, I welcome.* As you wash the dishes, worship your Maker. (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What inhibits your relationship with God? Get rid of distractions: pay off your credit cards, turn off the television for a night, and leave the motor home parked for the weekend. Take time to improve your friendship with God this week.

EXPLORATION
Idols—Deuteronomy 32:16; Psalm 96:5; Isaiah 2:8, 9; Colossians 3:5, 6; Revelation 9:20.

Life LESSONS

Psalm 136:1–26

SITUATION
People cannot put a limit on God's patient care. He painstakingly created every detail of the universe and patiently provides for His people.

OBSERVATION
Thank God because He has more resources than we can ever exhaust.

INSPIRATION
Why do you stare at sun sets and ponder the summer night sky? Why do you search for a rainbow in the mist or gaze at the Grand Canyon? Why do you allow the Pacific surf to mesmerize and Niagara to hypnotize? How do we explain our fascination with such sights?

Beauty? Yes. But doesn't the beauty point to a beautiful Someone? Doesn't the immensity of the ocean suggest an immense Creator? Doesn't the

rhythm of migrating cranes and beluga whales hint of a brilliant mind? And isn't that what we desire? A beautiful Maker? An immense Creator? A God so mighty that He can commission the birds and command the fish?

"Show me Your glory, God," Moses begs. Forget a bank; he wants to see Fort Knox. He needs a walk in the vault of God's wealth. *Would You stun me with Your strength? Numb me with your wisdom? Steal my breath with a brush of Yours? A moment in the spray of the cataract of grace, a glimpse of Your glory, God.* This is the prayer of Moses. . . .

Forgive my effrontery, but shouldn't Moses' request be yours? You've got problems. Look at you. Living in a dying body, walking on a decaying planet, surrounded by a self-centered society. Some saved by grace; others fueled by narcissism. Many of us by both. Cancer. War. Disease.

These are no small issues. A small god? No thanks. You and I need what Moses needed—a glimpse of God's glory. Such a sighting can change you forever. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How has God blessed you? How have others contributed to your life? Take time to thank God for ten blessings today.

EXPLORATION

Thanksgiving—2 Chronicles 20:21, 22; Psalm 103:1–5; Revelation 4:9–11.

18 And slew famous kings,
For His mercy *endures* forever—
19 Sihon king of the Amorites,
For His mercy *endures* forever;
20 And Og king of Bashan,
For His mercy *endures* forever—
21 And gave their land as a heritage,
For His mercy *endures* forever;
22 A heritage to Israel His servant,
For His mercy *endures* forever.

23 Who remembered us in our lowly state,
For His mercy *endures* forever;
24 And rescued us from our enemies,
For His mercy *endures* forever;
25 Who gives food to all flesh,
For His mercy *endures* forever.

26 Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven!
For His mercy *endures* forever.

PSALM 137

Longing for Zion in a Foreign Land

By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down, yea, we wept
When we remembered Zion.
2 We hung our harps
Upon the willows in the midst of it.
3 For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song,
And those who plundered us *requested* mirth,
Saying, "Sing us *one* of the songs of Zion!"

4 How shall we sing the Lord's song
In a foreign land?
5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget *its skill!*
6 If I do not remember you,
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—
If I do not exalt Jerusalem
Above my chief joy.

7 Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom
The day of Jerusalem,
Who said, "Raze *it,* raze *it,*
To its very foundation!"

8 O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed,
Happy the one who repays you as you have served us!
9 Happy the one who takes and dashes
Your little ones against the rock!

PSALM 138

The Lord's Goodness to the Faithful

A Psalm of David.

I will praise You with my whole heart;
Before the gods I will sing praises to You.
2 I will worship toward Your holy temple,
And praise Your name
For Your lovingkindness and Your truth;
For You have magnified Your word above all Your name.
3 In the day when I cried out, You answered me,
And made me bold *with* strength in my soul.

4 All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O Lord,
When they hear the words of Your mouth.
5 Yes, they shall sing of the ways of the Lord,
For great *is* the glory of the Lord.
6 Though the Lord *is* on high,
Yet He regards the lowly;
But the proud He knows from afar.

7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me;
You will stretch out Your hand
Against the wrath of my enemies,
And Your right hand will save me.
8 The Lord will perfect *that which* concerns me;
Your mercy, O Lord, *endures* forever;
Do not forsake the works of Your hands.

PSALM 139

God's Perfect Knowledge of Man

For the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

O Lord, You have searched me and known *me*.
2 You know my sitting down and my rising up;
You understand my thought afar off.
3 You comprehend my path and my lying down,
And are acquainted with all my ways.
4 For *there is* not a word on my tongue,
But behold, O Lord, You know it altogether.
5 You have hedged me behind and before,
And laid Your hand upon me.
6 *Such* knowledge *is* too wonderful for me;
It is high, I cannot *attain* it.

7 Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence?
8 If I ascend into heaven, You *are* there;
If I make my bed in hell, behold, You *are there*.
9 *If* I take the wings of the morning,
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

Life Lessons

Psalms 137:1—138:8

SITUATION
During the Babylon captivity, the Israelites mourned for their lost land.

OBSERVATION
In times of trouble it is easy to wonder if God hears us. God does hear our prayers, and He carries us through the difficulties.

INSPIRATION
Since God is more moved by our hurt than our eloquence, He respond[s]. That's what fathers do.

That's exactly what Jim Redmond did.

His son Derek, a twenty-six-year-old Briton, was favored to win the four-hundred-meter race in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. Halfway into his semifinal heat, a fiery pain seared through his right leg. He crumpled to the track with a torn hamstring.

As the medical attendants were approaching, Redmond fought to his feet. "It was animal instinct," he would later say. He set out hopping, pushing away the coaches in a crazed attempt to finish the race.

When he reached the stretch, a big man pushed through the crowd. He was wearing a t-shirt that read "Have you hugged your child today?" and a hat that challenged, "Just Do It." The man was Jim Redmond, Derek's father.

"You don't have to do this," he told his weeping son.

"Yes, I do," Derek declared.

"Well, then," said Jim, "we're going to finish this together."

And they did. Jim

wrapped Derek's arm around his shoulder and helped him hobble to the finish line. Fighting off security men, the son's head sometimes buried in the father's shoulder, they stayed in Derek's lane to the end.

The crowd clapped, then stood, then cheered, and then wept as the father and the son finished the race.

What made the father do it? What made the father leave the stands to meet his son on the track? Was it the strength of his child? No, it was the pain of his child. His son was hurt and fighting to complete the race. So the father came to help him finish.

God does the same. Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the one who hears it and not the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God wants us to pray to Him without getting bogged down in proper words and phrases. Forget the fancy words and eloquent phrases. Don't get caught up using the right prayer words. Pour out your joys, fears, concerns, and requests. He hears and will aid and comfort you.

EXPLORATION

God Hears His People—Exodus 2:23–25; 22:27; Psalm 18:6; 145:18; Isaiah 65:24; Jeremiah 33:3; Romans 10:12, 13.

10 Even there Your hand shall lead me,
And Your right hand shall hold me.
11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall[a] on me,"
Even the night shall be light about me;
12 Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You,
But the night shines as the day;
The darkness and the light *are* both alike *to You.*

13 For You formed my inward parts;
You covered me in my mother's womb.
14 I will praise You, for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made;[a]
Marvelous are Your works,
And *that* my soul knows very well.
15 My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
16 Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.
And in Your book they all were written,
The days fashioned for me,
When *as yet there were* none of them.

17 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!
How great is the sum of them!
18 *If* I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand;
When I awake, I am still with You.

19 Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God!
Depart from me, therefore, you bloodthirsty men.
20 For they speak against You wickedly;
Your enemies take *Your name* in vain.[a]
21 Do I not hate them, O Lord, who hate You?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?
22 I hate them with perfect hatred;
I count them my enemies.

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me, and know my anxieties;
24 And see if *there is any* wicked way in me,
And lead me in the way everlasting.

PSALM 140

Prayer for Deliverance from Evil Men

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

Deliver me, O Lord, from evil men;
Preserve me from violent men,
2 Who plan evil things in *their* hearts;

139:11 [a]Vulgate and Symmachus read *cover.* **139:14** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *You are fearfully wonderful.* **139:20** [a]Septuagint and Vulgate read *They take your cities in vain.*

God's Workmanship

If we don't acknowledge God, we are flotsam in the universe. At best we are developed animals. At worst we are rearranged space dust.

With God in your world, you aren't an accident or an incident; you are a gift to the world, a divine work of art, signed by God.

One of the finest gifts I ever received is a football signed by thirty former professional quarterbacks. There is nothing unique about this ball. For all I know it was bought at a discount sports store. What makes it unique is the signatures.

The same is true with us. In the scheme of nature Homo sapiens are not unique. We aren't the only creatures with flesh and hair and blood and hearts. What makes us special is not our bodies but the signature of God on our lives. We are His works of art. We are created in His image to do good deeds. We are significant, not because of what we do, but because of whose we are.

Who has more reason to worship than the astronomer who has seen the stars? Than the surgeon who has held a heart? Than the oceanographer who has pondered the depths? The more we know, the more we should be amazed.

Study Guide

Read Psalm 139.

- If someone told you that humanity is not worth any more than the sum total of the chemicals required to form our bodies, how would you respond?
- What parts of creation most convince you that there is a Creator?
- What evidence of God's signature do you see on your life?
- Why is it sometimes difficult to value ourselves as God's creation?
- What difference does it make in your everyday life to know that God has ordained all of your days?
- What images or things rather than God do people in our society worship?
- In what ways does our society care for creation more than the God who created it?
- What evidence of this kind of idolatry do you see around you?
- In what ways do you think God wants to be worshiped by His creation?

They continually gather together *for* war.
3 They sharpen their tongues like a serpent;
The poison of asps *is* under their lips. *Selah*

4 Keep me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked;
Preserve me from violent men,
Who have purposed to make my steps stumble.
5 The proud have hidden a snare for me, and cords;
They have spread a net by the wayside;
They have set traps for me. *Selah*

6 I said to the Lord: "You *are* my God;
Hear the voice of my supplications, O Lord.
7 O God the Lord, the strength of my salvation,
You have covered my head in the day of battle.
8 Do not grant, O Lord, the desires of the wicked;
Do not further his *wicked* scheme,
Lest they be exalted. *Selah*

9 "*As for* the head of those who surround me,
Let the evil of their lips cover them;
10 Let burning coals fall upon them;
Let them be cast into the fire,
Into deep pits, that they rise not up again.
11 Let not a slanderer be established in the earth;
Let evil hunt the violent man to overthrow *him*."

12 I know that the Lord will maintain
The cause of the afflicted,
And justice for the poor.
13 Surely the righteous shall give thanks to Your name;
The upright shall dwell in Your presence.

PSALM 141

Prayer for Safekeeping from Wickedness

A Psalm of David.

Lord, I cry out to You;
Make haste to me!
Give ear to my voice when I cry out to You.
2 Let my prayer be set before You *as* incense,
The lifting up of my hands *as* the evening sacrifice.

3 Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth;
Keep watch over the door of my lips.
4 Do not incline my heart to any evil thing,
To practice wicked works
With men who work iniquity;
And do not let me eat of their delicacies.

Life LESSONS

Psalm 139:1–24

SITUATION
David acknowledged that God knows everything, is everywhere, and is the Creator and Author of all life.

OBSERVATION
David recognized that the days of his life were written in God's book before he was even born.

INSPIRATION
You exited the womb uniquely equipped. David states it this way: "My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them" (Psalm 139:15, 16).

Spelunk these verses with me. David emphasizes the pronoun "You" as if to say "You, God, and You alone." "Made in secret" suggests a hidden and safe place, concealed from intruders and evil. Just as an artist takes a canvas into a locked studio, so God took you into His hidden chamber where you were "skillfully wrought." Moses used the same word to describe the needlework of the tabernacle's inner curtains—stitched together by skillful hands for the highest purpose (see Exodus 26:1; 36:8; 38:9). The Master Weaver selected your temperament threads, your character texture, the yarn of your personality—all before you were born. God did not drop you into the world utterly defenseless

5 Let the righteous strike me;
It shall be a kindness.
And let him rebuke me;
It shall be as excellent oil;
Let my head not refuse it.

For still my prayer *is* against the deeds of the wicked.
6 Their judges are overthrown by the sides of the cliff,
And they hear my words, for they are sweet.
7 Our bones are scattered at the mouth of the grave,
As when one plows and breaks up the earth.

8 But my eyes *are* upon You, O God the Lord;
In You I take refuge;
Do not leave my soul destitute.
9 Keep me from the snares they have laid for me,
And from the traps of the workers of iniquity.
10 Let the wicked fall into their own nets,
While I escape safely.

PSALM 142

A Plea for Relief from Persecutors

A Contemplation[a] of David. A Prayer when he was in the cave.

I cry out to the Lord with my voice;
With my voice to the Lord I make my supplication.
2 I pour out my complaint before Him;
I declare before Him my trouble.

3 When my spirit was overwhelmed within me,
Then You knew my path.
In the way in which I walk
They have secretly set a snare for me.
4 Look on *my* right hand and see,
For *there is* no one who acknowledges me;
Refuge has failed me;
No one cares for my soul.

5 I cried out to You, O Lord:
I said, "You *are* my refuge,
My portion in the land of the living.
6 Attend to my cry,
For I am brought very low;
Deliver me from my persecutors,
For they are stronger than I.
7 Bring my soul out of prison,
That I may praise Your name;
The righteous shall surround me,
For You shall deal bountifully with me."

142:title [a]Hebrew *Maschil*

and empty-handed. You arrived fully equipped. "The days fashioned . . ." Day of birth and day of death. Days of difficulty and victory. What motivates you, what exhausts you . . . God authored—and authors—it all.

Other translations employ equally intriguing verbs:

"You . . . knit me together" (v. 13 NLT).

"I was woven together in the dark of the womb" (v. 15 NLT).

"I was . . . intricately and curiously wrought [as if embroidered with various colors]" (v. 15 AMP).

My hands have never embroidered a stitch, but my mom's have. In predishwasher days when mothers drafted young sons into kitchen duty to dry dishes, I grew too acquainted with her set of embroidered dishtowels. She had embellished sturdy white cloths with colorful threads: seven towels, each bearing the name of a different day. Her artisan skills rendered common towels uncommonly unique.

God did the same with you! . . .

Don't dull your life by missing this point: You are more than statistical chance, more than a marriage of heredity and society, more than a confluence of inherited chromosomes and childhood trauma. More than a walking weather vane whipped about by the cold winds of fate. Thanks to God, you have been "sculpted from nothing into something" (v. 15 MSG). (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What is your life story at this point? Write a psalm acknowledging, as David did, the Creator and Author of your life and how He has shaped and guided you.

Thank Him for designing you in a unique fashion.

EXPLORATION
Known by God—
1 Chronicles 28:9; Psalm 17:3; Proverbs 20:27; John 10:27, 28; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Hebrews 4:13.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 140:1—144:15

SITUATION
David prayed for God's strength when he felt overwhelmed.

OBSERVATION
God gives us the endurance we need to face whatever situation life brings us.

INSPIRATION
God is the God who follows. I wonder . . . have you sensed Him following you? We often miss Him. . . . We don't know our Helper when He is near. But he comes.

Through the kindness of a stranger. The majesty of a sunset. The mystery of romance. Through the question of a child or the commitment of a spouse. Through a word well spoken or a touch well timed, have you sensed His presence?

If so, then release your doubts. Set them down. Be encumbered by them no longer. You are no candidate for insecurity. You are no longer a client of timidity. You can trust God. He has given His love to you; why don't you give your doubts to Him?

Not easy to trust, you say? Maybe not, but neither is it as difficult as you think. Try these ideas:

Trust your faith and not your feelings. You don't feel spiritual each day? Of course you don't. But your feelings have no impact on

PSALM 143

An Earnest Appeal for Guidance and Deliverance

A Psalm of David.

Hear my prayer, O Lord,
Give ear to my supplications!
In Your faithfulness answer me,
And in Your righteousness.
2 Do not enter into judgment with Your servant,
For in Your sight no one living is righteous.

3 For the enemy has persecuted my soul;
He has crushed my life to the ground;
He has made me dwell in darkness,
Like those who have long been dead.
4 Therefore my spirit is overwhelmed within me;
My heart within me is distressed.

5 I remember the days of old;
I meditate on all Your works;
I muse on the work of Your hands.
6 I spread out my hands to You;
My soul *longs* for You like a thirsty land. *Selah*

7 Answer me speedily, O Lord;
My spirit fails!
Do not hide Your face from me,
Lest I be like those who go down into the pit.
8 Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning,
For in You do I trust;
Cause me to know the way in which I should walk,
For I lift up my soul to You.

9 Deliver me, O Lord, from my enemies;
In You I take shelter.[a]
10 Teach me to do Your will,
For You *are* my God;
Your Spirit *is* good.
Lead me in the land of uprightness.

11 Revive me, O Lord, for Your name's sake!
For Your righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble.
12 In Your mercy cut off my enemies,
And destroy all those who afflict my soul;
For I *am* Your servant.

143:9 [a]Septuagint and Vulgate read *To You I flee.*

PSALM 144

A Song to the Lord Who Preserves and Prospers His People

A Psalm of David.

Blessed *be* the Lord my Rock,
Who trains my hands for war,
And my fingers for battle—
2 My lovingkindness and my fortress,
My high tower and my deliverer,
My shield and *the One* in whom I take refuge,
Who subdues my people[a] under me.

3 Lord, what *is* man, that You take knowledge of him?
Or the son of man, that You are mindful of him?
4 Man is like a breath;
His days *are* like a passing shadow.

5 Bow down Your heavens, O Lord, and come down;
Touch the mountains, and they shall smoke.
6 Flash forth lightning and scatter them;
Shoot out Your arrows and destroy them.
7 Stretch out Your hand from above;
Rescue me and deliver me out of great waters,
From the hand of foreigners,
8 Whose mouth speaks lying words,
And whose right hand *is* a right hand of falsehood.

9 I will sing a new song to You, O God;
On a harp of ten strings I will sing praises to You,
10 *The One* who gives salvation to kings,
Who delivers David His servant
From the deadly sword.

11 Rescue me and deliver me from the hand of foreigners,
Whose mouth speaks lying words,
And whose right hand *is* a right hand of falsehood—
12 That our sons *may be* as plants grown up in their youth;
That our daughters *may be* as pillars,
Sculptured in palace style;
13 *That* our barns *may be* full,
Supplying all kinds of produce;
That our sheep may bring forth thousands
And ten thousands in our fields;
14 *That* our oxen *may be* well laden;
That there be no breaking in or going out;
That there be no outcry in our streets.
15 Happy *are* the people who are in such a state;
Happy *are* the people whose God *is* the Lord!

144:2 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Septuagint, and Vulgate; Syriac and Targum read *the peoples* (compare 18:47).

God's presence. On the days you don't feel close to God, trust your faith and not your feelings. Goodness and mercy shall follow you all the days of your life.

Measure your value through God's eyes, not your own. . . . There are times in our lives when we are gangrels—homeless, disoriented, hard to help, and hard to love. In those seasons remember this simple fact: God loves you. He follows you. Why? Because you are family, and He will follow you all the days of your life.

See the big picture, not the small. . . . Perhaps your home and health have been threatened. The immediate result might be pain. But the long-term result might be finding a Father you never knew. A Father who will follow you all the days of your life. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What is your endurance quota? Do you need to improve it? Perhaps you need more patience, or strength to face a physical challenge. God can help you to endure all of life's struggles.

EXPLORATION

God Our Help—Deuteronomy 33:26–29; Psalm 30:2; 46:1; Isaiah 41:9, 10; Jonah 2:2.

Life LESSONS

Psalms 145:1—150:6

SITUATION
Some psalms directed people to praise God. The last four psalms were directed to God. They begin and end with *hallelujah,* the Hebrew word for "Praise the Lord."

OBSERVATION
Praise God for His abundant provision, His greatness, and His love.

INSPIRATION
"The multitude," Matthew wrote, "marveled when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing" (Matthew 15:31).

. . . Then Matthew, still the great economizer of words, gave us another phrase on which I wish he would have elaborated:

"They glorified the God of Israel."

I wonder how they did that? I feel more certain of what they *didn't* do than of what they did do. I feel confident that they didn't form a praise committee. I feel confident that they didn't make any robes. I feel confident that they didn't sit in rows and stare at the back of each other's heads.

I doubt seriously if they wrote a creed on how they were to praise this God they had never before worshiped. I can't picture them getting into an argument over technicalities. I doubt if they felt it had to be done indoors.

And I know they didn't wait until the Sabbath to do it. . . .

I can imagine throngs of people pushing and

PSALM 145

A Song of God's Majesty and Love

A Praise of David.

I will extol You, my God, O King;
And I will bless Your name forever and ever.
2 Every day I will bless You,
And I will praise Your name forever and ever.
3 Great *is* the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
And His greatness *is* unsearchable.

4 One generation shall praise Your works to another,
And shall declare Your mighty acts.
5 I[a] will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty,
And on Your wondrous works.[b]
6 *Men* shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts,
And I will declare Your greatness.
7 They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness,
And shall sing of Your righteousness.

8 The Lord *is* gracious and full of compassion,
Slow to anger and great in mercy.
9 The Lord *is* good to all,
And His tender mercies *are* over all His works.

10 All Your works shall praise You, O Lord,
And Your saints shall bless You.
11 They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom,
And talk of Your power,
12 To make known to the sons of men His mighty acts,
And the glorious majesty of His kingdom.
13 Your kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom,
And Your dominion *endures* throughout all generations.[a]

14 The Lord upholds all who fall,
And raises up all *who are* bowed down.
15 The eyes of all look expectantly to You,
And You give them their food in due season.
16 You open Your hand
And satisfy the desire of every living thing.

17 The Lord *is* righteous in all His ways,
Gracious in all His works.
18 The Lord *is* near to all who call upon Him,
To all who call upon Him in truth.
19 He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him;
He also will hear their cry and save them.

145:5 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Dead Sea Scrolls, Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *They.* [b]Literally *on the words of Your wondrous works*
145:13 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Dead Sea Scrolls, Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate add *The Lord is faithful in all His words, And holy in all His works.*

20 The Lord preserves all who love Him,
But all the wicked He will destroy.
21 My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord,
And all flesh shall bless His holy name
Forever and ever.

PSALM 146

The Happiness of Those Whose Help Is the Lord

Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord, O my soul!
2 While I live I will praise the Lord;
I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

3 Do not put your trust in princes,
Nor in a son of man, in whom *there is* no help.
4 His spirit departs, he returns to his earth;
In that very day his plans perish.

5 Happy *is he* who *has* the God of Jacob for his help,
Whose hope *is* in the Lord his God,
6 Who made heaven and earth,
The sea, and all that *is* in them;
Who keeps truth forever,
7 Who executes justice for the oppressed,
Who gives food to the hungry.
The Lord gives freedom to the prisoners.

8 The Lord opens *the eyes of* the blind;
The Lord raises those who are bowed down;
The Lord loves the righteous.
9 The Lord watches over the strangers;
He relieves the fatherless and widow;
But the way of the wicked He turns upside down.

10 The Lord shall reign forever—
Your God, O Zion, to all generations.

Praise the Lord!

PSALM 147

Praise to God for His Word and Providence

Praise the Lord!
For *it is* good to sing praises to our God;
For *it is* pleasant, *and* praise is beautiful.

2 The Lord builds up Jerusalem;
He gathers together the outcasts of Israel.
3 He heals the brokenhearted
And binds up their wounds.
4 He counts the number of the stars;

shoving. Wanting to get close. Not to request anything or demand anything, but just to say "thank you."

. . . However they did it, they did it. And Jesus was touched, so touched that He insisted they stay for a meal before they left. . . .

Worship is the "thank you" that refuses to be silenced.

We have tried to make a science out of worship. We can't do that. We can't do that any more than we can "sell love" or "negotiate peace."

Worship is a voluntary act of gratitude offered by the saved to the Savior, by the healed to the Healer, and by the delivered to the Deliverer. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Find a new way to praise God. Learn to play an instrument. Take up a new activity that will help you learn more about God or His creation. Sing a song of praise in your car. Praise the Lord!

EXPLORATION

Spontaneous Praise—Nehemiah 8:5, 6; Isaiah 12:6; 55:12; Luke 2:20; 19:37–40; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Hebrews 13:15; Revelation 7:9–12.

He calls them all by name.
5 Great *is* our Lord, and mighty in power;
His understanding *is* infinite.
6 The Lord lifts up the humble;
He casts the wicked down to the ground.

7 Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;
Sing praises on the harp to our God,
8 Who covers the heavens with clouds,
Who prepares rain for the earth,
Who makes grass to grow on the mountains.
9 He gives to the beast its food,
And to the young ravens that cry.

10 He does not delight in the strength of the horse;
He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man.
11 The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him,
In those who hope in His mercy.

12 Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem!
Praise your God, O Zion!
13 For He has strengthened the bars of your gates;
He has blessed your children within you.
14 He makes peace *in* your borders,
And fills you with the finest wheat.

15 He sends out His command *to the* earth;
His word runs very swiftly.
16 He gives snow like wool;
He scatters the frost like ashes;
17 He casts out His hail like morsels;
Who can stand before His cold?
18 He sends out His word and melts them;
He causes His wind to blow, *and* the waters flow.

19 He declares His word to Jacob,
His statutes and His judgments to Israel.
20 He has not dealt thus with any nation;
And *as for His* judgments, they have not known them.

Praise the Lord!

PSALM 148

Praise to the Lord from Creation

Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord from the heavens;
Praise Him in the heights!
2 Praise Him, all His angels;
Praise Him, all His hosts!
3 Praise Him, sun and moon;
Praise Him, all you stars of light!
4 Praise Him, you heavens of heavens,
And you waters above the heavens!

5 Let them praise the name of the Lord,
For He commanded and they were created.
6 He also established them forever and ever;
He made a decree which shall not pass away.

7 Praise the Lord from the earth,
You great sea creatures and all the depths;
8 Fire and hail, snow and clouds;
Stormy wind, fulfilling His word;
9 Mountains and all hills;
Fruitful trees and all cedars;
10 Beasts and all cattle;
Creeping things and flying fowl;
11 Kings of the earth and all peoples;
Princes and all judges of the earth;
12 Both young men and maidens;
Old men and children.

13 Let them praise the name of the Lord,
For His name alone is exalted;
His glory *is* above the earth and heaven.
14 And He has exalted the horn of His people,
The praise of all His saints—
Of the children of Israel,
A people near to Him.

Praise the Lord!

PSALM 149

Praise to God for His Salvation and Judgment

Praise the Lord!

Sing to the Lord a new song,
And His praise in the assembly of saints.

2 Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;
Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.
3 Let them praise His name with the dance;
Let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp.
4 For the Lord takes pleasure in His people;
He will beautify the humble with salvation.

5 Let the saints be joyful in glory;
Let them sing aloud on their beds.
6 *Let* the high praises of God *be* in their mouth,
And a two-edged sword in their hand,
7 To execute vengeance on the nations,
And punishments on the peoples;
8 To bind their kings with chains,
And their nobles with fetters of iron;
9 To execute on them the written judgment—
This honor have all His saints.

Praise the Lord!

PSALM 150

Let All Things Praise the Lord

Praise the Lord!

Praise God in His sanctuary;
Praise Him in His mighty firmament!

2 Praise Him for His mighty acts;
Praise Him according to His excellent greatness!

3 Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet;
Praise Him with the lute and harp!
4 Praise Him with the timbrel and dance;
Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!
5 Praise Him with loud cymbals;
Praise Him with clashing cymbals!

6 Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord!

THE BOOK OF

PROVERBS

INTRODUCTION

Proverbs is a collection of lamps.

Not spotlights that blind. Not bonfires that blaze. But lamps. Lamps that do for your heart what the lamps in your house do for your eyes. They chase away the darkness.

"The commandment is a lamp," wrote Solomon. "The law a light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life" (6:23).

Reading Proverbs turns on the lamps in the dark corners of life.

Corners such as: Foolishness. Wisdom. Pride. Humility. Fear. Insecurity. Wealth. Mercy. Lust. Diligence. Laziness. Prudence. Anger. Flattery. Gossip. Violence.

And that's just a start.

Having trouble with an enemy? Turn on the lamp of patience:

"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (15:1).

Having trouble with greed? Flip the switch of prudence:

"Better is a little with the fear of the LORD, than great treasure with trouble" (15:16).

Anxious about tomorrow? Sit under the light of trust:

"Commit your works to the LORD, and your thoughts will be established" (16:3).

See what I mean? Time spent with Proverbs makes a heart wise. It's a practical guide for getting along with others. Whereas Psalms tells you how to get along with God, Proverbs tells you how to get along with people. Whereas Psalms is a book for Sunday, Proverbs is a book for Monday.

Why don't you flip on a few lights and see for yourself?

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Authors: Solomon, Agur, and Lemuel

Date Written: 950–700 B.C.

Key Themes:

- To live according to God's law is to live wisely.
- Righteousness and wisdom are to be pursued.
- Avoiding evil and evil people is a necessity.

Key Verse:

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Proverbs 1:7).

Contents:

I. Wisdom 1:1—9:18

II. Righteous Living 10:1—16:33

III. The Understanding of Life 17:1—24:34

IV. General Instructions 25:1—29:27

V. Words from Agur and a Mother's Advice 30:1—31:31

The Beginning of Knowledge

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:

2 To know wisdom and instruction,
To perceive the words of understanding,
3 To receive the instruction of wisdom,
Justice, judgment, and equity;
4 To give prudence to the simple,
To the young man knowledge and discretion—
5 A wise *man* will hear and increase learning,
And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel,
6 To understand a proverb and an enigma,
The words of the wise and their riddles.

7 The fear of the Lord *is* the beginning of knowledge,
But fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Shun Evil Counsel

8 My son, hear the instruction of your father,
And do not forsake the law of your mother;
9 For they *will be* a graceful ornament on your head,
And chains about your neck.

10 My son, if sinners entice you,
Do not consent.
11 If they say, "Come with us,
Let us lie in wait to *shed* blood;
Let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause;
12 Let us swallow them alive like Sheol,[a]
And whole, like those who go down to the Pit;
13 We shall find all *kinds* of precious possessions,
We shall fill our houses with spoil;
14 Cast in your lot among us,
Let us all have one purse"—
15 My son, do not walk in the way with them,
Keep your foot from their path;
16 For their feet run to evil,
And they make haste to shed blood.
17 Surely, in vain the net is spread
In the sight of any bird;
18 But they lie in wait for their *own* blood,
They lurk secretly for their *own* lives.
19 So *are* the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain;
It takes away the life of its owners.

The Call of Wisdom

20 Wisdom calls aloud outside;
She raises her voice in the open squares.
21 She cries out in the chief concourses,[a]

1:12 [a]Or *the grave* **1:21** [a]Septuagint, Syriac, and Targum read *top of the walls;* Vulgate reads *the head of multitudes.*

Life Lessons

Proverbs 1:1–33

SITUATION
Proverbs provide wisdom and guidance for living an obedient life. Simple words and common sense give us guidelines for daily life.

OBSERVATION
The Proverbs contain many instructions to help steer readers away from sin. Listen to this advice and grow in wisdom. God's wisdom is superior to all others.

INSPIRATION
Peter announced: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Many recoil at such definitiveness. John 14:6 and Acts 4:12 sound primitive in this era of broadbands and broad minds. The world is shrinking, cultures are blending, borders are bending; this is the day of inclusion. All roads lead to heaven, right?

But can they? The sentence makes good talk-show fodder, but is it accurate? Can all approaches to God be correct?

Islam says Jesus was not crucified. Christians say He was. Both can't be right.

Judaism refuses the claim of Christ as the Messiah. Christians accept it. Someone's making a mistake.

Buddhists look toward Nirvana, achieved after no less than 547 reincarnations. Christians believe in one life, one death, and an eternity of enjoying God. Doesn't one view exclude the other?

At the openings of the gates in the city
She speaks her words:
22 "How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity?
For scorners delight in their scorning,
And fools hate knowledge.
23 Turn at my rebuke;
Surely I will pour out my spirit on you;
I will make my words known to you.
24 Because I have called and you refused,
I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded,
25 Because you disdained all my counsel,
And would have none of my rebuke,
26 I also will laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when your terror comes,
27 When your terror comes like a storm,
And your destruction comes like a whirlwind,
When distress and anguish come upon you.

28 "Then they will call on me, but I will not answer;
They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me.
29 Because they hated knowledge
And did not choose the fear of the Lord,
30 They would have none of my counsel
And despised my every rebuke.
31 Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way,
And be filled to the full with their own fancies.
32 For the turning away of the simple will slay them,
And the complacency of fools will destroy them;
33 But whoever listens to me will dwell safely,
And will be secure, without fear of evil."

The Value of Wisdom

2 My son, if you receive my words,
And treasure my commands within you,
2 So that you incline your ear to wisdom,
And apply your heart to understanding;
3 Yes, if you cry out for discernment,
And lift up your voice for understanding,
4 If you seek her as silver,
And search for her as *for* hidden treasures;
5 Then you will understand the fear of the Lord,
And find the knowledge of God.
6 For the Lord gives wisdom;
From His mouth *come* knowledge and understanding;
7 He stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
He is a shield to those who walk uprightly;
8 He guards the paths of justice,
And preserves the way of His saints.
9 Then you will understand righteousness and justice,
Equity *and* every good path.

Humanists do not acknowledge a creator of life. Jesus claims to be the source of life. One of the two speaks folly.

Spiritists read your palms. Christians consult the Bible.

Hindus perceive a plural and impersonal God. Christ-followers believe "there is no other God but one" (1 Corinthians 8:4). Somebody is wrong.

And, most supremely, every non-Christian religion says, "You can save you." Jesus says, "My death on the Cross saves you."

How can all religions lead to God when they are so different? . . .

Every path does not lead to God. Jesus blazed a stand-alone trail void of self-salvation. He cleared a one-of-a-kind passageway uncluttered by human effort. Christ came, not for the strong, but for the weak; not for the righteous, but for the sinner. We enter His way upon confession of our need, not completion of our deeds. He offers a unique-to-Him invitation in which He works and we trust, He dies and we live, He invites and we believe. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Today you may be bombarded by people giving advice—talk show hosts, psychics, psychologists. Take more time to listen to God than to television. At the end of the day, assess which words of wisdom you applied (or should have).

EXPLORATION

Wisdom—1 Kings 3:6–12; Proverbs 1:7; 4:7, 8; Luke 2:40.

10 When wisdom enters your heart,
And knowledge is pleasant to your soul,
11 Discretion will preserve you;
Understanding will keep you,
12 To deliver you from the way of evil,
From the man who speaks perverse things,
13 From those who leave the paths of uprightness
To walk in the ways of darkness;
14 Who rejoice in doing evil,
And delight in the perversity of the wicked;
15 Whose ways *are* crooked,
And *who are* devious in their paths;
16 To deliver you from the immoral woman,
From the seductress *who* flatters with her words,
17 Who forsakes the companion of her youth,
And forgets the covenant of her God.
18 For her house leads down to death,
And her paths to the dead;
19 None who go to her return,
Nor do they regain the paths of life—
20 So you may walk in the way of goodness,
And keep *to* the paths of righteousness.
21 For the upright will dwell in the land,
And the blameless will remain in it;
22 But the wicked will be cut off from the earth,
And the unfaithful will be uprooted from it.

Guidance for the Young

3 My son, do not forget my law,
But let your heart keep my commands;
2 For length of days and long life
And peace they will add to you.

3 Let not mercy and truth forsake you;
Bind them around your neck,
Write them on the tablet of your heart,
4 *And* so find favor and high esteem
In the sight of God and man.

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
6 In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct[a] your paths.

7 Do not be wise in your own eyes;
Fear the Lord and depart from evil.
8 It will be health to your flesh,[a]
And strength[b] to your bones.

3:6 [a]Or *make smooth* or *straight* **3:8** [a]Literally *navel,* figurative of the body [b]Literally *drink* or *refreshment*

Life Lessons

Proverbs 2:1–22

SITUATION
Solomon warned his readers to heed God's Word. He exhorted them to learn about God, who would help them to choose the right path.

OBSERVATION
Rebelling against God's wisdom leads to immorality and spiritual death. God's wisdom keeps us from living an immoral and defeated life.

INSPIRATION
Seek first the kingdom of wealth, and you'll worry over every dollar. Seek first the kingdom of health, and you'll sweat every blemish and bump. Seek first the kingdom of popularity, and you'll relive every conflict. Seek first the kingdom of safety, and you'll jump at every crack of the twig. But seek first his kingdom, and you will find it. On that, we can depend and never worry.

Eight steps. **P**ray, first. **E**asy, now. **A**ct on it. **C**ompile a worry list. **E**valuate your worry categories. **F**ocus on today. **U**nleash a worry army. **L**et God be enough.

P-E-A-C-E-F-U-L. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What are you seeking today? Are you seeking God first? As you read the Bible this week, select a Proverb each day that will help you make wise decisions. Make a list of these Proverbs. Carry the list with you so you can remind yourself to use this wisdom.

EXPLORATION
Moral Choices—Exodus

23:24, 25; 2 Kings 17:27–29; 2 Chronicles 13:8; Romans 1:25; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 3:1–35

SITUATION
God promises to guide those who obey and trust Him. Those who obey must actively explore God's Word.

OBSERVATION
Depend on God in every part of your life, and He will guide, protect, and comfort you.

INSPIRATION
We were running late for an evening book signing, late because the afternoon signing had seen such long lines. We expected the same at the next store. Concerned, we phoned ahead. "We are running behind. Tell all the people we'll arrive soon."

"No need to hurry," the store manager assured.

"What about the people?"

"Neither one seems to be in a hurry."

Neither one?

By the time we reached the store, thankfully, the crowd of two people had tripled to six. We had scheduled two hours for the signing; I needed ten minutes.

Self-conscious about sitting alone at the table, I peppered the last person with questions. We talked about her parents, school, Social Security number, favorite birthday party. Against my pleadings, she had to go. So I sat alone at the table. Big stack of Lucado books, no one in line.

9 Honor the Lord with your possessions,
And with the firstfruits of all your increase;
10 So your barns will be filled with plenty,
And your vats will overflow with new wine.

11 My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord,
Nor detest His correction;
12 For whom the Lord loves He corrects,
Just as a father the son *in whom* he delights.

13 Happy *is* the man *who* finds wisdom,
And the man *who* gains understanding;
14 For her proceeds *are* better than the profits of silver,
And her gain than fine gold.
15 She *is* more precious than rubies,
And all the things you may desire cannot compare with her.
16 Length of days *is* in her right hand,
In her left hand riches and honor.
17 Her ways *are* ways of pleasantness,
And all her paths *are* peace.
18 She *is* a tree of life to those who take hold of her,
And happy *are all* who retain her.

19 The Lord by wisdom founded the earth;
By understanding He established the heavens;
20 By His knowledge the depths were broken up,
And clouds drop down the dew.

21 My son, let them not depart from your eyes—
Keep sound wisdom and discretion;
22 So they will be life to your soul
And grace to your neck.
23 Then you will walk safely in your way,
And your foot will not stumble.
24 When you lie down, you will not be afraid;
Yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet.
25 Do not be afraid of sudden terror,
Nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes;
26 For the Lord will be your confidence,
And will keep your foot from being caught.

27 Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due,
When it is in the power of your hand to do *so.*
28 Do not say to your neighbor,
"Go, and come back,
And tomorrow I will give *it,*"
When you have it with you.
29 Do not devise evil against your neighbor,
For he dwells by you for safety's sake.
30 Do not strive with a man without cause,
If he has done you no harm.

31 Do not envy the oppressor,
And choose none of his ways;
32 For the perverse *person is* an abomination to the Lord,
But His secret counsel *is* with the upright.
33 The curse of the Lord *is* on the house of the wicked,
But He blesses the home of the just.
34 Surely He scorns the scornful,
But gives grace to the humble.
35 The wise shall inherit glory,
But shame shall be the legacy of fools.

Security in Wisdom

4 Hear, *my* children, the instruction of a father,
And give attention to know understanding;
2 For I give you good doctrine:
Do not forsake my law.
3 When I was my father's son,
Tender and the only one in the sight of my mother,
4 He also taught me, and said to me:
"Let your heart retain my words;
Keep my commands, and live.
5 Get wisdom! Get understanding!
Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth.
6 Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you;
Love her, and she will keep you.
7 Wisdom *is* the principal thing;
Therefore get wisdom.
And in all your getting, get understanding.
8 Exalt her, and she will promote you;
She will bring you honor, when you embrace her.
9 She will place on your head an ornament of grace;
A crown of glory she will deliver to you."

10 Hear, my son, and receive my sayings,
And the years of your life will be many.
11 I have taught you in the way of wisdom;
I have led you in right paths.
12 When you walk, your steps will not be hindered,
And when you run, you will not stumble.
13 Take firm hold of instruction, do not let go;
Keep her, for she *is* your life.

14 Do not enter the path of the wicked,
And do not walk in the way of evil.
15 Avoid it, do not travel on it;
Turn away from it and pass on.
16 For they do not sleep unless they have done evil;
And their sleep is taken away unless they make *someone* fall.
17 For they eat the bread of wickedness,
And drink the wine of violence.

I asked the store manager, "Did you advertise?"

"We did. More than usual." She walked off.

The next time she passed I asked, "Had other signings?"

"Yes, usually we have a great response," and kept going.

I signed all the books at my table. I signed all the Lucado books on the shelves. I signed Tom Clancy and John Grisham books. Finally a customer came to the table. "You write books?" he asked, picking up the new one.

"I do. Want me to sign it?"

"No thanks," he answered and left.

God hit His target. Lest I forget, my daily reading the next morning had this passage: "Do not be wise in your own eyes" (Proverbs 3:7).

When you're full of yourself, God can't fill you.

But when you empty yourself, God has a useful vessel. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Is your life like a hotel, with certain rooms marked "Do Not Disturb"? Open one of those rooms to God. If you are a pianist, give your practice or performance to God. If you are a basketball referee, give your game to God. No matter what your role in life or your occupation, live every aspect of your life to honor God.

EXPLORATION

Guidance—Joshua 1:9; Psalm 48:14; 118:8; Proverbs 2:1–5; Matthew 2:13; Luke 9:23–25; John 4:13, 14; Acts 8:26.

Life LESSONS

PROVERBS 4:1–27

SITUATION
The author emphasized that God's wisdom has been tested through the generations. These time-tested truths can help everyone avoid evil.

OBSERVATION
Listening and following the words of a wise father help children learn how to act.

INSPIRATION
The ephod originated in the era of the wilderness wanderings. Moses presented the first one to Aaron, the priest. It was an ornate vest, woven of white linen, in-wrought with threads of blue, purple, scarlet, and gold. A breastplate bearing twelve precious stones adorned the vest. The breastplate contained one or two, maybe three, resplendent diamonds or diamond-like stones. These stones had the names Urim and Thummim. No one knows the exact meaning of the terms, but "light" and "perfection" lead the list.

God revealed His will to the priests through these stones. How? Ancient writers have suggested several methods. The stones

- illuminated when God said yes;
- contained moving letters that gathered to form a response;
- were sacred lots that, upon being cast, would reveal an answer.

While we speculate on the technique, we don't need to guess at the value. Would you not cherish such a tool? When faced with a puzzling choice, David could, with reverent heart,

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. —Proverbs 4:23

Guarding Our Hearts

Jesus guarded His heart. If He did, shouldn't we do the same? Most certainly! "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). Jesus wants your heart to be fertile and fruitful. He wants you to have a heart like His. That is God's goal for you. He wants you to "let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). But how? The answer is surprisingly simple. We can be transformed if we make one decision: *I will submit my thoughts to the authority of Jesus.*

It's easy to overlook a significant claim made by Christ at the conclusion of Matthew's Gospel. "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). Jesus claims to be the CEO of heaven and earth. He has the ultimate say on everything, especially our thoughts. He has more authority, for example, than your parents. Your parents may say you are no good, but Jesus says you are valuable, and He has authority over parents. He even has more authority over you than you do. You may tell yourself that you are too bad to be forgiven, but Jesus has a different opinion. If you give Him authority over you, then your guilty thoughts are no longer allowed.

Jesus also has authority over your ideas. Suppose you have an idea that you want to rob a grocery store. Jesus, however, has made it clear that stealing is wrong. If you have given Him authority over your ideas, then the idea of stealing cannot remain in your thoughts.

See what I mean by authority? To have a pure heart, we must submit all thoughts to the authority of Christ. If we are willing to do that, He will change us to be like Him. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

Question: What thoughts do you need to submit to Jesus' authority today?

For more on "New Life in Christ," see page 999.

18 But the path of the just *is* like the shining sun,[a]
That shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.
19 The way of the wicked *is* like darkness;
They do not know what makes them stumble.

20 My son, give attention to my words;
Incline your ear to my sayings.
21 Do not let them depart from your eyes;
Keep them in the midst of your heart;
22 For they *are* life to those who find them,
And health to all their flesh.
23 Keep your heart with all diligence,
For out of it *spring* the issues of life.
24 Put away from you a deceitful mouth,
And put perverse lips far from you.
25 Let your eyes look straight ahead,
And your eyelids look right before you.
26 Ponder the path of your feet,
And let all your ways be established.
27 Do not turn to the right or the left;
Remove your foot from evil.

The Peril of Adultery

5 My son, pay attention to my wisdom;
Lend your ear to my understanding,
2 That you may preserve discretion,
And your lips may keep knowledge.
3 For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey,
And her mouth *is* smoother than oil;
4 But in the end she is bitter as wormwood,
Sharp as a two-edged sword.
5 Her feet go down to death,
Her steps lay hold of hell.[a]
6 Lest you ponder *her* path of life—
Her ways are unstable;
You do not know *them.*

7 Therefore hear me now, *my* children,
And do not depart from the words of my mouth.
8 Remove your way far from her,
And do not go near the door of her house,
9 Lest you give your honor to others,
And your years to the cruel *one;*
10 Lest aliens be filled with your wealth,
And your labors *go* to the house of a foreigner;
11 And you mourn at last,
When your flesh and your body are consumed,
12 And say:
"How I have hated instruction,
And my heart despised correction!

4:18 [a]Literally *light* **5:5** [a]Or *Sheol*

make a request, and God would answer.

Will Saul come after me? He will.

Will the men capture me? They will.

Should I pursue the enemy? You should.

Will I overtake them? You will.

Oh, that God would do the same for us. That we could ask and He would answer. That we could cry out and He would reply. Wouldn't you love to have an ephod? Who's to say you don't? God hasn't changed. He still promises to guide us:

The Lord says, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye" (Psalm 32:8).

"In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:6). (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Did you ever read about different thinkers or philosophers? Did you ever notice that their ideas seem to go out of style after a few years? God's wisdom doesn't! Make living by God's Word your highest priority. Read it, memorize it, think about it often, and let it change your life every day.

EXPLORATION

Listen and Obey—Proverbs 30:5; Isaiah 30:21.

13 I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers,
Nor inclined my ear to those who instructed me!
14 I was on the verge of total ruin,
In the midst of the assembly and congregation."

15 Drink water from your own cistern,
And running water from your own well.
16 Should your fountains be dispersed abroad,
Streams of water in the streets?
17 Let them be only your own,
And not for strangers with you.
18 Let your fountain be blessed,
And rejoice with the wife of your youth.
19 *As a* loving deer and a graceful doe,
Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;
And always be enraptured with her love.
20 For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman,
And be embraced in the arms of a seductress?

21 For the ways of man *are* before the eyes of the Lord,
And He ponders all his paths.
22 His own iniquities entrap the wicked *man,*
And he is caught in the cords of his sin.
23 He shall die for lack of instruction,
And in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.

Dangerous Promises

6 My son, if you become surety for your friend,
If you have shaken hands in pledge for a stranger,
2 You are snared by the words of your mouth;
You are taken by the words of your mouth.
3 So do this, my son, and deliver yourself;
For you have come into the hand of your friend:
Go and humble yourself;
Plead with your friend.
4 Give no sleep to your eyes,
Nor slumber to your eyelids.
5 Deliver yourself like a gazelle from the hand *of the hunter,*
And like a bird from the hand of the fowler.[a]

The Folly of Indolence

6 Go to the ant, you sluggard!
Consider her ways and be wise,
7 Which, having no captain,
Overseer or ruler,
8 Provides her supplies in the summer,
And gathers her food in the harvest.
9 How long will you slumber, O sluggard?
When will you rise from your sleep?

6:5 [a]That is, one who catches birds in a trap or snare

Life Lessons

Proverbs 5:1—6:35

SITUATION
Solomon warned his son of the sin of foolishness and sexual sin. He urged him to remember what he was taught and to avoid the temptation of having sex outside of marriage. He also encouraged him against things the Lord hates (6:16–19).

OBSERVATION
Do not be seduced by sin, foolishness, or lust. These lead to moral ruin and spiritual death.

INSPIRATION
God has a heart for hurting parents. Should we be surprised? After all, God Himself is a father. What parental emotion has He not felt? Are you separated from your child? So was God. Is someone mistreating your child? They mocked and bullied His. Is someone taking advantage of your children? The Son of God was set up by false testimony and betrayed by a greedy follower. Are you forced to watch while your child suffers? God watched His Son on the Cross. Do you find yourself wanting to spare your child from all the hurt in the world? God did. But because of His great love for us, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things" (Romans 8:32).

"All things" must include courage and hope. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
If you're a parent seeking to build wisdom into your child, it is an honorable and sometimes difficult task.

10 A little sleep, a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands to sleep—
11 So shall your poverty come on you like a prowler,
And your need like an armed man.

The Wicked Man

12 A worthless person, a wicked man,
Walks with a perverse mouth;
13 He winks with his eyes,
He shuffles his feet,
He points with his fingers;
14 Perversity *is* in his heart,
He devises evil continually,
He sows discord.
15 Therefore his calamity shall come suddenly;
Suddenly he shall be broken without remedy.

16 These six *things* the Lord hates,
Yes, seven *are* an abomination to Him:
17 A proud look,
A lying tongue,
Hands that shed innocent blood,
18 A heart that devises wicked plans,
Feet that are swift in running to evil,
19 A false witness *who* speaks lies,
And one who sows discord among brethren.

Beware of Adultery

20 My son, keep your father's command,
And do not forsake the law of your mother.
21 Bind them continually upon your heart;
Tie them around your neck.
22 When you roam, they[a] will lead you;
When you sleep, they will keep you;
And *when* you awake, they will speak with you.
23 For the commandment *is* a lamp,
And the law a light;
Reproofs of instruction *are* the way of life,
24 To keep you from the evil woman,
From the flattering tongue of a seductress.
25 Do not lust after her beauty in your heart,
Nor let her allure you with her eyelids.
26 For by means of a harlot
A man is reduced to a crust of bread;
And an adulteress[a] will prey upon his precious life.
27 Can a man take fire to his bosom,
And his clothes not be burned?
28 Can one walk on hot coals,
And his feet not be seared?

6:22 [a]Literally *it* **6:26** [a]Literally *a man's wife,* that is, of another

If your child has strayed, take courage and hope from these words, that God understands your hurt.

EXPLORATION
Lust—Proverbs 6:23–29; Matthew 5:27–30; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 1 John 2:16.

If you have the Shepherd, you have grace for every sin, direction for every turn, a candle for every corner, and an anchor for every storm.

—Max Lucado (Traveling Light)

29 So *is* he who goes in to his neighbor's wife;
Whoever touches her shall not be innocent.

30 *People* do not despise a thief
If he steals to satisfy himself when he is starving.
31 Yet *when* he is found, he must restore sevenfold;
He may have to give up all the substance of his house.
32 Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding;
He *who* does so destroys his own soul.
33 Wounds and dishonor he will get,
And his reproach will not be wiped away.
34 For jealousy *is* a husband's fury;
Therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance.
35 He will accept no recompense,
Nor will he be appeased though you give many gifts.

7 My son, keep my words,
And treasure my commands within you.
2 Keep my commands and live,
And my law as the apple of your eye.
3 Bind them on your fingers;
Write them on the tablet of your heart.
4 Say to wisdom, "You *are* my sister,"
And call understanding *your* nearest kin,
5 That they may keep you from the immoral woman,
From the seductress *who* flatters with her words.

The Crafty Harlot

6 For at the window of my house
I looked through my lattice,
7 And saw among the simple,
I perceived among the youths,
A young man devoid of understanding,
8 Passing along the street near her corner;
And he took the path to her house
9 In the twilight, in the evening,
In the black and dark night.

10 And there a woman met him,
With the attire of a harlot, and a crafty heart.
11 She *was* loud and rebellious,
Her feet would not stay at home.
12 At times *she was* outside, at times in the open square,
Lurking at every corner.
13 So she caught him and kissed him;
With an impudent face she said to him:
14 "*I have* peace offerings with me;
Today I have paid my vows.
15 So I came out to meet you,
Diligently to seek your face,
And I have found you.
16 I have spread my bed with tapestry,

Life Lessons

Proverbs 7:1–27

SITUATION
The writer of Proverbs warned against yielding to the temptation of extramarital sex and other sins.

OBSERVATION
Beware of being entrapped in the lies of the world that promise sensuality as the means of happiness and significance.

INSPIRATION
As I write, I'm seated at a desk in a hotel room. I'm away from home. Away from people who know me.

Voices that encourage and affirm are distant.

But voices that tantalize and entice are near. Although the room is quiet, if I listen, their voices are crystal clear.

A placard on my nightstand invites me to a lounge in the lobby, where I can "make new friends in a relaxing atmosphere." An advertisement on top of the television promises me that with the request of a late-night adult movie my "fantasies will come true." In the phone book, several columns of escort services offer "love away from home." . . . On television a talk-show host discusses the day's topic: "How to succeed at sex in the office."

Voices. Some for pleasure. Some for power.

The world rams at your door; Jesus taps at your door. The voices scream for your allegiance; Jesus softly and tenderly requests it. The world promises flashy pleasure; Jesus promises a quiet dinner . . . with God. "I will come in and eat."

Colored coverings of Egyptian linen.
17 I have perfumed my bed
With myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.
18 Come, let us take our fill of love until morning;
Let us delight ourselves with love.
19 For my husband *is* not at home;
He has gone on a long journey;
20 He has taken a bag of money with him,
And will come home on the appointed day."

21 With her enticing speech she caused him to yield,
With her flattering lips she seduced him.
22 Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter,
Or as a fool to the correction of the stocks,[a]
23 Till an arrow struck his liver.
As a bird hastens to the snare,
He did not know it *would cost* his life.

24 Now therefore, listen to me, *my* children;
Pay attention to the words of my mouth:
25 Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways,
Do not stray into her paths;
26 For she has cast down many wounded,
And all who were slain by her were strong *men.*
27 Her house *is* the way to hell,[a]
Descending to the chambers of death.

The Excellence of Wisdom

8 Does not wisdom cry out,
And understanding lift up her voice?
2 She takes her stand on the top of the high hill,
Beside the way, where the paths meet.
3 She cries out by the gates, at the entry of the city,
At the entrance of the doors:
4 "To you, O men, I call,
And my voice *is* to the sons of men.
5 O you simple ones, understand prudence,
And you fools, be of an understanding heart.
6 Listen, for I will speak of excellent things,
And from the opening of my lips *will come* right things;
7 For my mouth will speak truth;
Wickedness *is* an abomination to my lips.
8 All the words of my mouth *are* with righteousness;
Nothing crooked or perverse *is* in them.
9 They *are* all plain to him who understands,
And right to those who find knowledge.
10 Receive my instruction, and not silver,
And knowledge rather than choice gold;

7:22 [a]Septuagint, Syriac, and Targum read *as a dog to bonds;* Vulgate reads *as a lamb . . . to bonds.* **7:27** [a]Or *Sheol*

Which voice do you hear? (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
We cannot stand firm against the lies of the world unless we are firmly grounded in Christ. Be diligent to read God's Word, and pray often. Promise yourself to pray at three different times today.

EXPLORATION
Follow the Lord—Deuteronomy 4:30; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 8; Luke 9:35; Revelation 3:20.

Life LESSONS

Proverbs 8:1–36

SITUATION
God's wisdom called the readers of Proverbs to make right choices rather than wicked ones.

OBSERVATION
God always makes His wisdom available to us. Human wisdom will fail.

INSPIRATION
Listen, you and I are no match for Satan. Jesus knows this. . . . He put on our flesh. He "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). And because He did, we pass with flying colors.

God gives you Jesus' wilderness grade. Believe that. If you don't, the desert days will give you a one-two punch. The right hook is the struggle. The left jab is the shame for not prevailing against it. Trust his work.

And trust His Word. Don't trust your emotions. Don't trust your opinions. Don't even trust your friends. In the wilderness heed only the voice of God.

Again, Jesus is our model. Remember how Satan teased Him? "If You are the Son of God . . ." (Luke 4:3, 9). Why would Satan say this? Because he knew what Christ had heard at the baptism. "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

"Are you really God's Son?" Satan is asking. Then comes the dare—"Prove it!" Prove it by doing something:

"Command this stone to become bread" (Luke 4:3).

"If You will worship before me, all will be Yours" (v. 7).

"Throw Yourself down from here" (v. 9).

What subtle seduction! Satan doesn't denounce God; he simply raises doubts about God. Is his work enough? Earthly works—like bread changing or temple jumping—are given equal billing with heavenly works. He attempts to shift, ever so gradually, our source of confidence away from God's promise and toward our performance.

Jesus doesn't bite the bait. No heavenly sign is requested. He doesn't solicit a lightning bolt; He simply quotes the Bible. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What is your toughest decision today? Pray and search God's Word for advice.

EXPLORATION

Wisdom's Call—Psalm 119:97–104; Proverbs 1:20–28; 2:3–6; 4:5–8.

11 For wisdom *is* better than rubies,
And all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her.

12 "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,
And find out knowledge *and* discretion.
13 The fear of the Lord *is* to hate evil;
Pride and arrogance and the evil way
And the perverse mouth I hate.
14 Counsel *is* mine, and sound wisdom;
I *am* understanding, I have strength.
15 By me kings reign,
And rulers decree justice.
16 By me princes rule, and nobles,
All the judges of the earth.[a]
17 I love those who love me,
And those who seek me diligently will find me.
18 Riches and honor *are* with me,
Enduring riches and righteousness.
19 My fruit *is* better than gold, yes, than fine gold,
And my revenue than choice silver.
20 I traverse the way of righteousness,
In the midst of the paths of justice,
21 That I may cause those who love me to inherit wealth,
That I may fill their treasuries.

22 "The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way,
Before His works of old.
23 I have been established from everlasting,
From the beginning, before there was ever an earth.
24 When *there were* no depths I was brought forth,
When *there were* no fountains abounding with water.
25 Before the mountains were settled,
Before the hills, I was brought forth;
26 While as yet He had not made the earth or the fields,
Or the primal dust of the world.
27 When He prepared the heavens, I *was* there,
When He drew a circle on the face of the deep,
28 When He established the clouds above,
When He strengthened the fountains of the deep,
29 When He assigned to the sea its limit,
So that the waters would not transgress His command,
When He marked out the foundations of the earth,
30 Then I was beside Him *as* a master craftsman;[a]
And I was daily *His* delight,
Rejoicing always before Him,
31 Rejoicing in His inhabited world,
And my delight *was* with the sons of men.

8:16 [a]Masoretic Text, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate read *righteousness;* Septuagint, Bomberg, and some manuscripts and editions read *earth.* **8:30** [a]A Jewish tradition reads *one brought up.*

32 "Now therefore, listen to me, *my* children,
For blessed *are those who* keep my ways.
33 Hear instruction and be wise,
And do not disdain *it.*
34 Blessed is the man who listens to me,
Watching daily at my gates,
Waiting at the posts of my doors.
35 For whoever finds me finds life,
And obtains favor from the Lord;
36 But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul;
All those who hate me love death."

The Way of Wisdom

9 Wisdom has built her house,
She has hewn out her seven pillars;
2 She has slaughtered her meat,
She has mixed her wine,
She has also furnished her table.
3 She has sent out her maidens,
She cries out from the highest places of the city,
4 "Whoever *is* simple, let him turn in here!"
As for him who lacks understanding, she says to him,
5 "Come, eat of my bread
And drink of the wine I have mixed.
6 Forsake foolishness and live,
And go in the way of understanding.

7 "He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself,
And he who rebukes a wicked *man only* harms himself.
8 Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you;
Rebuke a wise *man,* and he will love you.
9 Give *instruction* to a wise *man,* and he will be still wiser;
Teach a just *man,* and he will increase in learning.

10 "The fear of the Lord *is* the beginning of wisdom,
And the knowledge of the Holy One *is* understanding.
11 For by me your days will be multiplied,
And years of life will be added to you.
12 If you are wise, you are wise for yourself,
And *if* you scoff, you will bear *it* alone."

The Way of Folly

13 A foolish woman is clamorous;
She is simple, and knows nothing.
14 For she sits at the door of her house,
On a seat *by* the highest places of the city,
15 To call to those who pass by,
Who go straight on their way:
16 "Whoever *is* simple, let him turn in here";
And *as for* him who lacks understanding, she says to him,
17 "Stolen water is sweet,
And bread *eaten* in secret is pleasant."

Life Lessons

Proverbs 9:1–18

SITUATION
By contrasting the invitations of wisdom and foolishness, chapter 9 provides a summary statement of the first eight chapters of Proverbs.

OBSERVATION
God's wisdom leads to life. Foolishness, personified by the adulteress, leads to death.

INSPIRATION
Casual sex, intimacy outside of marriage, pulls the Corinthian ploy. It pretends we can give the body and not affect the soul. We can't. We humans are so intricately psychosomatic that whatever touches the *soma* impacts the *psyche* as well. The me-centered phrase "as long as no one gets hurt" sounds noble, but the truth is, we don't know who gets hurt. God-centered thinking rescues us from the sex we thought would make us happy.

You may think your dalliances are harmless, and years may pass before the X-rays reveal the internal damage, but don't be fooled. Casual sex is a diet of chocolate—it tastes good for a while, but the imbalance can ruin you. Sex apart from God's plan wounds the soul. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Have you been nurturing a "harmless" habit? If so, you are like the man who continually passes in front of the prostitute's house, thinking he can withstand her alluring invitations! Stop that compromising habit

today and return to God before it is too late!

EXPLORATION
Avoiding Sin—Job 31:1; Proverbs 4:14, 15; 6:20–26; 8:13; 1 Corinthians 10:12, 13; 2 Timothy 2:22; James 1:13–15.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 10:1–32

SITUATION
This chapter begins a collection of proverbs attributed to Solomon.

OBSERVATION
The actions of wise and good people are contrasted with the deeds of foolish and evil people. Solomon emphasizes the need for honesty and the wise choice of words.

INSPIRATION
Insensitivity makes a wound that heals slowly.

If someone hurts your feelings intentionally, you know how to react. You know the source of the pain. But if someone accidentally bruises your soul, it's difficult to know how to respond.

Someone at work criticizes the new boss, who also happens to be your dear friend. "Oh, I'm sorry—I forgot the two of you were so close."

A joke is told at a party about overweight people. You're overweight. You hear the joke. You smile politely while your heart sinks.

What was intended to be a reprimand for a decision or action becomes a personal attack. "You have a history of poor decisions, John."

Someone chooses to wash your dirty laundry in public. "Sue, is it true that you and Jim are separated?"

18 But he does not know that the dead *are* there,
That her guests *are* in the depths of hell.[a]

Wise Sayings of Solomon

10 The proverbs of Solomon:

A wise son makes a glad father,
But a foolish son *is* the grief of his mother.

2 Treasures of wickedness profit nothing,
But righteousness delivers from death.
3 The Lord will not allow the righteous soul to famish,
But He casts away the desire of the wicked.

4 He who has a slack hand becomes poor,
But the hand of the diligent makes rich.
5 He who gathers in summer *is* a wise son;
He who sleeps in harvest *is* a son who causes shame.

6 Blessings *are* on the head of the righteous,
But violence covers the mouth of the wicked.
7 The memory of the righteous *is* blessed,
But the name of the wicked will rot.

8 The wise in heart will receive commands,
But a prating fool will fall.

9 He who walks with integrity walks securely,
But he who perverts his ways will become known.

10 He who winks with the eye causes trouble,
But a prating fool will fall.

11 The mouth of the righteous *is* a well of life,
But violence covers the mouth of the wicked.

12 Hatred stirs up strife,
But love covers all sins.

13 Wisdom is found on the lips of him who has understanding,
But a rod *is* for the back of him who is devoid of understanding.

14 Wise *people* store up knowledge,
But the mouth of the foolish *is* near destruction.

15 The rich man's wealth *is* his strong city;
The destruction of the poor *is* their poverty.

16 The labor of the righteous *leads* to life,
The wages of the wicked to sin.

9:18 [a]Or *Sheol*

17 He who keeps instruction *is in* the way of life,
But he who refuses correction goes astray.

18 Whoever hides hatred *has* lying lips,
And whoever spreads slander *is* a fool.

19 In the multitude of words sin is not lacking,
But he who restrains his lips *is* wise.
20 The tongue of the righteous *is* choice silver;
The heart of the wicked *is worth* little.
21 The lips of the righteous feed many,
But fools die for lack of wisdom.[a]

22 The blessing of the Lord makes *one* rich,
And He adds no sorrow with it.

23 To do evil *is* like sport to a fool,
But a man of understanding has wisdom.
24 The fear of the wicked will come upon him,
And the desire of the righteous will be granted.
25 When the whirlwind passes by, the wicked *is* no *more,*
But the righteous *has* an everlasting foundation.

26 As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes,
So *is* the lazy *man* to those who send him.

27 The fear of the Lord prolongs days,
But the years of the wicked will be shortened.
28 The hope of the righteous *will be* gladness,
But the expectation of the wicked will perish.
29 The way of the Lord *is* strength for the upright,
But destruction *will come* to the workers of iniquity.

30 The righteous will never be removed,
But the wicked will not inhabit the earth.
31 The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom,
But the perverse tongue will be cut out.
32 The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable,
But the mouth of the wicked *what is* perverse.

11 Dishonest scales *are* an abomination to the Lord,
But a just weight *is* His delight.

2 When pride comes, then comes shame;
But with the humble *is* wisdom.

3 The integrity of the upright will guide them,
But the perversity of the unfaithful will destroy them.
4 Riches do not profit in the day of wrath,
But righteousness delivers from death.

10:21 [a]Literally *heart*

Insensitive comments. Thoughts that should have remained thoughts. Feelings which had no business being expressed. Opinions carelessly tossed like a grenade into a crowd.

And if you were to tell the one who threw these thoughtless darts about the pain they caused, his response would be "Oh, but I had no intention. . . . I didn't realize you were so sensitive!" or "I forgot you were here."

In a way, the words are comforting, until you stop to think about them (which is not recommended). For when you start to think about insensitive slurs, you realize they come from an infamous family whose father has bred generations of pain. His name? Egotism. His children? Three sisters: disregard, disrespect, and disappointment.

These three witches have combined to poison countless relationships and break innumerable hearts. Listed among their weapons are Satan's cruelest artillery: gossip, accusations, resentment, impatience, and on and on. . . .

God's Word has strong medicine for those who carelessly wag their tongues. The message is clear: He who dares to call himself God's ambassador is not afforded the luxury of idle words. Excuses such as "I didn't know you were here" or "I didn't realize this was so touchy" are shallow when they come from those who claim to be followers and imitators of the Great Physician. We have an added responsibility to guard our tongues. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Evaluate the words you have spoken in the past week. What statements have

been sinful or harmful? Did your words build up or tear down? Were they critical? Were they vulgar? If so, ask for God's forgiveness and seek the forgiveness of anyone you have offended. Ask for God's help to use your words wisely.

EXPLORATION
Helpful Words—Proverbs 16:24; 25:11; Ecclesiastes 10:12; Isaiah 50:4; Ephesians 4:29; Colossians 4:6.

Life LESSONS

Proverbs 11:1–31

SITUATION
Solomon gave practical words of wisdom that would ensure long life to those who heed them.

OBSERVATION
Solomon contrasted righteous and wicked behavior, paying special attention to the best use of money. He calls for integrity and following His standards in all areas of life.

INSPIRATION
When I was nine years old I complimented a friend's model airplane. He curtly replied, "I stole it." He could tell that I was stunned because he asked, "Do you think that was wrong?"

When I told him I did, he answered simply, "It may be wrong for you. It's not wrong for me. I didn't hurt anyone when I stole the plane. I knew the owner. He is rich. I'm not. He can afford one. I can't."

What do you say to that argument? If you don't believe in life beyond the rafters, you have little to say. If there is no ultimate good *behind* the world, then how do we define "good" *within* the world? If the majority

5 The righteousness of the blameless will direct[a] his way aright,
But the wicked will fall by his own wickedness.
6 The righteousness of the upright will deliver them,
But the unfaithful will be caught by *their* lust.

7 When a wicked man dies, *his* expectation will perish,
And the hope of the unjust perishes.
8 The righteous is delivered from trouble,
And it comes to the wicked instead.
9 The hypocrite with *his* mouth destroys his neighbor,
But through knowledge the righteous will be delivered.
10 When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices;
And when the wicked perish, *there is* jubilation.
11 By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted,
But it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.

12 He who is devoid of wisdom despises his neighbor,
But a man of understanding holds his peace.

13 A talebearer reveals secrets,
But he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter.

14 Where *there is* no counsel, the people fall;
But in the multitude of counselors *there is* safety.

15 He who is surety for a stranger will suffer,
But one who hates being surety is secure.

16 A gracious woman retains honor,
But ruthless *men* retain riches.
17 The merciful man does good for his own soul,
But *he who is* cruel troubles his own flesh.
18 The wicked *man* does deceptive work,
But he who sows righteousness *will have* a sure reward.
19 As righteousness *leads* to life,
So he who pursues evil *pursues it* to his own death.
20 Those who are of a perverse heart *are* an abomination to the Lord,
But *the* blameless in their ways *are* His delight.
21 *Though they* join forces,[a] the wicked will not go unpunished;
But the posterity of the righteous will be delivered.

22 *As* a ring of gold in a swine's snout,
So is a lovely woman who lacks discretion.

23 The desire of the righteous *is* only good,
But the expectation of the wicked *is* wrath.

24 There is *one* who scatters, yet increases more;
And there is *one* who withholds more than is right,

11:5 [a]Or *make smooth* or *straight* **11:21** [a]Literally *hand to hand*

But it *leads* to poverty.
25 The generous soul will be made rich,
And he who waters will also be watered himself.
26 The people will curse him who withholds grain,
But blessing *will be* on the head of him who sells *it.*

27 He who earnestly seeks good finds favor,
But trouble will come to him who seeks *evil.*

28 He who trusts in his riches will fall,
But the righteous will flourish like foliage.

29 He who troubles his own house will inherit the wind,
And the fool *will be* servant to the wise of heart.

30 The fruit of the righteous *is a* tree of life,
And he who wins souls *is* wise.

31 If the righteous will be recompensed on the earth,
How much more the ungodly and the sinner.

12 Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge,
But he who hates correction *is* stupid.

2 A good *man* obtains favor from the Lord,
But a man of wicked intentions He will condemn.

3 A man is not established by wickedness,
But the root of the righteous cannot be moved.

4 An excellent[a] wife *is* the crown of her husband,
But she who causes shame *is* like rottenness in his bones.

5 The thoughts of the righteous *are* right,
But the counsels of the wicked *are* deceitful.
6 The words of the wicked *are,* "Lie in wait for blood,"
But the mouth of the upright will deliver them.

7 The wicked are overthrown and *are* no more,
But the house of the righteous will stand.

8 A man will be commended according to his wisdom,
But he who is of a perverse heart will be despised.

9 Better *is the one* who is slighted but has a servant,
Than he who honors himself but lacks bread.

10 A righteous *man* regards the life of his animal,
But the tender mercies of the wicked *are* cruel.

12:4 [a]Literally *A wife of valor*

opinion determines good and evil, what happens when the majority is wrong? What do you do when the majority of kids in a certain group say it's all right to steal or raid or even fire pistols from a moving vehicle?

The hedonist's world of no moral absolutes works fine on paper and sounds great in a college philosophy course, but in life? Ask the father of three children whose wife abandoned him, saying, "Divorce may be wrong for you, but it's OK for me." Or get the opinion of the teenage girl, pregnant and frightened, who was told by her boyfriend, "If you have the baby, it's your responsibility." Or the retirees ripped off of their pension by a huckster who believed anything is right if you don't get caught.

A godly view of the world, on the other hand, has something to say to my childhood thief. Faith challenges those with cricket brains to answer to a higher standard than personal opinion. "You may think it's right. Society may think it's OK. But the God who made you said, 'You shall not steal'—and He wasn't kidding." (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Where have you seen the "what's right for me may not be right for you" philosophy at work? What does it mean to you to follow God's standards in all areas of life?

EXPLORATION

The Rich Ruler—Luke 18:18–30. The Faithful, Wise Servant—Luke 12:42–48.

Life LESSONS

Proverbs 12:1—13:25

SITUATION
Solomon gave instruction about life. He contrasted good with evil, wisdom with foolishness, and labor with laziness.

OBSERVATION
Do right and you will succeed. Wickedness leads to failure and death. Foolishness and laziness lead to ruin.

INSPIRATION
You want success? Here's your model. You want achievement? Here's your prototype. You want bright lights, pageants and media attention? Consider the front-page, center article of the nation's largest daily newspaper.

It is a caricature of "Miss America." The vital data of the fifty-one participants has been compiled to present the perfect woman. She has brown hair. She has brown eyes. She knows how to sing and has a perfect figure: 35-24-35. She is Miss America.

The message trumpets off the page: "This is the standard for American women." The implication is clear: Do what it takes to be like her. Firm your thighs. Deepen your cleavage. Pamper your hair. Improve your walk.

No reference is made to her convictions . . . to her honesty . . . to her . . . faith . . . or to her God. But you are told her hip size.

In a small photo, four inches to the left, is another woman. Her face is thin. Her skin is wrinkled, almost leathery. No makeup . . . no blush . . . no lipstick. There is a faint smile on her lips

11 He who tills his land will be satisfied with bread,
But he who follows frivolity *is* devoid of understanding.[a]

12 The wicked covet the catch of evil *men,*
But the root of the righteous yields *fruit.*
13 The wicked is ensnared by the transgression of *his* lips,
But the righteous will come through trouble.
14 A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of *his* mouth,
And the recompense of a man's hands will be rendered to him.

15 The way of a fool *is* right in his own eyes,
But he who heeds counsel *is* wise.
16 A fool's wrath is known at once,
But a prudent *man* covers shame.

17 He *who* speaks truth declares righteousness,
But a false witness, deceit.
18 There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword,
But the tongue of the wise *promotes* health.
19 The truthful lip shall be established forever,
But a lying tongue *is* but for a moment.
20 Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil,
But counselors of peace have joy.
21 No grave trouble will overtake the righteous,
But the wicked shall be filled with evil.
22 Lying lips *are* an abomination to the Lord,
But those who deal truthfully *are* His delight.

23 A prudent man conceals knowledge,
But the heart of fools proclaims foolishness.

24 The hand of the diligent will rule,
But the lazy *man* will be put to forced labor.

25 Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression,
But a good word makes it glad.

26 The righteous should choose his friends carefully,
For the way of the wicked leads them astray.

27 The lazy *man* does not roast what he took in hunting,
But diligence *is* man's precious possession.

28 In the way of righteousness *is* life,
And in *its* pathway *there is* no death.

13 A wise son *heeds* his father's instruction,
But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.

12:11 [a]Literally *heart*

2 A man shall eat well by the fruit of *his* mouth,
But the soul of the unfaithful feeds on violence.
3 He who guards his mouth preserves his life,
But he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction.

4 The soul of a lazy *man* desires, and *has* nothing;
But the soul of the diligent shall be made rich.

5 A righteous *man* hates lying,
But a wicked *man* is loathsome and comes to shame.
6 Righteousness guards *him whose* way is blameless,
But wickedness overthrows the sinner.

7 There is one who makes himself rich, yet *has* nothing;
And one who makes himself poor, yet *has* great riches.

8 The ransom of a man's life *is* his riches,
But the poor does not hear rebuke.

9 The light of the righteous rejoices,
But the lamp of the wicked will be put out.

10 By pride comes nothing but strife,
But with the well-advised *is* wisdom.

11 Wealth *gained by* dishonesty will be diminished,
But he who gathers by labor will increase.

12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick,
But *when* the desire comes, *it is* a tree of life.

13 He who despises the word will be destroyed,
But he who fears the commandment will be rewarded.
14 The law of the wise *is* a fountain of life,
To turn *one* away from the snares of death.

15 Good understanding gains favor,
But the way of the unfaithful *is* hard.
16 Every prudent *man* acts with knowledge,
But a fool lays open *his* folly.

17 A wicked messenger falls into trouble,
But a faithful ambassador *brings* health.

18 Poverty and shame *will come* to him who disdains correction,
But he who regards a rebuke will be honored.

19 A desire accomplished is sweet to the soul,
But *it is* an abomination to fools to depart from evil.

20 He who walks with wise *men* will be wise,
But the companion of fools will be destroyed.

and a glint in her eyes. She looks pale. Perhaps it's my imagination or perhaps it's time. The caption reads, "Mother Teresa: In serious condition."

Mother Teresa. You know her story. When she won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985, she gave the two hundred thousand dollars to the poor of Calcutta. When a business man bought her a new car, she sold it and gave the money to the underprivileged. She owns nothing. She owes nothing.

Two women: Miss America and Mother Teresa. One walks the boardwalk; the other walks the alley. Two voices. One promises crowns, flowers, and crowds. The other promises service, surrender, and joy.

Now I have nothing against beauty pageants (although I have my reservations about them). But I do have something against the lying voices that noise our world.

You've heard them. They tell you to swap your integrity for a new sale. To barter your convictions for an easy deal. To exchange your devotion for a quick thrill.

They whisper. They woo. They taunt. They tantalize. They flirt. They flatter. "Go ahead, its O.K." "Just wait until tomorrow." "Don't worry, no one will know." "How could anything that feels so right be so wrong?" . . .

For amidst the fleeting promises of pleasure is the timeless promise of [God's] presence.

"I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

"I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

There is no chorus so loud that the voice of God cannot be heard . . . if we

will but listen. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What matters to you: looks or love, your job or service to God, wealth or sacrifice? Pattern your life after wise, spiritual, and devoted workers.

EXPLORATION
Righteousness—Psalm 1; Proverbs 10:2; Romans 4:3.

Life LESSONS

Proverbs 14:1–35

SITUATION
Each proverb in this section was written to capture interest through contrast. Each one highlights the life of the wise and righteous person in contrast to life of the foolish and wicked.

OBSERVATION
If we choose to live by God's standards, we will be righteous. But if we choose to live by our own standards, we will be wicked and will face God's wrath.

INSPIRATION
There are many reasons to help people in need.

"Benevolence is good for the world."

"We all float on the same ocean. When the tide rises, it benefits everyone."

"To deliver someone from poverty is to unleash that person's potential as a researcher, educator, or doctor."

"As we reduce poverty and disease, we reduce war and atrocities. Healthy, happy people don't hurt each other."

Compassion has a dozen advocates.

21 Evil pursues sinners,
But to the righteous, good shall be repaid.

22 A good *man* leaves an inheritance to his children's children,
But the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.

23 Much food *is in* the fallow *ground* of the poor,
And for lack of justice there is waste.[a]

24 He who spares his rod hates his son,
But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.

25 The righteous eats to the satisfying of his soul,
But the stomach of the wicked shall be in want.

14 The wise woman builds her house,
But the foolish pulls it down with her hands.

2 He who walks in his uprightness fears the Lord,
But *he who is* perverse in his ways despises Him.

3 In the mouth of a fool *is* a rod of pride,
But the lips of the wise will preserve them.

4 Where no oxen *are,* the trough *is* clean;
But much increase *comes* by the strength of an ox.

5 A faithful witness does not lie,
But a false witness will utter lies.

6 A scoffer seeks wisdom and does not *find it,*
But knowledge *is* easy to him who understands.
7 Go from the presence of a foolish man,
When you do not perceive *in him* the lips of knowledge.
8 The wisdom of the prudent *is* to understand his way,
But the folly of fools *is* deceit.

9 Fools mock at sin,
But among the upright *there is* favor.

10 The heart knows its own bitterness,
And a stranger does not share its joy.

11 The house of the wicked will be overthrown,
But the tent of the upright will flourish.

12 There is a way *that seems* right to a man,
But its end *is* the way of death.

13 Even in laughter the heart may sorrow,
And the end of mirth *may be* grief.

13:23 [a]Literally *what is swept away*

14 The backslider in heart will be filled with his own ways,
But a good man *will be satisfied* from above.[a]

15 The simple believes every word,
But the prudent considers well his steps.
16 A wise *man* fears and departs from evil,
But a fool rages and is self-confident.
17 A quick-tempered *man* acts foolishly,
And a man of wicked intentions is hated.
18 The simple inherit folly,
But the prudent are crowned with knowledge.
19 The evil will bow before the good,
And the wicked at the gates of the righteous.

20 The poor *man* is hated even by his own neighbor,
But the rich *has* many friends.
21 He who despises his neighbor sins;
But he who has mercy on the poor, happy *is* he.

22 Do they not go astray who devise evil?
But mercy and truth *belong* to those who devise good.

23 In all labor there is profit,
But idle chatter[a] *leads* only to poverty.

24 The crown of the wise is their riches,
But the foolishness of fools *is* folly.

25 A true witness delivers souls,
But a deceitful *witness* speaks lies.

26 In the fear of the Lord *there is* strong confidence,
And His children will have a place of refuge.
27 The fear of the Lord *is* a fountain of life,
To turn *one* away from the snares of death.

28 In a multitude of people *is* a king's honor,
But in the lack of people *is* the downfall of a prince.

29 *He who is* slow to wrath has great understanding,
But *he who is* impulsive[a] exalts folly.

30 A sound heart *is* life to the body,
But envy *is* rottenness to the bones.

31 He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker,
But he who honors Him has mercy on the needy.

32 The wicked is banished in his wickedness,
But the righteous has a refuge in his death.

14:14 [a]Literally *from above himself* **14:23** [a]Literally *talk of the lips* **14:29** [a]Literally *short of spirit*

But for the Christian, none is higher than this: when we love those in need, we are loving Jesus. It is a mystery beyond science, a truth beyond statistics. But it is a message that Jesus made crystal clear: when we love them, we love Him. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

In what ways can you help people who are in need? Who do you know who could benefit from your help? Ask God to guide you to be able to help in sensitive and truly beneficial ways.

EXPLORATION

Wisdom—1 Kings 3:6–9, 12; Psalm 119:97–104; Proverbs 1:23–28; 2:3–6, 9, 10; Ecclesiastes 8:1; Luke 2:40; James 1:5.

33 Wisdom rests in the heart of him who has understanding,
But *what is* in the heart of fools is made known.

34 Righteousness exalts a nation,
But sin *is* a reproach to *any* people.

35 The king's favor *is* toward a wise servant,
But his wrath *is against* him who causes shame.

15 A soft answer turns away wrath,
But a harsh word stirs up anger.
2 The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly,
But the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness.

3 The eyes of the Lord *are* in every place,
Keeping watch on the evil and the good.

4 A wholesome tongue *is* a tree of life,
But perverseness in it breaks the spirit.

5 A fool despises his father's instruction,
But he who receives correction is prudent.

6 *In* the house of the righteous *there is* much treasure,
But in the revenue of the wicked is trouble.

7 The lips of the wise disperse knowledge,
But the heart of the fool *does* not *do* so.

8 The sacrifice of the wicked *is* an abomination to the Lord,
But the prayer of the upright *is* His delight.
9 The way of the wicked *is* an abomination to the Lord,
But He loves him who follows righteousness.

10 Harsh discipline *is* for him who forsakes the way,
And he who hates correction will die.

11 Hell[a] and Destruction[b] *are* before the Lord;
So how much more the hearts of the sons of men.

12 A scoffer does not love one who corrects him,
Nor will he go to the wise.

13 A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance,
But by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.

14 The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge,
But the mouth of fools feeds on foolishness.

15 All the days of the afflicted *are* evil,
But he who is of a merry heart *has* a continual feast.

15:11 [a]Or *Sheol* [b]Hebrew *Abaddon*

Life Lessons

Proverbs 15:1–33

SITUATION
Wise and prudent followers of God solve their problems while pleasing God. The corrupt and foolish may gain wealth, but they also gain God's wrath.

OBSERVATION
We should seek God's wisdom in every part of life. A wise person solves problems peacefully.

INSPIRATION
"The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" [James 3:18].

The principle for peace is the same as the principle for crops: Never underestimate the power of a seed.

The story of Heinz is a good example. Europe, 1934. Hitler's plague of anti-Semitism was infecting a continent. Some would escape it. Some would die from it. But eleven-year-old Heinz would learn from it. He would learn the power of sowing seeds of peace.

Heinz was a Jew.

The Bavarian village of Furth, where Heinz lived, was being overrun by Hitler's young thugs. Heinz's father, a schoolteacher, lost his job. Recreational activities ceased. Tension mounted on the streets.

The Jewish families clutched the traditions that held them together—the observance of the Sabbath, of Rosh Hashanah, of Yom Kippur. Old ways took on new significance. As the clouds of persecution swelled and blackened, these ancient precepts were a precious cleft in a mighty rock.

And as the streets

16 Better *is* a little with the fear of the Lord,
Than great treasure with trouble.
17 Better *is* a dinner of herbs[a] where love is,
Than a fatted calf with hatred.

18 A wrathful man stirs up strife,
But *he who is* slow to anger allays contention.

19 The way of the lazy *man is* like a hedge of thorns,
But the way of the upright *is* a highway.

20 A wise son makes a father glad,
But a foolish man despises his mother.

21 Folly *is* joy *to him who is* destitute of discernment,
But a man of understanding walks uprightly.

22 Without counsel, plans go awry,
But in the multitude of counselors they are established.

23 A man has joy by the answer of his mouth,
And a word *spoken* in due season, how good *it is!*

24 The way of life *winds* upward for the wise,
That he may turn away from hell[a] below.

25 The Lord will destroy the house of the proud,
But He will establish the boundary of the widow.

26 The thoughts of the wicked *are* an abomination to the Lord,
But the words of the pure *are* pleasant.

27 He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house,
But he who hates bribes will live.

28 The heart of the righteous studies how to answer,
But the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.

29 The Lord *is* far from the wicked,
But He hears the prayer of the righteous.

30 The light of the eyes rejoices the heart,
And a good report makes the bones healthy.[a]

31 The ear that hears the rebukes of life
Will abide among the wise.
32 He who disdains instruction despises his own soul,
But he who heeds rebuke gets understanding.
33 The fear of the Lord *is* the instruction of wisdom,
And before honor *is* humility.

15:17 [a]Or *vegetables* **15:24** [a]Or *Sheol* **15:30** [a]Literally *fat*

became a battleground, such security meant survival.

Hitler youth roamed the neighborhoods looking for trouble. Young Heinz learned to keep his eyes open. When he saw a band of troublemakers, he would step to the other side of the street. Sometimes he would escape a fight—sometimes not.

One day, in 1934, a pivotal confrontation occurred. Heinz found himself face-to-face with a Hitler bully. A beating appeared inevitable. This time, however, he walked away unhurt—not because of what he did, but because of what he said. He didn't fight back; he spoke up. He convinced the troublemakers that a fight was not necessary. His words kept battle at bay. And Heinz saw firsthand how the tongue can create peace.

He learned the skill of using words to avoid conflict. And for a young Jew in Hitler-ridden Europe, that skill had many opportunities to be honed.

Fortunately, Heinz's family escaped from Bavaria and made their way to America. Later in life, he would downplay the impact those adolescent experiences had on his development.

But one has to wonder. For after Heinz grew up, his name became synonymous with peace negotiations. His legacy became that of a bridge builder. Somewhere he had learned the power of the properly placed word of peace. And one has to wonder if his training didn't come on the streets of Bavaria.

You don't know him as Heinz. You know him by his Anglicized name, Henry. Henry Kissinger.

Never underestimate the power of a seed. (From *The*

Applause of Heaven by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
This chapter has nine proverbs that deal directly with your relationship with God. Select three of them to help you improve your relationship with Him.

EXPLORATION
Continual Devotion—Psalm 119:147, 148; Matthew 13:44–46; Mark 12:28–30; Romans 12:11, 12; Galatians 6:9.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 16:1–33

SITUATION
Solomon knew that when his actions and motives pleased God, God rewarded him with peace. When pride and greed entered his heart, he began to travel down the road to chaos and destruction.

OBSERVATION
No matter what good we do, God knows our motivation for doing it. God judges our motives, not simply our actions. And He hates pride.

INSPIRATION
I know a frog who . . . had a real problem. His home pond was drying up. If he didn't find water soon, he would do the same. Word reached him of a vibrant stream over the adjacent hill. If only he could live there. But how could he? The short legs of a frog were not made for long journeys.

But then he had an idea. Convincing two birds to carry either end of a stick, he bit the center and held on as they flew. As they winged toward the new water, his jaws clamped

16 The preparations of the heart *belong* to man,
But the answer of the tongue *is* from the Lord.

2 All the ways of a man *are* pure in his own eyes,
But the Lord weighs the spirits.

3 Commit your works to the Lord,
And your thoughts will be established.

4 The Lord has made all for Himself,
Yes, even the wicked for the day of doom.

5 Everyone proud in heart *is* an abomination to the Lord;
Though they join forces,[a] none will go unpunished.

6 In mercy and truth
Atonement is provided for iniquity;
And by the fear of the Lord *one* departs from evil.

7 When a man's ways please the Lord,
He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

8 Better *is* a little with righteousness,
Than vast revenues without justice.

9 A man's heart plans his way,
But the Lord directs his steps.

10 Divination *is* on the lips of the king;
His mouth must not transgress in judgment.
11 Honest weights and scales *are* the Lord's;
All the weights in the bag *are* His work.
12 *It is* an abomination for kings to commit wickedness,
For a throne is established by righteousness.
13 Righteous lips *are* the delight of kings,
And they love him who speaks *what is* right.
14 As messengers of death *is* the king's wrath,
But a wise man will appease it.
15 In the light of the king's face *is* life,
And his favor *is* like a cloud of the latter rain.

16 How much better to get wisdom than gold!
And to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.

17 The highway of the upright *is* to depart from evil;
He who keeps his way preserves his soul.

18 Pride *goes* before destruction,
And a haughty spirit before a fall.
19 Better *to be* of a humble spirit with the lowly,
Than to divide the spoil with the proud.

16:5 [a] Literally *hand to hand*

20 He who heeds the word wisely will find good,
And whoever trusts in the Lord, happy *is* he.

21 The wise in heart will be called prudent,
And sweetness of the lips increases learning.

22 Understanding *is* a wellspring of life to him who has it.
But the correction of fools *is* folly.

23 The heart of the wise teaches his mouth,
And adds learning to his lips.

24 Pleasant words *are like* a honeycomb,
Sweetness to the soul and health to the bones.

25 There is a way *that seems* right to a man,
But its end *is* the way of death.

26 The person who labors, labors for himself,
For his *hungry* mouth drives him *on.*

27 An ungodly man digs up evil,
And *it is* on his lips like a burning fire.
28 A perverse man sows strife,
And a whisperer separates the best of friends.
29 A violent man entices his neighbor,
And leads him in a way *that is* not good.
30 He winks his eye to devise perverse things;
He purses his lips *and* brings about evil.

31 The silver-haired head *is* a crown of glory,
If it is found in the way of righteousness.

32 *He who is* slow to anger *is* better than the mighty,
And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

33 The lot is cast into the lap,
But its every decision *is* from the Lord.

17 Better *is* a dry morsel with quietness,
Than a house full of feasting[a] *with* strife.

2 A wise servant will rule over a son who causes shame,
And will share an inheritance among the brothers.

3 The refining pot *is* for silver and the furnace for gold,
But the Lord tests the hearts.

4 An evildoer gives heed to false lips;
A liar listens eagerly to a spiteful tongue.

17:1 [a]Or *sacrificial meals*

tightly. It was quite a sight! Two birds, one stick, and a frog in the middle. Down below, a cow in a pasture saw them passing overhead. Impressed, he wondered aloud, "Now who came up with that idea?"

The frog overheard his question and couldn't resist a reply. "I diiiiiiii… "

Don't make the same mistake. "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). Why are you good at what you do? For your comfort? For your retirement? For your self-esteem? No. Deem these as bonuses, not as the reason. Why are you good at what you do? For God's sake. Your success is not about what you do. It's all about Him—His present and future glory. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Are you fooling God? It can't be done! You can't just "go through the motions." Is pride getting in the way? Live a genuine life of faith today by praying that God will guide your heart and mind. Then He will direct your actions.

EXPLORATION
Heart—1 Samuel 16:7; Proverbs 4:23; Jeremiah 17:9, 10; Luke 6:45.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 17:1–28

SITUATION
God judges every person by the same standard. He condemns evil.

OBSERVATION
Wisdom does not come naturally. We gain it by respecting God and making careful choices.

INSPIRATION

My teenage acquaintances included a handful of Christians, none of whom were cool. One minister's daughter passed on beer parties and gossip. As a result, she spent most lunch hours and Friday nights alone. A tennis player came back from summer break with a Bible bumper sticker on his car and a smile on his face. We called him a Jesus freak.

My voice was among the mockers. It shouldn't have been, but it was. Somewhere inside I knew better, but I didn't go there for advice. My parents took me to church. My minister told me about Christ. But did I make a big deal about God or the church? No. I had something far more important to promote.

My reputation. An athlete, a flirt, a beer drinker, a partyer. I polished and protected my reputation like a '65 Mustang. What mattered most to me was people's opinion of me.

But then I went off to college and heard a professor describe a Christ I'd never seen. A people-loving and death-defeating Christ. A Jesus who made time for the lonely, the losers . . . a Jesus who died for hypocrites like me. So I signed up. As much as I could, I gave Him my heart.

Not long after that decision, I traveled home to meet some of the old gang. Only minutes into the trip I grew nervous. My friends didn't know about my faith. I wasn't sure I wanted them to. . . .

I went to the hometown party. As expected, everyone asked questions like, "What's the latest?" I told them. Not gracefully or eloquently . . . but honestly. "My faith," I remember

5 He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker;
He who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.

6 Children's children *are* the crown of old men,
And the glory of children *is* their father.

7 Excellent speech is not becoming to a fool,
Much less lying lips to a prince.

8 A present *is* a precious stone in the eyes of its possessor;
Wherever he turns, he prospers.

9 He who covers a transgression seeks love,
But he who repeats a matter separates friends.

10 Rebuke is more effective for a wise *man*
Than a hundred blows on a fool.

11 An evil *man* seeks only rebellion;
Therefore a cruel messenger will be sent against him.

12 Let a man meet a bear robbed of her cubs,
Rather than a fool in his folly.

13 Whoever rewards evil for good,
Evil will not depart from his house.

14 The beginning of strife *is like* releasing water;
Therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts.

15 He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just,
Both of them alike *are* an abomination to the Lord.

16 Why *is there* in the hand of a fool the purchase price of wisdom,
Since *he has* no heart *for it?*

17 A friend loves at all times,
And a brother is born for adversity.

18 A man devoid of understanding shakes hands in a pledge,
And becomes surety for his friend.

19 He who loves transgression loves strife,
And he who exalts his gate seeks destruction.

20 He who has a deceitful heart finds no good,
And he who has a perverse tongue falls into evil.

21 He who begets a scoffer *does so* to his sorrow,
And the father of a fool has no joy.

22 A merry heart does good, *like* medicine,[a]
But a broken spirit dries the bones.

23 A wicked *man* accepts a bribe behind the back[a]
To pervert the ways of justice.

24 Wisdom *is* in the sight of him who has understanding,
But the eyes of a fool *are* on the ends of the earth.

25 A foolish son *is* a grief to his father,
And bitterness to her who bore him.

26 Also, to punish the righteous *is* not good,
Nor to strike princes for *their* uprightness.

27 He who has knowledge spares his words,
And a man of understanding is of a calm spirit.
28 Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace;
When he shuts his lips, *he is considered* perceptive.

18 A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire;
He rages against all wise judgment.

2 A fool has no delight in understanding,
But in expressing his own heart.

3 When the wicked comes, contempt comes also;
And with dishonor *comes* reproach.

4 The words of a man's mouth *are* deep waters;
The wellspring of wisdom *is* a flowing brook.

5 *It is* not good to show partiality to the wicked,
Or to overthrow the righteous in judgment.

6 A fool's lips enter into contention,
And his mouth calls for blows.
7 A fool's mouth *is* his destruction,
And his lips *are* the snare of his soul.
8 The words of a talebearer *are* like tasty trifles,[a]
And they go down into the inmost body.

9 He who is slothful in his work
Is a brother to him who is a great destroyer.

10 The name of the Lord *is* a strong tower;
The righteous run to it and are safe.
11 The rich man's wealth *is* his strong city,
And like a high wall in his own esteem.

17:22 [a]Or *makes medicine even better* **17:23** [a]Literally *from the bosom*
18:8 [a]A Jewish tradition reads *wounds.*

saying. "I'm taking faith real seriously."

A few rolled their eyes. Others made mental notes to remove my name from their party list. But one or two found their way over and confided, "I've been thinking the same thing."

Turns out I wasn't standing alone after all. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
As the book of Proverbs continually points out, wisdom is of great value—and true wisdom is found in a relationship with God. Only in learning His Word will you find wisdom and discernment to help you make right choices.

EXPLORATION
Faith—Psalm 20:7; John 14:14–17; Hebrews 11:1.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 18:1–24

SITUATION
For Jews, the individual was not separate from the community. Antisocial behavior was considered a terrible crime in Israel and Judah.

OBSERVATION
There are three warnings in this chapter against forming hasty opinions.

INSPIRATION
We aren't good enough to judge. Can the hungry accuse the beggar? Can the sick mock the ill? Can the blind judge the deaf? Can the sinner condemn the sinner? No. Only One can judge, and that One is neither writing nor reading this book.

Not only are we unworthy, we are unqualified. We don't know

enough about the person to judge him. We don't know enough about his past. We condemn a man for stumbling this morning, but we didn't see the blows he took yesterday. We judge a woman for the limp in her walk but cannot see the tack in her shoe. We mock the fear in their eyes but have no idea how many stones they have ducked or darts they have dodged.

Are they too loud? Perhaps they fear being neglected again. Are they too timid? Perhaps they fear failing again. Too slow? Perhaps they fell the last time they hurried. You don't know. Only one who has followed yesterday's steps can be their judge.

Not only are we ignorant about yesterday, we are ignorant about tomorrow. Dare we judge a book while chapters are yet unwritten? Should we pass a verdict on a painting while the artist still holds the brush? How can you dismiss a soul until God's work is complete? "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

Be careful! The Peter who denies Jesus at tonight's fire may proclaim Him with fire at tomorrow's Pentecost. The Samson who is blind and weak today may use his final strength to level the pillars of godlessness. A stammering shepherd in this generation may be the mighty Moses of the next. Don't call Noah a fool, you may be asking him for a lift. "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes" (1 Corinthians 4:5).

A condemned criminal was sent to his death by his country. In his final moments, he asked for mercy. Had he asked for mercy from the people, it would have been denied.

12 Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty,
And before honor *is* humility.

13 He who answers a matter before he hears *it,*
It *is* folly and shame to him.

14 The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness,
But who can bear a broken spirit?

15 The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge,
And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.

16 A man's gift makes room for him,
And brings him before great men.

17 The first *one* to plead his cause *seems* right,
Until his neighbor comes and examines him.

18 Casting lots causes contentions to cease,
And keeps the mighty apart.

19 A brother offended *is harder to win* than a strong city,
And contentions *are* like the bars of a castle.

20 A man's stomach shall be satisfied from the fruit of his mouth;
From the produce of his lips he shall be filled.

21 Death and life *are* in the power of the tongue,
And those who love it will eat its fruit.

22 *He who* finds a wife finds a good *thing,*
And obtains favor from the Lord.

23 The poor *man* uses entreaties,
But the rich answers roughly.

24 A man *who has* friends must himself be friendly,[a]
But there is a friend *who* sticks closer than a brother.

19 Better *is* the poor who walks in his integrity
Than *one who is* perverse in his lips, and is a fool.

2 Also it is not good *for* a soul *to be* without knowledge,
And he sins who hastens with *his* feet.

3 The foolishness of a man twists his way,
And his heart frets against the Lord.

4 Wealth makes many friends,
But the poor is separated from his friend.

18:24 [a]Following Greek manuscripts, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text reads *may come to ruin.*

5 A false witness will not go unpunished,
And *he who* speaks lies will not escape.

6 Many entreat the favor of the nobility,
And every man *is* a friend to one who gives gifts.
7 All the brothers of the poor hate him;
How much more do his friends go far from him!
He may pursue *them with* words, *yet* they abandon *him.*

8 He who gets wisdom loves his own soul;
He who keeps understanding will find good.

9 A false witness will not go unpunished,
And *he who* speaks lies shall perish.

10 Luxury is not fitting for a fool,
Much less for a servant to rule over princes.

11 The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger,
And his glory *is* to overlook a transgression.

12 The king's wrath *is* like the roaring of a lion,
But his favor *is* like dew on the grass.

13 A foolish son *is* the ruin of his father,
And the contentions of a wife *are* a continual dripping.

14 Houses and riches *are* an inheritance from fathers,
But a prudent wife *is* from the Lord.

15 Laziness casts *one* into a deep sleep,
And an idle person will suffer hunger.

16 He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul,
But he who is careless[a] of his ways will die.

17 He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord,
And He will pay back what he has given.

18 Chasten your son while there is hope,
And do not set your heart on his destruction.[a]

19 *A man of* great wrath will suffer punishment;
For if you rescue *him,* you will have to do it again.

20 Listen to counsel and receive instruction,
That you may be wise in your latter days.

21 There are many plans in a man's heart,
Nevertheless the Lord's counsel—that will stand.

19:16 [a]Literally *despises,* figurative of recklessness or carelessness **19:18** [a]Literally *to put him to death;* a Jewish tradition reads *on his crying.*

Had he asked it of the government, it would have been declined. Had he asked it of his victims, they would have turned a deaf ear. But it wasn't to these he turned for grace. He turned instead to the bloodied form of the One who hung on the cross next to his and pleaded, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus answered by saying, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Are you consciously or subconsciously judging someone? Try to determine what is behind your attitude. Are you jumping to conclusions? Do you know the whole story? List a number of reasons why you are unqualified to be that person's judge. Ask God to give you a heart of compassion instead.

EXPLORATION
Warnings Against Judging—Matthew 7:1–5; 1 Corinthians 4:5; James 4:11, 12.

Life LESSONS

Proverbs 19:1–29

SITUATION
Solomon contrasted foolishness with wisdom, wealth with poverty, and falsehood with truth.

OBSERVATION
Keep the highest standards for God in your thoughts and actions. Many principles Proverbs describe what good parents want to teach their children, in addition to pointing out the importance of discipline (19:18; also 13:24; 29:15, 17).

INSPIRATION

Parents, we can't protect children from every threat in life, but we can take them to the Source of life. We can entrust our kids to Christ. Even then, however, our shoreline appeals may be followed by a difficult choice.

As Jairus and Jesus were going to Jairus's home, "someone came from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, 'Your daughter is dead. Do not trouble the Teacher'" (Luke 8:49, 50).

Jairus was whipsawed between the contrasting messages. The first, from the servants: "Your daughter is dead." The second, from Jesus: "Do not be afraid." Horror called from one side. Hope compelled from the other. Tragedy, then trust. Jairus heard two voices and had to choose which one he would heed.

Don't we all?

The hard reality of parenting reads something like this: you can do your best and still stand where Jairus stood. You can protect, pray, and keep all the bogeymen at bay and still find yourself in an ER at midnight or a drug rehab clinic on visitors' Sunday, choosing between two voices: despair and belief. Jairus could have chosen despair. Who would have faulted him for deciding "Enough is enough"? He had no guarantee that Jesus could help. His daughter was dead. Jairus could have walked away. As parents, we're so glad he didn't. . . .

[God] never dismisses a parent's prayer. Keep giving your child to God, and in the right time and the right way, God will give your child back to you. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

22 What is desired in a man is kindness,
And a poor man is better than a liar.

23 The fear of the Lord *leads* to life,
And *he who has it* will abide in satisfaction;
He will not be visited with evil.

24 A lazy *man* buries his hand in the bowl,[a]
And will not so much as bring it to his mouth again.

25 Strike a scoffer, and the simple will become wary;
Rebuke one who has understanding, *and* he will discern knowledge.

26 He who mistreats *his* father *and* chases away *his* mother
Is a son who causes shame and brings reproach.

27 Cease listening to instruction, my son,
And you will stray from the words of knowledge.

28 A disreputable witness scorns justice,
And the mouth of the wicked devours iniquity.

29 Judgments are prepared for scoffers,
And beatings for the backs of fools.

20 Wine *is* a mocker,
Strong drink *is* a brawler,
And whoever is led astray by it is not wise.

2 The wrath[a] of a king *is* like the roaring of a lion;
Whoever provokes him to anger sins *against* his own life.

3 *It is* honorable for a man to stop striving,
Since any fool can start a quarrel.

4 The lazy *man* will not plow because of winter;
He will beg during harvest and *have* nothing.

5 Counsel in the heart of man *is like* deep water,
But a man of understanding will draw it out.

6 Most men will proclaim each his own goodness,
But who can find a faithful man?

7 The righteous *man* walks in his integrity;
His children *are* blessed after him.

8 A king who sits on the throne of judgment
Scatters all evil with his eyes.

19:24 [a]Septuagint and Syriac read *bosom;* Targum and Vulgate read *armpit.*
20:2 [a]Literally *fear* or *terror* which is produced by the king's wrath

9 Who can say, "I have made my heart clean,
I am pure from my sin"?

10 Diverse weights *and* diverse measures,
They *are* both alike, an abomination to the Lord.

11 Even a child is known by his deeds,
Whether what he does *is* pure and right.

12 The hearing ear and the seeing eye,
The Lord has made them both.

13 Do not love sleep, lest you come to poverty;
Open your eyes, *and* you will be satisfied with bread.

14 "*It is* good for nothing,"[a] cries the buyer;
But when he has gone his way, then he boasts.

15 There is gold and a multitude of rubies,
But the lips of knowledge *are* a precious jewel.

16 Take the garment of one who is surety *for* a stranger,
And hold it as a pledge *when it* is for a seductress.

17 Bread gained by deceit *is* sweet to a man,
But afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel.

18 Plans are established by counsel;
By wise counsel wage war.

19 He who goes about *as* a talebearer reveals secrets;
Therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips.

20 Whoever curses his father or his mother,
His lamp will be put out in deep darkness.

21 An inheritance gained hastily at the beginning
Will not be blessed at the end.

22 Do not say, "I will recompense evil";
Wait for the Lord, and He will save you.

23 Diverse weights *are* an abomination to the Lord,
And dishonest scales *are* not good.

24 A man's steps *are* of the Lord;
How then can a man understand his own way?

25 *It is* a snare for a man to devote rashly *something as* holy,
And afterward to reconsider *his* vows.

20:14 [a]Literally *evil, evil*

APPLICATION
Parents can only do their very best to raise their children to follow the Lord, but children will make their own choices. Parents must continue giving their children to God and trusting them to His care.

EXPLORATION
Obeying God's Principles—Matthew 7:24–27; 1 Corinthians 2:14–16; James 1:22–25; 1 Peter 1:13–16.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 20:1–30

SITUATION
Solomon wrote more proverbs. If readers followed these words of wisdom, Solomon promised that God would approve of their lives.

OBSERVATION
Sin takes many forms: gossip, laziness, drunkenness, and dishonesty.

INSPIRATION
Jesus' perfection silences us.

So how does he respond to our unholy hearts? Can a good cardiologist spot irregularity and dismiss it? Can God overlook our sins as innocent mistakes? No. He is the one and only judge. He issues decrees, not opinions; commands, not suggestions. They are truth. They emerge from His holy self. Violate them, and you dethrone Him—dethrone Him at the highest cost.

Jesus made His position clear: "Anyone whose life is not holy will never see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14 NCV). Hard-hearted souls will not populate heaven.

It is the "pure in heart" who will "see God" (Matthew 5:8). . . .

26 A wise king sifts out the wicked,
And brings the threshing wheel over them.

27 The spirit of a man *is* the lamp of the Lord,
Searching all the inner depths of his heart.[a]

28 Mercy and truth preserve the king,
And by lovingkindness he upholds his throne.

29 The glory of young men *is* their strength,
And the splendor of old men *is* their gray head.

30 Blows that hurt cleanse away evil,
As *do* stripes the inner depths of the heart.[a]

21 The king's heart *is* in the hand of the Lord,
Like the rivers of water;
He turns it wherever He wishes.

2 Every way of a man *is* right in his own eyes,
But the Lord weighs the hearts.

3 To do righteousness and justice
Is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.

4 A haughty look, a proud heart,
And the plowing[a] of the wicked *are* sin.

5 The plans of the diligent *lead* surely to plenty,
But *those of* everyone *who is* hasty, surely to poverty.

6 Getting treasures by a lying tongue
Is the fleeting fantasy of those who seek death.[a]

7 The violence of the wicked will destroy them,[a]
Because they refuse to do justice.

8 The way of a guilty man *is* perverse;[a]
But *as for* the pure, his work *is* right.

9 Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop,
Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

10 The soul of the wicked desires evil;
His neighbor finds no favor in his eyes.

11 When the scoffer is punished, the simple is made wise;
But when the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge.

20:27 [a]Literally *the rooms of the belly* **20:30** [a]Literally *the rooms of the belly* **21:4** [a]Or *lamp* **21:6** [a]Septuagint reads *Pursue vanity on the snares of death;* Vulgate reads *Is vain and foolish, and shall stumble on the snares of death;* Targum reads *They shall be destroyed, and they shall fall who seek death.* **21:7** [a]Literally *drag them away* **21:8** [a]Or *The way of a man is perverse and strange*

Christ exchanged hearts with you. Yes, your thieving, lying, adulterous, and murderous heart. He placed your sin in Himself and invited God to punish it. "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What sin do you wrestle with? How long has it been a problem? Seek God for victory. Ask Him to help you throw that habit out of your life today.

EXPLORATION
Victory over Sin and Temptation—Proverbs 1:10; Daniel 1:8; Romans 6:13; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 John 5:3–5.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 21:1–31

SITUATION
Solomon gave advice to moral people and warnings to the wicked ones. A God-honoring lifestyle will bring God's reward, but a selfish, wicked lifestyle leads to ruin.

OBSERVATION
The wicked are marked by arrogance and pride. The righteous are marked by humility.

INSPIRATION
Be quick to applaud the success of others. To the Romans, Paul gives this counsel: "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another" (Romans 12:10).

William Barclay tells of a respected educator of a century past. He was known not just for his success but the way he handled it. On one occasion as he stepped to a seat on a platform,

12 The righteous *God* wisely considers the house of the wicked,
Overthrowing the wicked for *their* wickedness.

13 Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor
Will also cry himself and not be heard.

14 A gift in secret pacifies anger,
And a bribe behind the back,[a] strong wrath.

15 *It is* a joy for the just to do justice,
But destruction *will come* to the workers of iniquity.

16 A man who wanders from the way of understanding
Will rest in the assembly of the dead.

17 He who loves pleasure *will be* a poor man;
He who loves wine and oil will not be rich.

18 The wicked *shall be* a ransom for the righteous,
And the unfaithful for the upright.

19 Better to dwell in the wilderness,
Than with a contentious and angry woman.

20 *There is* desirable treasure,
And oil in the dwelling of the wise,
But a foolish man squanders it.

21 He who follows righteousness and mercy
Finds life, righteousness, and honor.

22 A wise *man* scales the city of the mighty,
And brings down the trusted stronghold.

23 Whoever guards his mouth and tongue
Keeps his soul from troubles.

24 A proud *and* haughty *man*—"Scoffer" *is* his name;
He acts with arrogant pride.

25 The desire of the lazy *man* kills him,
For his hands refuse to labor.
26 He covets greedily all day long,
But the righteous gives and does not spare.

27 The sacrifice of the wicked *is* an abomination;
How much more *when* he brings it with wicked intent!

28 A false witness shall perish,
But the man who hears *him* will speak endlessly.

21:14 [a] Literally *in the bosom*

the public noticed who he was and began to applaud. Shocked, he turned and asked the man behind him to go ahead. He then began to applaud the man, assuming the applause was for him, and he was quite willing to share in it.

The humble heart honors others.

Again, is Jesus not our example? Content to be known as a carpenter. Happy to be mistaken for the gardener. He served His followers by washing their feet. He serves us by doing the same. Each morning He gifts us with beauty. Each Sunday He calls us to His table. Each moment He dwells in our hearts. And does He not speak of the day when He as "the master . . . will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them" (Luke 12:37)?

If Jesus is so willing to honor us, can we not do the same for others? Make people a priority. Accept your part in His plan. Be quick to share the applause. And, most of all, regard others as more important than yourself. Love does. For love "does not parade itself, is not puffed up" (1 Corinthians 13:4).

Someone is piecing this all together. His thoughts are something like this: If I think you are more important than I am . . . and you think I am more important than you are . . . and he thinks she is more important than he is . . . and she thinks he is more important than she is . . . then in the end everyone feels important but no one acts important.

H'm. You think that's what God had in mind? (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

In what ways do you accept, respect, and honor those

29 A wicked man hardens his face,
But *as for* the upright, he establishes[a] his way.

30 *There is* no wisdom or understanding
Or counsel against the Lord.

31 The horse *is* prepared for the day of battle,
But deliverance *is* of the Lord.

22 A *good* name is to be chosen rather than great riches,
Loving favor rather than silver and gold.

2 The rich and the poor have this in common,
The Lord *is* the maker of them all.

3 A prudent *man* foresees evil and hides himself,
But the simple pass on and are punished.

4 By humility *and* the fear of the Lord
Are riches and honor and life.

5 Thorns *and* snares *are* in the way of the perverse;
He who guards his soul will be far from them.

6 Train up a child in the way he should go,
And when he is old he will not depart from it.

7 The rich rules over the poor,
And the borrower *is* servant to the lender.

8 He who sows iniquity will reap sorrow,
And the rod of his anger will fail.

9 He who has a generous eye will be blessed,
For he gives of his bread to the poor.

10 Cast out the scoffer, and contention will leave;
Yes, strife and reproach will cease.

11 He who loves purity of heart
And has grace on his lips,
The king *will be* his friend.

12 The eyes of the Lord preserve knowledge,
But He overthrows the words of the faithless.

13 The lazy *man* says, "*There is* a lion outside!
I shall be slain in the streets!"

21:29 [a]Qere and Septuagint read *understands.*

who have more than you? Practice humility not by putting yourself down, but by building others up. What friend, relative, or coworker can you regard as more important than yourself this week? Think of at least three specific ways you can build that person up this week.

EXPLORATION
Humility—Proverbs 15:33; 18:12; Philippians 2:1–11; Colossians 3:12; 1 Peter 5:5.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 22:1–29

SITUATION
The proverbs in this chapter point to the way for proper living. The promised rewards are more than just earthly accolades.

OBSERVATION
People should desire to have a good name, not because this brings status but because it honors God. Parents should train up their children to follow God's paths.

INSPIRATION
Like no one else, parents can unlock the door to a child's uncommonness. As parents, we accelerate or stifle, release or repress our children's giftedness. They will spend much of life benefiting or recovering from our influence. . . .

Listen closely to this maternity-ward reminder: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

Be careful with this verse. Don't interpret it to mean "If I put my kids on the right path, they'll never leave it. If I fill them full of Scripture and Bible lessons

14 The mouth of an immoral woman *is* a deep pit;
He who is abhorred by the Lord will fall there.

15 Foolishness *is* bound up in the heart of a child;
The rod of correction will drive it far from him.

16 He who oppresses the poor to increase his *riches,*
And he who gives to the rich, *will* surely *come* to poverty.

Sayings of the Wise

17 Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise,
And apply your heart to my knowledge;
18 For *it is* a pleasant thing if you keep them within you;
Let them all be fixed upon your lips,
19 So that your trust may be in the Lord;
I have instructed you today, even you.
20 Have I not written to you excellent things
Of counsels and knowledge,
21 That I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth,
That you may answer words of truth
To those who send to you?

22 Do not rob the poor because he *is* poor,
Nor oppress the afflicted at the gate;
23 For the Lord will plead their cause,
And plunder the soul of those who plunder them.

24 Make no friendship with an angry man,
And with a furious man do not go,
25 Lest you learn his ways
And set a snare for your soul.

26 Do not be one of those who shakes hands in a pledge,
One of those who is surety for debts;
27 If you have nothing *with which* to pay,
Why should he take away your bed from under you?

28 Do not remove the ancient landmark
Which your fathers have set.

29 Do you see a man *who* excels in his work?
He will stand before kings;
He will not stand before unknown *men.*

23 When you sit down to eat with a ruler,
Consider carefully what *is* before you;
2 And put a knife to your throat
If you *are* a man given to appetite.
3 Do not desire his delicacies,
For they *are* deceptive food.

4 Do not overwork to be rich;
Because of your own understanding, cease!

and sermons, they may rebel, but they'll eventually return."

The proverb makes no such promise. Salvation is a work of God. Godly parents can prepare the soil and sow the seed, but God gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6). Moms and dads soften hearts, but can't control them. Show them the path? Yes. Force them to take it? No. . . .

The phrase "train up" descends from a root word that means to develop a thirst. Hebrew midwives awakened the thirst of a newborn by dipping a finger in a bowl of crushed dates and placing it in the baby's mouth. To "train up," then, means to awaken thirst.

Parents awaken thirst "in the way [the child] should go." (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How can you "awaken thirst" for God in the lives of the children in your world? Whether your own children, relatives, those of friends and neighbors, or children you see regularly, you have an opportunity to show them God's love for them.

EXPLORATION

A Good Name—1 Samuel 18:30; Ecclesiastes 7:1; Acts 6:3; 10:22; 16:2; 22:12; 2 Corinthians 8:18; 3 John 12.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 23:1–35

SITUATION
Solomon exhorted his hearers to avoid gluttony and drunkenness. He also advised them to respect older people.

OBSERVATION
Younger people can gain wisdom by learning from those who are older.

INSPIRATION
Don't you hate it when someone else reminds you?

The barber: "Getting a little thin on top here, Joe."

The stylist: "Next time you come in, Sue, we'll do something about these gray streaks."

The invitation: "You are invited to your thirtieth high school reunion."

Your doctor: "Nothing to worry about, Bill. Your condition is common for folks in their mid-age."

The dawning of old age. The first pages of the final chapters. A golden speck appears on the green leaves of your life, and you are brought face to wrinkled face with the fact that you are getting older. . . .

Everything hurts when you wake up. What doesn't hurt, doesn't work.

Your parents begin acting like your children.

The smile lines don't go away when you stop smiling.

And then—boom! The rain becomes a torrent. The gentle taps become thunder. Cardiac arrest. Empty nest. Forty candles. Bifocals. Boom. Boom! BOOM!

Now there is no denial. Ponce de Leon didn't find the fountain of youth, and neither will you. Oh, but

5 Will you set your eyes on that which is not?
For *riches* certainly make themselves wings;
They fly away like an eagle *toward* heaven.

6 Do not eat the bread of a miser,[a]
Nor desire his delicacies;
7 For as he thinks in his heart, so *is* he.
"Eat and drink!" he says to you,
But his heart is not with you.
8 The morsel you have eaten, you will vomit up,
And waste your pleasant words.

9 Do not speak in the hearing of a fool,
For he will despise the wisdom of your words.

10 Do not remove the ancient landmark,
Nor enter the fields of the fatherless;
11 For their Redeemer *is* mighty;
He will plead their cause against you.

12 Apply your heart to instruction,
And your ears to words of knowledge.

13 Do not withhold correction from a child,
For *if* you beat him with a rod, he will not die.
14 You shall beat him with a rod,
And deliver his soul from hell.[a]

15 My son, if your heart is wise,
My heart will rejoice—indeed, I myself;
16 Yes, my inmost being will rejoice
When your lips speak right things.

17 Do not let your heart envy sinners,
But *be zealous* for the fear of the Lord all the day;
18 For surely there is a hereafter,
And your hope will not be cut off.

19 Hear, my son, and be wise;
And guide your heart in the way.
20 Do not mix with winebibbers,
Or with gluttonous eaters of meat;
21 For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty,
And drowsiness will clothe *a man* with rags.

22 Listen to your father who begot you,
And do not despise your mother when she is old.

23 Buy the truth, and do not sell *it,*
Also wisdom and instruction and understanding.

23:6 [a]Literally *one who has an evil eye* **23:14** [a]Or *Sheol*

24 The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice,
And he who begets a wise *child* will delight in him.
25 Let your father and your mother be glad,
And let her who bore you rejoice.

26 My son, give me your heart,
And let your eyes observe my ways.
27 For a harlot *is* a deep pit,
And a seductress *is* a narrow well.
28 She also lies in wait as *for* a victim,
And increases the unfaithful among men.

29 Who has woe?
Who has sorrow?
Who has contentions?
Who has complaints?
Who has wounds without cause?
Who has redness of eyes?
30 Those who linger long at the wine,
Those who go in search of mixed wine.
31 Do not look on the wine when it is red,
When it sparkles in the cup,
When it swirls around smoothly;
32 At the last it bites like a serpent,
And stings like a viper.
33 Your eyes will see strange things,
And your heart will utter perverse things.
34 Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea,
Or like one who lies at the top of the mast, *saying:*
35 "They have struck me, *but* I was not hurt;
They have beaten me, but I did not feel *it.*
When shall I awake, that I may seek another *drink?*"

24 Do not be envious of evil men,
Nor desire to be with them;
2 For their heart devises violence,
And their lips talk of troublemaking.

3 Through wisdom a house is built,
And by understanding it is established;
4 By knowledge the rooms are filled
With all precious and pleasant riches.

5 A wise man *is* strong,
Yes, a man of knowledge increases strength;
6 For by wise counsel you will wage your own war,
And in a multitude of counselors *there is* safety.

7 Wisdom *is* too lofty for a fool;
He does not open his mouth in the gate.

8 He who plots to do evil
Will be called a schemer.

how we try. Barbells get pumped. Black hair gone gray goes black again, or better yet, blond. The van is traded in on a truck, a four-wheel-drive monster that will tackle the treacherous ravines of the interstate. The face gets stretched. The chin gets tucked. Breasts get a lift.

But try as we might, the calendar pages still turn. The clocks still tick. And the body still grows older. And with every new pill we take we are reminded that growing old is a pill that has to be swallowed. . . .

But the real pain is deeper. For some it is the hollowness of success. Life at the top of the ladder can be lonely. Mahogany desks grow cold. Sales awards tarnish. Diplomas fade. Sometimes a dream-come-true world has come true and it's less than you'd hoped. . . .

It can get even worse. Regret can lead to rebellion. Rebellion against the demands. Rebellion against the mundane. Rebellion against the ho-hum. Rebellion against whatever ties you down: your job, your government, your station wagon, or worse still . . . your family. . . .

Let me be very clear with my point: Growing old can be dangerous. The trail is treacherous and the pitfalls are many. One is wise to be prepared. You know it's coming. It's not like God kept the process a secret. It's not like you are blazing a trail as you grow older. It's not as if no one has ever done it before. Look around you. You have ample opportunity to prepare and ample case studies to consider. If growing old catches you by surprise, don't blame God. He gave you plenty of warning. He

also gave you plenty of advice. . . .

Read Jesus' admonition. "Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it" [Luke 9:24].

Your last chapters can be your best. Your final song can be your greatest. It could be that all of your life has prepared you for a grand exit. God's oldest have always been among His choicest. . . .

As we get older, our vision should improve. Not our vision of earth but our vision of heaven. Those who have spent their life looking for heaven gain a skip in their step as the city comes into view. . . .

And I hope you'll be ready when you get home. For you, age is no enemy. Age is a mile-marker—a gentle reminder that home has never been so near.

Tell that to your barber. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you listen to the wisdom of the elderly? Take time this week to talk with an older person and gain wisdom from that individual.

EXPLORATION

Overindulgence—Deuteronomy 21:20, 21; Proverbs 20:1; 28:7; Isaiah 5:11, 22; Habakkuk 2:15, 16; Luke 21:34; Romans 13:13, 14; 1 Thessalonians 5:7, 8.

Life LESSONS

Proverbs 24:1–34

SITUATION

Solomon admonished and warned, but he also motivated and encouraged.

9 The devising of foolishness *is* sin,
And the scoffer *is* an abomination to men.

10 *If* you faint in the day of adversity,
Your strength *is* small.

11 Deliver *those who* are drawn toward death,
And hold back *those* stumbling to the slaughter.
12 If you say, "Surely we did not know this,"
Does not He who weighs the hearts consider *it?*
He who keeps your soul, does He *not* know *it?*
And will He *not* render to *each* man according to his deeds?

13 My son, eat honey because *it is* good,
And the honeycomb *which is* sweet to your taste;
14 So *shall* the knowledge of wisdom *be* to your soul;
If you have found *it,* there is a prospect,
And your hope will not be cut off.

15 Do not lie in wait, O wicked *man,* against the dwelling of the righteous;
Do not plunder his resting place;
16 For a righteous *man* may fall seven times
And rise again,
But the wicked shall fall by calamity.

17 Do not rejoice when your enemy falls,
And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles;
18 Lest the Lord see *it,* and it displease Him,
And He turn away His wrath from him.

19 Do not fret because of evildoers,
Nor be envious of the wicked;
20 For there will be no prospect for the evil *man;*
The lamp of the wicked will be put out.

21 My son, fear the Lord and the king;
Do not associate with those given to change;
22 For their calamity will rise suddenly,
And who knows the ruin those two can bring?

Further Sayings of the Wise

23 These *things* also *belong* to the wise:
It is not good to show partiality in judgment.
24 He who says to the wicked, "You *are* righteous,"
Him the people will curse;
Nations will abhor him.
25 But those who rebuke *the wicked* will have delight,
And a good blessing will come upon them.

26 He who gives a right answer kisses the lips.

27 Prepare your outside work,
Make it fit for yourself in the field;
And afterward build your house.

28 Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause,
For would you deceive[a] with your lips?
29 Do not say, "I will do to him just as he has done to me;
I will render to the man according to his work."

30 I went by the field of the lazy *man,*
And by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding;
31 And there it was, all overgrown with thorns;
Its surface was covered with nettles;
Its stone wall was broken down.
32 When I saw *it,* I considered *it* well;
I looked on *it and* received instruction:
33 A little sleep, a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands to rest;
34 So shall your poverty come *like* a prowler,
And your need like an armed man.

Further Wise Sayings of Solomon

25 These also *are* proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied:

2 *It is* the glory of God to conceal a matter,
But the glory of kings *is* to search out a matter.

3 *As* the heavens for height and the earth for depth,
So the heart of kings *is* unsearchable.

4 Take away the dross from silver,
And it will go to the silversmith *for* jewelry.
5 Take away the wicked from before the king,
And his throne will be established in righteousness.

6 Do not exalt yourself in the presence of the king,
And do not stand in the place of the great;
7 For *it is* better that he say to you,
"Come up here,"
Than that you should be put lower in the presence of the prince,
Whom your eyes have seen.

8 Do not go hastily to court;
For what will you do in the end,
When your neighbor has put you to shame?
9 Debate your case with your neighbor,
And do not disclose the secret to another;
10 Lest he who hears *it* expose your shame,
And your reputation be ruined.

24:28 [a] Septuagint and Vulgate read *Do not deceive.*

OBSERVATION
Don't be jealous of evil people. Instead, live wisely—exemplify justice, honesty, and hard work.

INSPIRATION
Here's God's agenda for your day: to make you more like Jesus.

"God . . . decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son" (Romans 8:29 MSG). Do you see what God is doing? Shaping you "along the same lines as the life of his Son."

Jesus felt no guilt; God wants you to feel no guilt.

Jesus had no bad habits; God wants to do away with yours.

Jesus faced fears with courage; God wants you to do the same.

Jesus knew the difference between right and wrong; God wants us to know the same.

Jesus served others and gave His life for the lost; we can do likewise.

Jesus dealt with anxiety about death; you can too.

God's desire, His plan, His ultimate goal is to make you into the image of Christ. (From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Approach your day in a new way. How much time do you spend driving, working, or eating? What time is wasted? Replace wasted time with an activity that has value in the Kingdom of God.

EXPLORATION
Laziness—Proverbs 6:6–11; 18:9; Ecclesiastes 10:18; Romans 12:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:11, 12; Hebrews 6:11, 12.

11 A word fitly spoken *is like* apples of gold
In settings of silver.
12 *Like* an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold
Is a wise rebuker to an obedient ear.

13 Like the cold of snow in time of harvest
Is a faithful messenger to those who send him,
For he refreshes the soul of his masters.

14 Whoever falsely boasts of giving
Is like clouds and wind without rain.

15 By long forbearance a ruler is persuaded,
And a gentle tongue breaks a bone.

16 Have you found honey?
Eat only as much as you need,
Lest you be filled with it and vomit.

17 Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house,
Lest he become weary of you and hate you.

18 A man who bears false witness against his neighbor
Is like a club, a sword, and a sharp arrow.

19 Confidence in an unfaithful *man* in time of trouble
Is like a bad tooth and a foot out of joint.

20 *Like* one who takes away a garment in cold weather,
And like vinegar on soda,
Is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.

21 If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat;
And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;
22 For *so* you will heap coals of fire on his head,
And the Lord will reward you.

23 The north wind brings forth rain,
And a backbiting tongue an angry countenance.

24 *It is* better to dwell in a corner of a housetop,
Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

25 *As* cold water to a weary soul,
So *is* good news from a far country.

26 A righteous *man* who falters before the wicked
Is like a murky spring and a polluted well.

27 *It is* not good to eat much honey;
So to seek one's own glory *is not* glory.

Life LESSONS

Proverbs 25:1–28

SITUATION
Solomon encouraged his hearers to be wise and careful in their conversations.

OBSERVATION
Learning to control the tongue is an important step in self-control.

INSPIRATION
It's the Wild West in the Ancient East. [Read the story in 1 Samuel 25.]

All of a sudden, beauty appears. A daisy lifts her head in the desert; a swan lands at the meat packing plant; a whiff of perfume floats through the men's locker room. Abigail, the wife of Nabal, stands on the trail. Whereas he is brutish and mean, she was "a woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance" (1 Samuel 25:3).

Brains *and* beauty. Abigail puts both to work. When she learns of Nabal's crude response, she springs into action. With no word to her husband, she gathers gifts and races to intercept David. As David and his men descend a ravine, she takes her position, armed with "two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five sheep already dressed, five seahs of roasted grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and loaded them on donkeys" (25:18).

Four hundred men rein in their rides. Some gape at the food; others gawk at the female. She's good lookin' with good cookin', a combination that stops any army. . . .

Abigail's no fool. She

28 Whoever *has* no rule over his own spirit
Is like a city broken down, without walls.

26 As snow in summer and rain in harvest,
So honor is not fitting for a fool.

2 Like a flitting sparrow, like a flying swallow,
So a curse without cause shall not alight.

3 A whip for the horse,
A bridle for the donkey,
And a rod for the fool's back.
4 Do not answer a fool according to his folly,
Lest you also be like him.
5 Answer a fool according to his folly,
Lest he be wise in his own eyes.
6 He who sends a message by the hand of a fool
Cuts off *his own* feet *and* drinks violence.
7 *Like* the legs of the lame that hang limp
Is a proverb in the mouth of fools.
8 Like one who binds a stone in a sling
Is he who gives honor to a fool.
9 *Like* a thorn *that* goes into the hand of a drunkard
Is a proverb in the mouth of fools.
10 The great *God* who formed everything
Gives the fool *his* hire and the transgressor *his* wages.[a]
11 As a dog returns to his own vomit,
So a fool repeats his folly.
12 Do you see a man wise in his own eyes?
There is more hope for a fool than for him.

13 The lazy *man* says, "*There is* a lion in the road!
A fierce lion *is* in the streets!"
14 *As* a door turns on its hinges,
So *does* the lazy *man* on his bed.
15 The lazy *man* buries his hand in the bowl;[a]
It wearies him to bring it back to his mouth.
16 The lazy *man is* wiser in his own eyes
Than seven men who can answer sensibly.

17 He who passes by *and* meddles in a quarrel not his own
Is like one who takes a dog by the ears.

18 Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death,
19 *Is* the man *who* deceives his neighbor,
And says, "I was only joking!"

20 Where *there is* no wood, the fire goes out;
And where *there is* no talebearer, strife ceases.

26:10 [a]The Hebrew is difficult; ancient and modern translators differ greatly.
26:15 [a]Compare 19:24

knows the importance of the moment. She stands as the final barrier between her family and sure death. Falling at David's feet, she issues a plea worthy of a paragraph in Scripture. "On me, my lord, on me let this iniquity be! And please let your maidservant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your maidservant" (25:24). . . .

Meekness saved the day that day. Abigail's gentleness reversed a river of anger. Humility has such power. Apologies can disarm arguments. Contrition can defuse rage. Olive branches do more good than battle-axes ever will. "Soft speech can crush strong opposition" (Proverbs 25:15 NLT). (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Have words ever popped out of your mouth before you thought about them? Think before you respond. Never just blurt out an answer. Don't insult someone or carelessly criticize. Never be sarcastic, and be careful how you tease.

EXPLORATION
The Tongue and Self-control—Psalm 34:13; Proverbs 10:19; 21:23; Galatians 5:22, 23; James 1:26; 3:5–10; 2 Peter 1:5–7.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 26:1–28

SITUATION
Solomon warned: Beware of negative people who can hurt you. The fool, the lazy, and the gossip bring nothing but damage to your life.

OBSERVATION
If you can't help them

21 *As* charcoal *is* to burning coals, and wood to fire,
So *is* a contentious man to kindle strife.
22 The words of a talebearer *are* like tasty trifles,
And they go down into the inmost body.

23 Fervent lips with a wicked heart
Are like earthenware covered with silver dross.

24 He who hates, disguises *it* with his lips,
And lays up deceit within himself;
25 When he speaks kindly, do not believe him,
For *there are* seven abominations in his heart;
26 *Though his* hatred is covered by deceit,
His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly.

27 Whoever digs a pit will fall into it,
And he who rolls a stone will have it roll back on him.

28 A lying tongue hates *those who are* crushed by it,
And a flattering mouth works ruin.

27 Do not boast about tomorrow,
For you do not know what a day may bring forth.

2 Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth;
A stranger, and not your own lips.

3 A stone *is* heavy and sand *is* weighty,
But a fool's wrath *is* heavier than both of them.

4 Wrath *is* cruel and anger a torrent,
But who *is* able to stand before jealousy?

5 Open rebuke *is* better
Than love carefully concealed.

6 Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend,
But the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful.

7 A satisfied soul loathes the honeycomb,
But to a hungry soul every bitter thing *is* sweet.

8 Like a bird that wanders from its nest
Is a man who wanders from his place.

9 Ointment and perfume delight the heart,
And the sweetness of a man's friend *gives delight* by hearty counsel.

10 Do not forsake your own friend or your father's friend,
Nor go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity;
Better *is* a neighbor nearby than a brother far away.

change, detach yourself from people with a negative attitude.

INSPIRATION
Two types of voices command your attention today. Negative ones fill your mind with doubt, bitterness, and fear. Positive ones purvey hope and strength. Which ones will you choose to heed? You have a choice, you know. You ought to take "every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Do you let anyone who knocks on your door enter your house? Don't let every thought that surfaces dwell in your mind. Take it captive . . . make it obey Jesus. If it refuses, don't think it.

Negative thoughts never strengthen you. How many times have you cleared a traffic jam with your grumbles? Does groaning about bills make them disappear? Why moan about your aches and pains, problems and tasks?

"Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). (From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Put the brakes on negativity this week. Squash it like an intruding spider.

EXPLORATION
Negative People—Leviticus 26:14–35; Nehemiah 13:25–29; Psalm 57:4; Matthew 7:1–5.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 27:1–27

SITUATION
God wanted the Israelites to govern themselves with justice and wisdom.

11 My son, be wise, and make my heart glad,
That I may answer him who reproaches me.

12 A prudent *man* foresees evil *and* hides himself;
The simple pass on *and* are punished.

13 Take the garment of him who is surety for a stranger,
And hold it in pledge *when* he is surety for a seductress.

14 He who blesses his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning,
It will be counted a curse to him.

15 A continual dripping on a very rainy day
And a contentious woman are alike;
16 Whoever restrains her restrains the wind,
And grasps oil with his right hand.

17 *As* iron sharpens iron,
So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.

18 Whoever keeps the fig tree will eat its fruit;
So he who waits on his master will be honored.

19 As in water face *reflects* face,
So a man's heart *reveals* the man.

20 Hell[a] and Destruction[b] are never full;
So the eyes of man are never satisfied.

21 The refining pot *is* for silver and the furnace for gold,
And a man *is valued* by what others say of him.

22 Though you grind a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain,
Yet his foolishness will not depart from him.

23 Be diligent to know the state of your flocks,
And attend to your herds;
24 For riches *are* not forever,
Nor does a crown *endure* to all generations.
25 *When* the hay is removed, and the tender grass shows itself,
And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in,
26 The lambs *will provide* your clothing,
And the goats the price of a field;
27 *You shall have* enough goats' milk for your food,
For the food of your household,
And the nourishment of your maidservants.

27:20 [a]Or *Sheol* [b]Hebrew *Abaddon*

OBSERVATION

The writers of Proverbs saw sin as a constant and daily reality. Confession of sin results in God's mercy and forgiveness.

INSPIRATION

We must face the fact that there is something beastly within each and every one of us. Something beastly that makes us do things that surprise even us. Haven't you surprised yourself? Haven't you reflected on an act and wondered, "What got into me?"

The Bible has a three-letter answer for that question: S-I-N. There is something bad—beastly—within each of us. In theological terms, we are "totally depraved." Though made in God's image, we have fallen. We're corrupt at the core. The very center of our being is selfish and perverse. David said, "I was brought forth in iniquity" (Psalm 51:5). Could any of us say any less? Each one of us was born with a tendency to sin. Depravity is a universal condition.

Some would disagree with such strong words. They look around and say, "Compared to everyone else, I'm a decent person." You know, a pig might say something similar. He might look at his trough partners and announce, "I'm just as clean as everyone else." Compared to humans, however, that pig needs help. Compared to God, we humans need the same. The standard for sinlessness isn't found at the pig troughs of earth but at the throne of heaven. God, Himself, is the standard.

We are beasts. As French essayist Michel de Montaigne said, "There is no man so good, who, were he to submit all his thoughts and actions to the laws, would not deserve hanging

ten times in his life." Our deeds are ugly. Our actions are harsh. We don't do what we want to do, we don't like what we do, and what's worse—yes, there is something worse—we can't change.

We try, oh, how we try. But "can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil" (Jeremiah 13:23).

Still disagree? Still think the assessment is too harsh? If so, accept this challenge. For the next twenty-four hours lead a sinless life. I'm not asking for a perfect decade or year or even a perfect month. Just one perfect day. Can you do it? Can you live without sin for one day?

No? How about one hour? Could you promise that for the next sixty minutes you will have only pure thoughts and actions?

Still hesitant? Then how about the next five minutes? Five minutes of worry-free, anger-free, unselfish living—can you do it?

No? Nor can I.

Then we have a problem: We are sinners, and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

We have a problem: We are not holy, and "anyone whose life is not holy will never see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14 NCV).

We have a problem: We are evil, and "evil people are paid with punishment" (Proverbs 10:16 NCV). (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Sin is our unfortunate reality. We need a Savior. Have you found Him? With confession and repentance, you will find forgiveness.

EXPLORATION

Confessing Sins—Psalm

28 The wicked flee when no one pursues,
But the righteous are bold as a lion.

2 Because of the transgression of a land, many *are* its princes;
But by a man of understanding *and* knowledge
Right will be prolonged.

3 A poor man who oppresses the poor
Is like a driving rain which leaves no food.

4 Those who forsake the law praise the wicked,
But such as keep the law contend with them.

5 Evil men do not understand justice,
But those who seek the Lord understand all.

6 Better *is* the poor who walks in his integrity
Than one perverse *in his* ways, though he *be* rich.

7 Whoever keeps the law *is* a discerning son,
But a companion of gluttons shames his father.

8 One who increases his possessions by usury and extortion
Gathers it for him who will pity the poor.

9 One who turns away his ear from hearing the law,
Even his prayer *is* an abomination.

10 Whoever causes the upright to go astray in an evil way,
He himself will fall into his own pit;
But the blameless will inherit good.

11 The rich man *is* wise in his own eyes,
But the poor who has understanding searches him out.

12 When the righteous rejoice, *there is* great glory;
But when the wicked arise, men hide themselves.

13 He who covers his sins will not prosper,
But whoever confesses and forsakes *them* will have mercy.

14 Happy *is* the man who is always reverent,
But he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

15 *Like* a roaring lion and a charging bear
Is a wicked ruler over poor people.

16 A ruler who lacks understanding *is* a great oppressor,
But he who hates covetousness will prolong *his* days.

17 A man burdened with bloodshed will flee into a pit;
Let no one help him.

18 Whoever walks blamelessly will be saved,
But *he who is* perverse *in his* ways will suddenly fall.

19 He who tills his land will have plenty of bread,
But he who follows frivolity will have poverty enough!

20 A faithful man will abound with blessings,
But he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished.

21 To show partiality *is* not good,
Because for a piece of bread a man will transgress.

22 A man with an evil eye hastens after riches,
And does not consider that poverty will come upon him.

23 He who rebukes a man will find more favor afterward
Than he who flatters with the tongue.

24 Whoever robs his father or his mother,
And says, "*It is* no transgression,"
The same *is* companion to a destroyer.

25 He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife,
But he who trusts in the Lord will be prospered.

26 He who trusts in his own heart is a fool,
But whoever walks wisely will be delivered.

27 He who gives to the poor will not lack,
But he who hides his eyes will have many curses.

28 When the wicked arise, men hide themselves;
But when they perish, the righteous increase.

29 He who is often rebuked, *and* hardens *his* neck,
Will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

2 When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice;
But when a wicked *man* rules, the people groan.

3 Whoever loves wisdom makes his father rejoice,
But a companion of harlots wastes *his* wealth.

4 The king establishes the land by justice,
But he who receives bribes overthrows it.

5 A man who flatters his neighbor
Spreads a net for his feet.

6 By transgression an evil man is snared,
But the righteous sings and rejoices.

32:1–5; 51:1–9; Luke 11:4; James 5:16; 1 John 1:5–10.

Life Lessons

Proverbs 28:1–28

SITUATION
Proverbs describes two paths of living—obedience to God or one's own way. Readers do well to heed God's way and God's plan.

OBSERVATION
The Book of Proverbs is helpful only as long as we do not harden our hearts to its message.

INSPIRATION
We still face fears without facing God.

He sends Exodus-level demonstrations of power: sunsets, starry nights, immeasurable oceans. He solves Red Sea–caliber problems and air-drops blessings like morning manna. But let one crisis surface, let Moses disappear for a few hours, and we tornado into chaos. Rather than turn to God, we turn from Him, hardening our hearts. The result? Cow-worshiping folly. [See the full story in Exodus 32.]

According to heaven's medical diagnosis: "[Hardhearted people] are hopelessly confused. Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him. They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity" (Ephesians 4:17–19 NLT, emphasis mine).

Measure the irregular pulse of the hard heart:

- "Hopelessly confused"

• "Minds . . . of darkness"
• "Have no sense of shame"
• "Live for lustful pleasure"
• "Practice every kind of impurity"

Morticians render a brighter diagnosis. No wonder Scripture says, "he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity" (Proverbs 28:14). . . .

Here's how [to have a softened heart]: Don't forget what God has done for you. Jesus performed two bread-multiplying miracles: in one He fed five thousand people, in the other four thousand. Still, his disciples, who witnessed both feasts, worried about empty pantries. A frustrated Jesus rebuked them: "Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened?" (Mark 8:17, 18). (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What sins do you need to confess in your life? Take time daily to come before God and ask Him for forgiveness. Don't let your heart become hardened to God's words to you. Ask for forgiveness and receive his grace and mercy thankfully.

EXPLORATION

Repentance—Leviticus 26:40-42; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Job 22:23; Proverbs 1:23-33; Malachi 3:7; Acts 17:30; James 4:8-10; 1 John 1:9.

7 The righteous considers the cause of the poor,
But the wicked does not understand *such* knowledge.

8 Scoffers set a city aflame,
But wise *men* turn away wrath.

9 *If* a wise man contends with a foolish man,
Whether *the fool* rages or laughs, *there is* no peace.

10 The bloodthirsty hate the blameless,
But the upright seek his well-being.[a]

11 A fool vents all his feelings,[a]
But a wise *man* holds them back.

12 If a ruler pays attention to lies,
All his servants *become* wicked.

13 The poor *man* and the oppressor have this in common:
The LORD gives light to the eyes of both.

14 The king who judges the poor with truth,
His throne will be established forever.

15 The rod and rebuke give wisdom,
But a child left *to himself* brings shame to his mother.

16 When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increases;
But the righteous will see their fall.

17 Correct your son, and he will give you rest;
Yes, he will give delight to your soul.

18 Where *there is* no revelation,[a] the people cast off restraint;
But happy *is* he who keeps the law.

19 A servant will not be corrected by mere words;
For though he understands, he will not respond.

20 Do you see a man hasty in his words?
There is more hope for a fool than for him.

21 He who pampers his servant from childhood
Will have him as a son in the end.

22 An angry man stirs up strife,
And a furious man abounds in transgression.

23 A man's pride will bring him low,
But the humble in spirit will retain honor.

29:10 [a]Literally *soul* **29:11** [a]Literally *spirit* **29:18** [a]Or *prophetic vision*

24 Whoever is a partner with a thief hates his own life;
He swears to tell the truth,[a] but reveals nothing.

25 The fear of man brings a snare,
But whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe.

26 Many seek the ruler's favor,
But justice for man *comes* from the Lord.

27 An unjust man *is* an abomination to the righteous,
And *he who is* upright in the way *is* an abomination to the wicked.

The Wisdom of Agur

30 The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, *his* utterance. This man declared to Ithiel—to Ithiel and Ucal:

2 Surely I *am* more stupid than *any* man,
And do not have the understanding of a man.
3 I neither learned wisdom
Nor have knowledge of the Holy One.

4 Who has ascended into heaven, or descended?
Who has gathered the wind in His fists?
Who has bound the waters in a garment?
Who has established all the ends of the earth?
What *is* His name, and what *is* His Son's name,
If you know?

5 Every word of God *is* pure;
He *is* a shield to those who put their trust in Him.
6 Do not add to His words,
Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.

7 Two *things* I request of You
(Deprive me not before I die):
8 Remove falsehood and lies far from me;
Give me neither poverty nor riches—
Feed me with the food allotted to me;
9 Lest I be full and deny *You,*
And say, "Who *is* the Lord?"
Or lest I be poor and steal,
And profane the name of my God.

10 Do not malign a servant to his master,
Lest he curse you, and you be found guilty.

11 *There is* a generation *that* curses its father,
And does not bless its mother.
12 *There is* a generation *that is* pure in its own eyes,

29:24 [a]Literally *hears the adjuration*

Life Lessons

Proverbs 29:1–27

SITUATION
Without the love and fear of God, Israel made mistakes. Without restraint and discipline, sin took over.

OBSERVATION
God's standards are crucial to our lives. Those who ignore them drift apart from God, but loving, God-fearing people prosper.

INSPIRATION
David, how are things with your children?

He winces at the subject. Fourteen years have passed since David seduced Bathsheba, thirteen years since Nathan told David, "The sword shall never depart from your house" (2 Samuel 12:10).

Nathan's prophecy has proved painfully true. One of David's sons, Amnon, fell in lust with his half-sister Tamar, one of David's daughters by another marriage. Amnon pined, plotted, and raped her. After the rape, he discarded Tamar like a worn doll.

Tamar, understandably, came undone. She threw ashes on her head and tore the robe of many colors worn by virgin daughters of the king. She "remained desolate in her brother Absalom's house" (13:20). The next verse tells us David's response: "When King David heard of all these things, he was very angry."

That's it? That's all? We want a longer verse. We want a few verbs. Confront will do. Punish would be nice. Banish even better. We expect to read, "David was very angry and . . . confronted

Amnon or punished Amnon or banished Amnon." But what did David do to Amnon?

Nothing. No lecture. No penalty. No imprisonment. No dressing down. No chewing out. David did nothing to Amnon. . . .

David, the Homer Simpson of biblical dads. The picture of passivity. When we ask him about his kids, he just groans. . . .

David finally reunited with [Absalom], but it was too late. The seeds of bitterness had spread deep roots. Absalom resolved to overthrow his father. He recruited from David's army and staged a coup.

His takeover set the stage for the sad walk of David out of Jerusalem—up the Mount of Olives and into the wilderness. No crown. No city. Just a heavyhearted, lonely, old man. "So David went up by the ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went up; and he had his head covered and went barefoot" (2 Samuel 15:30).

Loyalists eventually chase Absalom down. When he tries to escape on horseback, his long hair tangles in a tree, and soldiers spear him. David hears the news and falls to pieces: "O my son Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!" (18:33).

Tardy tears. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God has set the example for parents. Children need rules to guide and protect them. If you are a parent, set clear, fair guidelines. Then be firm in implementing them.

EXPLORATION

God's Law—Exodus 15:25; 31:18; Deuteronomy 4:8; Galatians 2:15, 16.

Yet is not washed from its filthiness.
13 *There is* a generation—oh, how lofty are their eyes!
And their eyelids are lifted up.
14 *There is* a generation whose teeth *are like* swords,
And whose fangs *are like* knives,
To devour the poor from off the earth,
And the needy from *among* men.

15 The leech has two daughters—
Give *and* Give!

There are three *things that* are never satisfied,
Four never say, "Enough!":
16 The grave,[a]
The barren womb,
The earth *that* is not satisfied with water—
And the fire never says, "Enough!"

17 The eye *that* mocks *his* father,
And scorns obedience to *his* mother,
The ravens of the valley will pick it out,
And the young eagles will eat it.

18 There are three *things which* are too wonderful for me,
Yes, four *which* I do not understand:
19 The way of an eagle in the air,
The way of a serpent on a rock,
The way of a ship in the midst of the sea,
And the way of a man with a virgin.

20 This *is* the way of an adulterous woman:
She eats and wipes her mouth,
And says, "I have done no wickedness."

21 For three *things* the earth is perturbed,
Yes, for four it cannot bear up:
22 For a servant when he reigns,
A fool when he is filled with food,
23 A hateful *woman* when she is married,
And a maidservant who succeeds her mistress.

24 There are four *things which* are little on the earth,
But they *are* exceedingly wise:
25 The ants *are* a people not strong,
Yet they prepare their food in the summer;
26 The rock badgers[a] are a feeble folk,
Yet they make their homes in the crags;
27 The locusts have no king,
Yet they all advance in ranks;
28 The spider[a] skillfully grasps with its hands,
And it is in kings' palaces.

30:16 [a]Or *Sheol* **30:26** [a]Or *hyraxes* **30:28** [a]Or *lizard*

29 There are three *things which* are majestic in pace,
Yes, four *which* are stately in walk:
30 A lion, *which is* mighty among beasts
And does not turn away from any;
31 A greyhound,[a]
A male goat also,
And a king *whose* troops *are* with him.[b]

32 If you have been foolish in exalting yourself,
Or if you have devised evil, *put your* hand on *your* mouth.
33 For *as* the churning of milk produces butter,
And wringing the nose produces blood,
So the forcing of wrath produces strife.

The Words of King Lemuel's Mother

31 The words of King Lemuel, the utterance which his mother taught him:

2 What, my son?
And what, son of my womb?
And what, son of my vows?
3 Do not give your strength to women,
Nor your ways to that which destroys kings.

4 *It is* not for kings, O Lemuel,
It is not for kings to drink wine,
Nor for princes intoxicating drink;
5 Lest they drink and forget the law,
And pervert the justice of all the afflicted.
6 Give strong drink to him who is perishing,
And wine to those who are bitter of heart.
7 Let him drink and forget his poverty,
And remember his misery no more.

8 Open your mouth for the speechless,
In the cause of all *who are* appointed to die.[a]
9 Open your mouth, judge righteously,
And plead the cause of the poor and needy.

The Virtuous Wife

10 Who[a] can find a virtuous[b] wife?
For her worth *is* far above rubies.
11 The heart of her husband safely trusts her;
So he will have no lack of gain.
12 She does him good and not evil
All the days of her life.
13 She seeks wool and flax,

30:31 [a]Exact identity unknown [b]A Jewish tradition reads *a king against whom there is no uprising.* **31:8** [a]Literally *sons of passing away* **31:10** [a]Verses 10 through 31 are an alphabetic acrostic in Hebrew (compare Psalm 119). [b]Literally *a wife of valor,* in the sense of all forms of excellence

Life Lessons

Proverbs 30:1–33

SITUATION
Agur was a descendant from Abraham's son, Ishmael. Agur came from the Ancient Near East, which was famous for its wisdom.

OBSERVATION
In verses 11–14 Agur described four kinds of people: those who are disrespectful, hypocritical, arrogant, and oppressive. From such seeds, all types of conflicts can evolve.

INSPIRATION
Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional. Use your God-given creative energy to solve conflict before it escalates into combat.

Perhaps the seeds you sow in your areas of conflict won't reach maturity tomorrow, next week or even for a generation. Does that mean you shouldn't sow the seeds? No! It means you should sow the seeds *immediately.* Never underestimate the power of a seed of peace: the power of a kind word, a seed of apology, a phone call, an explanation. This is the way we serve a God of peace. (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "Conflict")

APPLICATION
List the ways in which you are sowing conflict and the ways in which you are sowing peace. If you are experiencing conflict with another person, ask God, a friend, or a pastor to intercede. Think of three ways you can begin to sow seeds of peace with that person.

EXPLORATION
Reconciliation—Matthew

And willingly works with her hands.
14 She is like the merchant ships,
She brings her food from afar.
15 She also rises while it is yet night,
And provides food for her household,
And a portion for her maidservants.
16 She considers a field and buys it;
From her profits she plants a vineyard.
17 She girds herself with strength,
And strengthens her arms.
18 She perceives that her merchandise *is* good,
And her lamp does not go out by night.
19 She stretches out her hands to the distaff,
And her hand holds the spindle.
20 She extends her hand to the poor,
Yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy.
21 She is not afraid of snow for her household,
For all her household *is* clothed with scarlet.
22 She makes tapestry for herself;
Her clothing *is* fine linen and purple.
23 Her husband is known in the gates,
When he sits among the elders of the land.
24 She makes linen garments and sells *them,*
And supplies sashes for the merchants.
25 Strength and honor *are* her clothing;
She shall rejoice in time to come.
26 She opens her mouth with wisdom,
And on her tongue *is* the law of kindness.
27 She watches over the ways of her household,
And does not eat the bread of idleness.
28 Her children rise up and call her blessed;
Her husband *also,* and he praises her:
29 "Many daughters have done well,
But you excel them all."
30 Charm *is* deceitful and beauty *is* passing,
But a woman *who* fears the Lord, she shall be praised.
31 Give her of the fruit of her hands,
And let her own works praise her in the gates.

5:24; Luke 15; Romans 5:9–11; 1 Corinthians 7:11; 2 Corinthians 5:18–20; Ephesians 2:13–22.

Life LESSONS

Proverbs 31:1–31

SITUATION
Proverbs began with a command to respect the Lord (1:7) and ended with the description of a woman who fulfilled this command.

OBSERVATION
A woman who respects God deserves more praise than one who is just physically beautiful. Caring for her family and caring for others—these characteristics are praised in this woman.

INSPIRATION
How would you have liked to be the one who opened his home for Jesus? You can be. "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40). As you welcome strangers to your table, you are welcoming God himself.

Something holy happens around a dinner table that will never happen in a sanctuary. In a church auditorium you see the backs of heads. Around the table you see the expressions on faces. In the auditorium one person speaks; around the table everyone has a voice. Church services are on the clock. Around the table there is time to talk.

Hospitality opens the door to uncommon community.

It's no accident that *hospitality* and *hospital* come from the same Latin word, for they both lead to the same result: healing. When you open your door to someone, you are sending this message: "You matter to me and to God." You may think you are saying, "Come over for a visit." But what your guest hears is, "I'm worth the effort."

Do you know people who need this message? Singles who eat alone? Young couples who are far from home? Coworkers who've been transferred, teens who feel left out, and seniors who no longer drive? Some people pass an entire day with no meaningful contact with anyone else. Your hospitality can be their hospital. . . .

The event need not be elaborate to be significant. Don't listen to the Martha Stewart voice, the voice that says everything must be perfect. The house must be perfect. The china must be perfect. Meal. Kids. Husband. Everything must be perfect. Scented guest towels, warm appetizers, after-dinner mints.

If we wait until everything is perfect, we'll never issue an invitation. Remember this: what is common to you is a banquet to someone else. You think your house is small, but to the lonely heart, it is a castle. You think the living room is a mess, but to the person whose life is a mess, your house is a sanctuary. You think the meal is simple, but to those who eat alone every night, pork and beans on paper plates tastes like filet mignon. What is small to you is huge to them.

Open your table. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What does your attitude toward your family and others show about how you feel about God?

EXPLORATION
Respecting the Lord—Proverbs 1:7. Good Wife—Ruth 3:11; Proverbs 31:10–31.

THE BOOK OF

ECCLESIASTES

INTRODUCTION

She didn't want to share her name, just her pain. So I cradled the phone against my shoulder and listened. Her husband had cheated. She was angry. Angry at him. Angry at God. Angry at herself for being angry. In two months she'd gone through three bottles of antidepressants. She didn't want to leave her room or see her friends. Weak and bitter she finally asked, "Max, will I ever be happy again?"

She's not the first to wonder.

As the drinker orders a double, he wonders.

As the achiever logs another eighteen-hour day, she wonders.

As the boss reaches for his secretary's hand, both wonder.

"Will I ever be happy again?"

There is a great dissatisfaction across the land. Hand after hand reaching out to quench thirsts and scratch itches. But the thirst lingers, the itch remains. As one man told me, "I learned that once I had what I wanted, I found I didn't want what I had."

Solomon could have said those words. He was unlimited in what he could do. Unbridled in what he could own. Unharnessed in what he could experience. So he set out to do it all.

He tried knowledge (1:13), pleasure, possessions, and projects (2:3–8). He was serious about each. He built a temple and a palace. He owned forty thousand horses with twelve thousand horsemen. He married the daughter of Pharaoh and built her a house (which was good because he had six hundred and ninety-nine more wives so *his* place was crowded).

In spite of it all, or because of it all, he was restless. "I hated life," he journaled. He was isolated (3:22), frustrated (5:17), and longed for the good old days when things were simpler and the wine was sweeter.

For some reason, Solomon kept a record of his longings. And somehow, they became

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Solomon, though he is not mentioned by name

Date Written: c. 935 B.C.

Key Themes:

- Trying to find meaning in life from possessions is meaningless.
- Living your life and enjoying your work is a gift from God.
- Connecting with God through faith and worship is the key to a meaningful life.

Key Verse:

"What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?" (Ecclesiastes 1:3).

Contents:

I. Life's Meaning 1:1—5:7

II. Possessions 5:8—6:12

III. Practical Wisdom 7:1—11:8

IV. Remember Your Creator 11:9—12:14

public. Maybe he knew that he wasn't the only one to get to the top of the ladder only to find it against the wrong building.

If that's where you are, or might be, this book is for you.

The Vanity of Life

The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

2 "Vanity[a] of vanities," says the Preacher;
"Vanity of vanities, all *is* vanity."

3 What profit has a man from all his labor
In which he toils under the sun?
4 *One* generation passes away, and *another* generation comes;
But the earth abides forever.
5 The sun also rises, and the sun goes down,
And hastens to the place where it arose.
6 The wind goes toward the south,
And turns around to the north;
The wind whirls about continually,
And comes again on its circuit.
7 All the rivers run into the sea,
Yet the sea *is* not full;
To the place from which the rivers come,
There they return again.
8 All things *are* full of labor;
Man cannot express *it.*
The eye is not satisfied with seeing,
Nor the ear filled with hearing.

9 That which has been *is* what will be,
That which *is* done is what will be done,
And *there is* nothing new under the sun.
10 Is there anything of which it may be said,
"See, this *is* new"?
It has already been in ancient times before us.
11 *There is* no remembrance of former *things,*
Nor will there be any remembrance of *things* that are to come
By *those* who will come after.

The Grief of Wisdom

12 I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of

1:2 [a] Or *Absurdity, Frustration, Futility, Nonsense;* and so throughout this book

Life Lessons

Ecclesiastes 1:1—2:26

SITUATION
The writer of Ecclesiastes wanted to help those who would live after him lead a fulfilling life. He taught lessons learned from his own life.

OBSERVATION
Without God, all of our work, pleasure, and wisdom are useless. Lasting fulfillment comes from honoring God in all we do.

INSPIRATION
The Bible never promotes workaholism or an addiction to employment as pain medication. But God unilaterally calls all the physically able to till the gardens He gives. God honors work. So honor God in your work. "Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God" (Ecclesiastes 2:24).

I just heard a groan.

"But, Max," someone objects, "my work is simply that—work! It pays my bills, but numbs my soul." . . .

"Job satisfaction? How about job survival? How do I survive a job misfit?" (I have some ideas.)

"I have no clue how to find my skill." . . .

"Honor God? After the mess I've made of my life?" . . .

For now, here is the big idea:

Use your uniqueness (what you do) to make a big deal out of God (why you do it) every day of your life (where you do it).

At the convergence of all three, you'll find the cure for the common life: your sweet spot. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How do you seek intellectual knowledge? What pleasures do you seek? Solomon warns that these activities will never bring fulfillment by themselves. Learn to live your life so every detail pleases God. Mow the lawn, clean up your house, or enjoy a hobby in order to please God.

EXPLORATION

Coming to God—Matthew 11:28–30. Persevering—Jude 20–25. Heavenly Wisdom—James 3:17, 18.

man, by which they may be exercised. 14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

15 *What is* crooked cannot be made straight,
And what is lacking cannot be numbered.

16 I communed with my heart, saying, "Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge." 17 And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind.

18 For in much wisdom *is* much grief,
And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

The Vanity of Pleasure

2 I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure"; but surely, this also *was* vanity. 2 I said of laughter—"Madness!"; and of mirth, "What does it accomplish?" 3 I searched in my heart *how* to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what *was* good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives.

4 I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. 5 I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all *kinds* of fruit trees in them. 6 I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. 7 I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. 8 I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, *and* musical instruments[a] of all kinds.

9 So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me.

10 Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them.
I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure,
For my heart rejoiced in all my labor;
And this was my reward from all my labor.
11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done
And on the labor in which I had toiled;
And indeed all *was* vanity and grasping for the wind.
There was no profit under the sun.

The End of the Wise and the Fool

12 Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly;
For what *can* the man *do* who succeeds the king?—
Only what he has already done.

2:8 [a] Exact meaning unknown

13 Then I saw that wisdom excels folly
As light excels darkness.
14 The wise man's eyes *are* in his head,
But the fool walks in darkness.
Yet I myself perceived
That the same event happens to them all.

15 So I said in my heart,
"As it happens to the fool,
It also happens to me,
And why was I then more wise?"
Then I said in my heart,
"This also *is* vanity."
16 For *there is* no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool
forever,
Since all that now *is* will be forgotten in the days to come.
And how does a wise *man* die?
As the fool!

17 Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun *was* distressing to me, for all *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.
18 Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me. 19 And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also *is* vanity. 20 Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun. 21 For there is a man whose labor *is* with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it. This also *is* vanity and a great evil. 22 For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? 23 For all his days *are* sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity.
24 Nothing *is* better for a man *than* that he should eat and drink, and *that* his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God. 25 For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?[a] 26 For *God* gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who *is* good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to *him who is* good before God. This also *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

Everything Has Its Time

3 To everything *there is* a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:

2 A time to be born,
And a time to die;
A time to plant,
And a time to pluck *what is* planted;

2:25 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, and Syriac read *without Him.*

Life Lessons

Ecclesiastes 3:1—5:17

SITUATION
The author gives insights on values. He encourages the reader to use time wisely by making right choices.

OBSERVATION
One of the key words in this section is the word "time." Solomon said that God has an appropriate time for every activity and for every stage of life. How we use our time reflects our values and our understanding of our eternal destination.

INSPIRATION
You have an eternal address fixed in your mind as well. God has "put eternity in their hearts" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Down deep you know you are not home yet.

So be careful not to act like you are. Don't lower the duffel bag too soon. Would you hang pictures on the wall of a Greyhound bus? Do you set up a bedroom at the roadside rest stop? Do you load your king-size bed on a commercial flight?

Would you treat this world like home? It isn't. The greatest calamity is not to feel far from home when you are, but to feel right at home when you are not. Don't quench, but rather, stir this longing for heaven.

God's home is a forever home. "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6).

My friends Jeff and Carol just adopted two small children. Christopher, the older, is only three, but he knows the difference between Jeff's house and the foster home from which he came. He tells all visitors, "This is my forever home."

Won't it be great when

Abundant Life

A friend of the late American jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes asked him why he had taken up the study of Greek at the age of ninety-four. Holmes replied, "Well, my good sir, it's now or never."

When J. C. Penney was ninety-five years old, he affirmed, "My eyesight may be getting weaker, but my vision is increasing."

Growing old can be dangerous. The trail is treacherous and the pitfalls are many. One is wise to be prepared. You know it's coming. It's not like God kept the process a secret. It's not like you are blazing a trail as you grow older. It's not as if no one has ever done it before. Look around you. You have ample opportunity to prepare and ample case studies to consider. If growing old catches you by surprise, don't blame God. He gave you plenty of warning. He also gave you plenty of advice.

"He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39).

"There are two ways to view life," Jesus is saying, "those who protect it or those who pursue it. The wisest are not the ones with the most years in their lives, but the most life in their years."

There is a rawness and a wonder to life. Pursue it. Hunt for it. Sell out to get it. Don't listen to the whines of those who have settled for a second-rate life and want you to do the same so they won't feel guilty. Your goal is not to live long; it's to live.

Time slips. Days pass. Years fade. And life ends. And what we came to do must be done while there is time.

We would think it bizarre for a traveler not to be prepared for the end of the journey. We would pity the poor passenger who never read his itinerary. We'd be bewildered by someone who thought the purpose of the trip was the trip.

Others, however, are anticipating the destination. I hope you are. And I hope you'll be ready when you get home. For you, age is no enemy. Age is a mile-marker—a gentle reminder that home has never been so near.

Study Guide

Read Ecclesiastes 2:17–26

- Describe a person you know who has aged gracefully.
- What is the difference between living long and really living?
- Why do you think so many people fight the natural aging process?
- What are some fears people have about growing old?
- What criterion do you think we should use in looking back over a lifetime and evaluating its worth?
- What are the "how to"s for enjoying the life God gives us?
- Do you think old age gives you more or less ability to enjoy life?
- What do you fear most about aging? Why?
- What stage of life do you think is the best and which is the most challenging? Why?
- What can we do when we feel discouraged about growing old?

3 A time to kill,
And a time to heal;
A time to break down,
And a time to build up;
4 A time to weep,
And a time to laugh;
A time to mourn,
And a time to dance;
5 A time to cast away stones,
And a time to gather stones;
A time to embrace,
And a time to refrain from embracing;
6 A time to gain,
And a time to lose;
A time to keep,
And a time to throw away;
7 A time to tear,
And a time to sew;
A time to keep silence,
And a time to speak;
8 A time to love,
And a time to hate;
A time of war,
And a time of peace.

The God-Given Task

9 What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? 10 I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

12 I know that nothing *is* better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, 13 and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it *is* the gift of God.

14 I know that whatever God does,
It shall be forever.
Nothing can be added to it,
And nothing taken from it.
God does *it,* that men should fear before Him.
15 That which is has already been,
And what is to be has already been;
And God requires an account of what is past.

Injustice Seems to Prevail

16 Moreover I saw under the sun:

In the place of judgment,
Wickedness *was* there;
And *in* the place of righteousness,
Iniquity *was* there.

we say the same? Couldn't we use a forever home? This home we're in won't last forever. Birthdays remind us of that.

During the writing of this book I turned forty-six. I'm closer to ninety than I am to infancy. All those things they say about aging are coming true. I'm patting myself less on the back and more under the chin. I have everything I had twenty years ago, except now it's all lower. The other day I tried to straighten out the wrinkles in my socks and found out I wasn't wearing any.

Aging. It's no fun. The way we try to avoid it, you'd think we could. We paint the body, preserve the body, protect the body. And well we should. These bodies are God's gifts. We should be responsible. But we should also be realistic. This body must die so the new body can live. "What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever" (1 Corinthians 15:50 NLT).

Aging is God's idea. It's one of the ways He keeps us headed homeward. We can't change the process, but we can change our attitude. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Eternity seems like a long way away for some people. If you're avoiding thinking about it, start looking at your own mortality. What does it mean for you to live today in the knowledge that God has set eternity in your heart? What changes can you make in your lifestyle based on that knowledge?

EXPLORATION
Eternity—Psalm 89:47; 139:24; Isaiah 26:4; John 5:39; Galatians 6:8; 1 Timothy 6:12.

Hope is an olive leaf—evidence of dry land after a flood. Proof to the dreamer that dreaming is worth the risk.

—Max Lucado (A Love Worth Giving)

17 I said in my heart,

"God shall judge the righteous and the wicked,
For *there is* a time there for every purpose and for every work."

18 I said in my heart, "Concerning the condition of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are *like* animals." 19 For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all *is* vanity. 20 All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust. 21 Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth?[a] 22 So I perceived that nothing *is* better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that *is* his heritage. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?

4 Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun:

And look! The tears of the oppressed,
But they have no comforter—
On the side of their oppressors *there is* power,
But they have no comforter.
2 Therefore I praised the dead who were already dead,
More than the living who are still alive.
3 Yet, better than both *is he* who has never existed,
Who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

The Vanity of Selfish Toil

4 Again, I saw that for all toil and every skillful work a man is envied by his neighbor. This also *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

5 The fool folds his hands
And consumes his own flesh.
6 Better a handful *with* quietness
Than both hands full, *together with* toil and grasping for the wind.

7 Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun:

8 There is one alone, without companion:
He has neither son nor brother.
Yet *there is* no end to all his labors,
Nor is his eye satisfied with riches.
But he never asks,
"For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?"
This also *is* vanity and a grave misfortune.

3:21 [a] Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate read *Who knows whether the spirit . . . goes upward, and whether . . . goes downward to the earth?*

The Value of a Friend

9 Two *are* better than one,
Because they have a good reward for their labor.
10 For if they fall, one will lift up his companion.
But woe to him *who is* alone when he falls,
For *he has* no one to help him up.
11 Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm;
But how can one be warm *alone*?
12 Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him.
And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Popularity Passes Away

13 Better a poor and wise youth
Than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more.
14 For he comes out of prison to be king,
Although he was born poor in his kingdom.
15 I saw all the living who walk under the sun;
They were with the second youth who stands in his place.
16 *There was* no end of all the people over whom he was made king;
Yet those who come afterward will not rejoice in him.
Surely this also *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

Fear God, Keep Your Vows

5 Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.

2 Do not be rash with your mouth,
And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God.
For God *is* in heaven, and you on earth;
Therefore let your words be few.
3 For a dream comes through much activity,
And a fool's voice *is known* by *his* many words.

4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it;
For *He has* no pleasure in fools.
Pay what you have vowed—
5 Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.

6 Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger *of God* that it *was* an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse[a] and destroy the work of your hands? 7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words *there is* also vanity. But fear God.

The Vanity of Gain and Honor

8 If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of justice and righteousness in a province, do not marvel at the matter; for high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them.

5:6 [a] Literally *voice*

Life Lessons

Ecclesiastes 5:18—8:17

SITUATION
Although people cannot fully understand all of God's plan, the author of Ecclesiastes believed people could find some of God's goodness.

OBSERVATION
In this passage, Solomon made it clear that wealth cannot buy happiness and that enjoying your work and life is a God-given gift.

INSPIRATION
Take your seat in the chair, and look across the table at the psalmist David. He motions for you to lean forward. "I have a secret to tell you," he whispers, "the secret of satisfaction. 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want'" (Psalm 23:1).

David has found the pasture where discontent goes to die. It's as if he is saying, "What I have in God is greater than what I don't have in life."

You think you and I could learn to say the same?

Think for just a moment about the things you own. Think about the house you have, the car you drive, the money you've saved. Think about the jewelry you've inherited and the stocks you've traded and the clothes you've purchased. Envision all your stuff, and let me remind you of two biblical truths.

Your stuff isn't yours. Ask any coroner. Ask any embalmer. Ask any funeral-home director. No one takes anything with him. When one of the wealthiest men in history, John D. Rockefeller, died, his accountant was asked,

"How much did John D. leave?" The accountant's reply? "All of it."

"As he came from his mother's womb, naked shall he return, to go as he came; and he shall take nothing from his labor which he may carry away in his hand" (Ecclesiastes 5:15).

All that stuff—it's not yours. And you know what else about all that stuff? It's not you. Who you are has nothing to do with the clothes you wear or the car you drive. "And He said to them, 'Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses'" (Luke 12:15). Heaven does not know you as the fellow with the nice suit or the woman with the big house or the kid with the new bike. Heaven knows your heart. "For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). When God thinks of you, He may see your compassion, your devotion, your tenderness or quick mind, but He doesn't think of your things.

And when you think of you, you shouldn't either. Define yourself by your stuff, and you'll feel good when you have a lot and bad when you don't. Contentment comes when we can honestly say with Paul: "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:11, 12). (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Make a list of the ten most valuable possessions that you own. Now make a list

9 Moreover the profit of the land is for all; *even* the king is served from the field.

10 He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver;
Nor he who loves abundance, with increase.
This also *is* vanity.

11 When goods increase,
They increase who eat them;
So what profit have the owners
Except to see *them* with their eyes?

12 The sleep of a laboring man *is* sweet,
Whether he eats little or much;
But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep.

13 There is a severe evil *which* I have seen under the sun:
Riches kept for their owner to his hurt.
14 But those riches perish through misfortune;
When he begets a son, *there is* nothing in his hand.
15 As he came from his mother's womb, naked shall he return,
To go as he came;
And he shall take nothing from his labor
Which he may carry away in his hand.

16 And this also *is* a severe evil—
Just exactly as he came, so shall he go.
And what profit has he who has labored for the wind?
17 All his days he also eats in darkness,
And *he has* much sorrow and sickness and anger.

18 Here is what I have seen: *It is* good and fitting *for one* to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it *is* his heritage. 19 As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this *is* the gift of God. 20 For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps *him* busy with the joy of his heart.

6 There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it *is* common among men: 2 A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor, so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires; yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreigner consumes it. This *is* vanity, and it *is* an evil affliction.

3 If a man begets a hundred *children* and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with goodness, or indeed he has no burial, I say *that* a stillborn child *is* better than he— 4 for it comes in vanity and departs in darkness, and its name is covered with darkness. 5 Though it has not seen the sun or known *anything,* this has more rest than that man, 6 even if he lives a thousand years twice—but has not seen goodness. Do not all go to one place?

7 All the labor of man *is* for his mouth,
And yet the soul is not satisfied.
8 For what more has the wise *man* than the fool?
What does the poor man have,
Who knows *how* to walk before the living?
9 Better *is* the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire.
This also *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

10 Whatever one is, he has been named already,
For it is known that he *is* man;
And he cannot contend with Him who is mightier than he.
11 Since there are many things that increase vanity,
How *is* man the better?

12 For who knows what *is* good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?

The Value of Practical Wisdom

7 A good name *is* better than precious ointment,
And the day of death than the day of one's birth;
2 Better to go to the house of mourning
Than to go to the house of feasting,
For that *is* the end of all men;
And the living will take *it* to heart.
3 Sorrow *is* better than laughter,
For by a sad countenance the heart is made better.
4 The heart of the wise *is* in the house of mourning,
But the heart of fools *is* in the house of mirth.

5 *It is* better to hear the rebuke of the wise
Than for a man to hear the song of fools.
6 For like the crackling of thorns under a pot,
So *is* the laughter of the fool.
This also is vanity.
7 Surely oppression destroys a wise *man's* reason,
And a bribe debases the heart.

8 The end of a thing *is* better than its beginning;
The patient in spirit *is* better than the proud in spirit.
9 Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry,
For anger rests in the bosom of fools.
10 Do not say,
"Why were the former days better than these?"
For you do not inquire wisely concerning this.

11 Wisdom *is* good with an inheritance,
And profitable to those who see the sun.
12 For wisdom *is* a defense *as* money *is* a defense,
But the excellence of knowledge *is that* wisdom gives life to those who have it.

of what God has given you. Consider which list contains the greater gifts. Take time to reflect on what changes you need to make in your attitude toward what God has given you and your earthly possessions.

EXPLORATION
Contentment—
2 Corinthians 9:8; Philippians 4:10–13; 1 Timothy 6:6; Hebrews 13:5.

You cannot keep people from rejecting you. But you can keep rejections from enraging.

—Max Lucado (A Love Worth Giving)

13 Consider the work of God;
For who can make straight what He has
made crooked?
14 In the day of prosperity be joyful,
But in the day of adversity consider:
Surely God has appointed the one as well
as the other,
So that man can find out nothing *that*
will come after him.

15 I have seen everything in my days of vanity:

There is a just *man* who perishes in his
righteousness,
And there is a wicked *man* who prolongs
life in his wickedness.

16 Do not be overly righteous,
Nor be overly wise:
Why should you destroy yourself?
17 Do not be overly wicked,
Nor be foolish:
Why should you die before your time?
18 *It is* good that you grasp this,
And also not remove your hand from the
other;
For he who fears God will escape them all.

19 Wisdom strengthens the wise
More than ten rulers of the city.

20 For *there is* not a just man on earth who
does good
And does not sin.

21 Also do not take to heart everything
people say,
Lest you hear your servant cursing you.
22 For many times, also, your own heart has
known
That even you have cursed others.

23 All this I have proved by wisdom.
I said, "I will be wise";
But it *was* far from me.
24 As for that which is far off and
exceedingly deep,
Who can find it out?
25 I applied my heart to know,
To search and seek out wisdom and the
reason *of things,*
To know the wickedness of folly,
Even of foolishness *and* madness.
26 And I find more bitter than death
The woman whose heart *is* snares and
nets,
Whose hands *are* fetters.
He who pleases God shall escape from
her,
But the sinner shall be trapped by her.

27 "Here is what I have found," says the
Preacher,
"*Adding* one thing to the other to find out
the reason,
28 Which my soul still seeks but I cannot
find:
One man among a thousand I have
found,
But a woman among all these I have not
found.
29 Truly, this only I have found:
That God made man upright,
But they have sought out many schemes."

8 Who *is* like a wise *man?*
And who knows the interpretation of a
thing?
A man's wisdom makes his face shine,
And the sternness of his face is changed.

Obey Authorities for God's Sake

2 I *say,* "Keep the king's commandment for the sake of your oath to God. 3 Do not be hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand for an evil thing, for he does whatever pleases him."

4 Where the word of a king *is, there is*
power;
And who may say to him, "What are you
doing?"
5 He who keeps his command will
experience nothing harmful;
And a wise man's heart discerns both
time and judgment,
6 Because for every matter there is a time
and judgment,
Though the misery of man increases
greatly.
7 For he does not know what will
happen;
So who can tell him when it will occur?

8 No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit,
And no one has power in the day of death.
There is no release from that war,
And wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it.

9 All this I have seen, and applied my heart to every work that is done under the sun: *There is* a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt.

Death Comes to All

10 Then I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of holiness, and they were forgotten[a] in the city where they had so done. This also *is* vanity. 11 Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. 12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred *times,* and his *days* are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. 13 But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong *his* days, *which are* as a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

14 There is a vanity which occurs on earth, that there are just *men* to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked *men* to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also *is* vanity.

15 So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor *all* the days of his life which God gives him under the sun.

16 When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night, 17 then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover *it,* yet he will not find *it;* moreover, though a wise *man* attempts to know *it,* he will not be able to find *it.*

9 For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all: that the righteous and the wise and their works *are* in the hand of God. People know neither love nor hatred *by* anything *they see* before them. 2 All things *come* alike to all:

One event *happens* to the righteous and the wicked;
To the good,[a] the clean, and the unclean;
To him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice.
As is the good, so *is* the sinner;
He who takes an oath as *he* who fears an oath.

3 This *is* an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing *happens* to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness *is* in their hearts while they live, and after that *they go* to the dead. 4 But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

8:10 [a]Some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, and Vulgate read *praised.*
9:2 [a]Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *good and bad.*

Life Lessons

Ecclesiastes 9:1—12:14

SITUATION
Every person must face death. Those who are righteous and wise rest in God's hands.

OBSERVATION
Work hard, enjoy what you have in life, and seek wisdom. Wisdom provides greater assets than power. Although you still face death, you can be comforted to know that those who follow God will live forever with Him.

INSPIRATION
Remarkable.

Each morning I climb into a truck that weighs half a ton and take it out on an interstate where I—and a thousand other drivers—turn our vehicles into sixty-mile-per-hour missiles. Although I've had a few scares and mishaps, I still whistle while I drive at a speed that would have caused my great-grandfather to pass out.

Remarkable.

Every day I have the honor of sitting down with a book that contains the words of the One who created me. Every day I have the opportunity to let Him give me a thought or two on how to live.

If I don't do what He says, He doesn't burn the book or cancel my subscription. If I disagree with what He says, lightning doesn't split my swivel chair or an angel doesn't mark my name off the holy list. If I don't understand what He says, He doesn't call me a dummy.

In fact, He calls me "Son," and on a different

page explains what I don't understand.

Remarkable.

At the end of the day when I walk through the house, I step into the bedrooms of three little girls. Their covers are usually kicked off, so I cover them up. Their hair usually hides their faces, so I brush it back. And one by one, I bend over and kiss the foreheads of the angels God has loaned me. Then I stand in the doorway and wonder why in the world he would entrust a stumbling, fumbling fellow like me with the task of loving and leading such treasures.

Remarkable.

Then I go and crawl into bed with a woman far wiser than I . . . a woman who deserves a man much better looking than I . . . but a woman who would argue that fact and tell me from the bottom of her heart that I'm the best thing to come down her pike.

After I think about the wife I have, and when I think that I get to be with her for a lifetime, I shake my head and thank the God of grace for grace and think, *Remarkable*.

In the morning, I'll do it all again. I'll drive down the same road. Go to the same office. Call on the same bank. Kiss the same girls. And crawl into bed with the same woman. But I'm learning not to take these everyday miracles for granted. . . .

I'm discovering many things: traffic jams eventually clear up, sunsets are for free, Little League is a work of art, and most planes take off and arrive on time. I'm learning that most folks are good folks who are just as timid as I am about starting a conversation. . . .

I'm learning that if I look . . . if I open my eyes and

5 For the living know that they will die;
But the dead know nothing,
And they have no more reward,
For the memory of them is forgotten.
6 Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished;
Nevermore will they have a share
In anything done under the sun.

7 Go, eat your bread with joy,
And drink your wine with a merry heart;
For God has already accepted your works.
8 Let your garments always be white,
And let your head lack no oil.

9 Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that *is* your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun.

10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do *it* with your might; for *there is* no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.

11 I returned and saw under the sun that—

The race *is* not to the swift,
Nor the battle to the strong,
Nor bread to the wise,
Nor riches to men of understanding,
Nor favor to men of skill;
But time and chance happen to them all.
12 For man also does not know his time:
Like fish taken in a cruel net,
Like birds caught in a snare,
So the sons of men *are* snared in an evil time,
When it falls suddenly upon them.

Wisdom Superior to Folly

13 This wisdom I have also seen under the sun, and it *seemed* great to me: 14 *There was* a little city with few men in it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great snares[a] around it. 15 Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that same poor man.

16 Then I said:

"Wisdom *is* better than strength.
Nevertheless the poor man's wisdom *is* despised,
And his words are not heard.
17 Words of the wise, *spoken* quietly, *should be* heard
Rather than the shout of a ruler of fools.
18 Wisdom *is* better than weapons of war;
But one sinner destroys much good."

9:14 [a]Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *bulwarks*.

10 Dead flies putrefy[a] the perfumer's ointment,
And cause it to give off a foul odor;
So does a little folly to one respected for wisdom *and* honor.
2 A wise man's heart *is* at his right hand,
But a fool's heart at his left.
3 Even when a fool walks along the way,
He lacks wisdom,
And he shows everyone *that* he *is* a fool.
4 If the spirit of the ruler rises against you,
Do not leave your post;
For conciliation pacifies great offenses.

5 There is an evil I have seen under the sun,
As an error proceeding from the ruler:
6 Folly is set in great dignity,
While the rich sit in a lowly place.
7 I have seen servants on horses,
While princes walk on the ground like servants.

8 He who digs a pit will fall into it,
And whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent.
9 He who quarries stones may be hurt by them,
And he who splits wood may be endangered by it.
10 If the ax is dull,
And one does not sharpen the edge,
Then he must use more strength;
But wisdom brings success.

11 A serpent may bite when *it is* not charmed;
The babbler is no different.
12 The words of a wise man's mouth *are* gracious,
But the lips of a fool shall swallow him up;
13 The words of his mouth begin with foolishness,
And the end of his talk *is* raving madness.
14 A fool also multiplies words.
No man knows what is to be;
Who can tell him what will be after him?
15 The labor of fools wearies them,
For they do not even know how to go to the city!

16 Woe to you, O land, when your king *is* a child,
And your princes feast in the morning!
17 Blessed *are* you, O land, when your king *is* the son of nobles,
And your princes feast at the proper time—
For strength and not for drunkenness!
18 Because of laziness the building decays,
And through idleness of hands the house leaks.
19 A feast is made for laughter,
And wine makes merry;
But money answers everything.

10:1 [a]Targum and Vulgate omit *putrefy.*

observe . . . there are many reasons to take off my hat, look at the source of it all, and just say thanks. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you feel like you are falling behind in the rat race? Do you wonder how you will catch up? Look at your remarkable blessings, and give God thanks for what you *do* have.

EXPLORATION

Life—Genesis 9:5, 6; Deuteronomy 8:3; Psalm 90:12; 144:3, 4; Matthew 10:39; Mark 8:35–37; John 4:13, 14; Acts 20:24.

God changes your "n" into a "v." You go from lonely to lovely.

—Max Lucado (Traveling Light)

20 Do not curse the king, even in your thought;
Do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom;
For a bird of the air may carry your voice,
And a bird in flight may tell the matter.

The Value of Diligence

11 Cast your bread upon the waters,
For you will find it after many days.
2 Give a serving to seven, and also to eight,
For you do not know what evil will be on the earth.

3 If the clouds are full of rain,
They empty *themselves* upon the earth;
And if a tree falls to the south or the north,
In the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie.
4 He who observes the wind will not sow,
And he who regards the clouds will not reap.

5 As you do not know what *is* the way of the wind,[a]
Or how the bones *grow* in the womb of her who is with child,
So you do not know the works of God who makes everything.
6 In the morning sow your seed,
And in the evening do not withhold your hand;
For you do not know which will prosper,
Either this or that,
Or whether both alike *will be* good.

7 Truly the light is sweet,
And *it is* pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun;
8 But if a man lives many years
And rejoices in them all,
Yet let him remember the days of darkness,
For they will be many.
All that is coming *is* vanity.

Seek God in Early Life

9 Rejoice, O young man, in your youth,
And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth;
Walk in the ways of your heart,
And in the sight of your eyes;
But know that for all these
God will bring you into judgment.
10 Therefore remove sorrow from your heart,
And put away evil from your flesh,
For childhood and youth *are* vanity.

12 Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth,
Before the difficult days come,
And the years draw near when you say,
"I have no pleasure in them":
2 While the sun and the light,
The moon and the stars,
Are not darkened,
And the clouds do not return after the rain;
3 In the day when the keepers of the house tremble,
And the strong men bow down;
When the grinders cease because they are few,
And those that look through the windows grow dim;
4 When the doors are shut in the streets,
And the sound of grinding is low;
When one rises up at the sound of a bird,
And all the daughters of music are brought low.
5 Also they are afraid of height,
And of terrors in the way;
When the almond tree blossoms,
The grasshopper is a burden,
And desire fails.
For man goes to his eternal home,
And the mourners go about the streets.

6 *Remember your Creator* before the silver cord is loosed,[a]
Or the golden bowl is broken,
Or the pitcher shattered at the fountain,
Or the wheel broken at the well.
7 Then the dust will return to the earth as it was,
And the spirit will return to God who gave it.

8 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher,
"All *is* vanity."

11:5 [a]Or *spirit* **12:6** [a]Following Qere and Targum; Kethib reads *removed;* Septuagint and Vulgate read *broken*.

The Whole Duty of Man

9 And moreover, because the Preacher was
wise, he still taught the people knowledge;
yes, he pondered and sought out *and* set in
order many proverbs. 10 The Preacher sought
to find acceptable words; and *what was* writ-
ten *was* upright—words of truth. 11 The words
of the wise are like goads, and the words
of scholars[a] are like well-driven nails, given
by one Shepherd. 12 And further, my son, be
admonished by these. Of making many books
there is no end, and much study *is* wearisome
to the flesh.

13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole
matter:

Fear God and keep His commandments,
For this is man's all.
14 For God will bring every work into
judgment,
Including every secret thing,
Whether good or evil.

12:11 [a] Literally *masters of the assemblies*

THE BOOK OF

SONG OF SOLOMON

INTRODUCTION

Remember your love notes of young romance?

Come on, now. Think about it.

Flip back through the scrapbook of your heart. You'll find one.

You thought *he* was the only one. You knew *she* was the reason for creation. And with youthful passion, you expressed your love.

"I'll love you forever."

"You are my one and only."

"Had I the pen of a poet, had I the stars to give you, even then I couldn't show it . . . "

Ahhh, the words of romance. (That last verse? That was mine, proving that even a crusty West Texan can be romantic.)

But the most daring Romeos will blush at what you are about to read—"The Song of Solomon." A love poem that chronicles the passion between starstruck Solomon and his spellbound bride.

It's unlike anything in the Bible. For that reason, it should be read differently than any book in the Bible. Don't take it literally. Don't search for hidden codes or submerged messages. Love letters are to be appreciated, not analyzed.

Appreciate this one. Don't get hung up on the ancient terms of affection. Sure, they sound strange. My wife wouldn't appreciate being told her neck was like David's tower (4:4) or that her limbs were like pomegranates (4:13). Just remember that these words were not written for you.

You are opening someone else's shoebox of letters and reading the correspondence between two people madly in love.

I guess God knew we needed a reminder that romance was His idea.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Solomon

Date Written: c. 935 B.C.

Key Themes:

- Love and sexual attraction are powerful forces in the world.
- A marriage is a celebration of those forces.

Key Verse:

"I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me" (Song of Solomon 7:10).

Contents:

I. Love Begins and Grows 1:1—3:5

II. The Wedding 3:6—5:1

III. The Bride 5:2—7:13

IV. The Wonder of Love 8:1–14

The song of songs, which *is* Solomon's.

The Banquet

The Shulamite[a]

2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—
For your[b] love *is* better than wine.
3 Because of the fragrance of your good ointments,
Your name *is* ointment poured forth;
Therefore the virgins love you.
4 Draw me away!

The Daughters of Jerusalem

We will run after you.[a]

The Shulamite

The king has brought me into his chambers.

The Daughters of Jerusalem

We will be glad and rejoice in you.[b]

We will remember your[c] love more than wine.

The Shulamite

Rightly do they love you.[d]

5 I *am* dark, but lovely,
O daughters of Jerusalem,
Like the tents of Kedar,
Like the curtains of Solomon.
6 Do not look upon me, because I *am* dark,
Because the sun has tanned me.
My mother's sons were angry with me;
They made me the keeper of the vineyards,
But my own vineyard I have not kept.

(To Her Beloved)

7 Tell me, O you whom I love,
Where you feed *your flock,*
Where you make *it* rest at noon.
For why should I be as one who veils herself[a]
By the flocks of your companions?

The Beloved

8 If you do not know, O fairest among women,
Follow in the footsteps of the flock,
And feed your little goats
Beside the shepherds' tents.

1:2 [a]A young woman from the town of Shulam or Shunem (compare 6:13). The speaker and audience are identified according to the number, gender, and person of the Hebrew words. Occasionally the identity is not certain. [b]Masculine singular, that is, the Beloved **1:4** [a]Masculine singular, that is, the Beloved [b]Feminine singular, that is, the Shulamite [c]Masculine singular, that is, the Beloved [d]Masculine singular, that is, the Beloved **1:7** [a]Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *wanders*.

Life Lessons

Song of Solomon 1:1—2:7

SITUATION

Solomon's Song describes a relationship between a bride and groom. Solomon and the Shulammite woman were about to be married in the king's palace. The woman was a peasant worker from Shunem, a farming town sixty miles north of Jerusalem.

OBSERVATION

God gives marriage as a gift. It is a gift based on unquestioning commitment and unconditional acceptance.

INSPIRATION

I sensed it as we were lying on the bed. It blew over me mixed with the sweet fragrance of fresh rain. My wife was lying silently at my side. Jenna was using my stomach for a pillow. She, too, was quiet. Our second child, only a month from birth, rested within the womb of her mother. They must have sensed it, for no one spoke. It entered our presence as if introduced by God Himself. And no one dared stir for fear it leave prematurely.

What was it? An eternal instant.

An instant in time that had no time. A picture that froze in mid-frame, demanding to be savored. A minute that refused to die after sixty seconds. A moment that was lifted off the timeline and amplified into a forever so all the angels could witness its majesty.

An eternal instant.

A moment that reminds you of the treasures surrounding you. Your

home. Your peace of mind. Your health. A moment that tenderly rebukes you for spending so much time on temporal preoccupations such as savings accounts, houses, and punctuality. A moment that can bring a mist to the manliest of eyes and perspective to the darkest life.

Eternal instants have dotted history.

It was an eternal instant when the Creator smiled and said, "It is good." It was a timeless moment when Abraham pleaded for mercy from the God of mercy, "But if there are just ten faithful." It was a moment without time when Noah pushed open the rain-soaked hatch and breathed in the clean air. And it was a moment in the "fullness of time" when a carpenter, some smelly shepherds, and an exhausted young mother stood in silent awe at the sight of the infant in the manger.

Eternal instants. You've had them. We all have.

Sharing a porch swing on a summer evening with your grandchild.

Seeing *her* face in the glow of a candle.

Putting your arm into your husband's as you stroll through the golden leaves and breathe the brisk autumn air.

Listening to your six year old thank God for everything from goldfish to Grandma.

Such moments are necessary because they remind us that everything is okay. The King is still on the throne and life is still worth living. Eternal instants remind us that love is still the greatest possession and the future is nothing to fear.

The next time an instant in your life begins to be eternal, let it. Put your head back on the pillow and soak

9 I have compared you, my love,
To my filly among Pharaoh's chariots.
10 Your cheeks are lovely with ornaments,
Your neck with chains *of gold.*

The Daughters of Jerusalem

11 We will make you[a] ornaments of gold
With studs of silver.

The Shulamite

12 While the king *is* at his table,
My spikenard sends forth its fragrance.
13 A bundle of myrrh *is* my beloved to me,
That lies all night between my breasts.
14 My beloved *is* to me a cluster of henna *blooms*
In the vineyards of En Gedi.

The Beloved

15 Behold, you *are* fair, my love!
Behold, you *are* fair!
You *have* dove's eyes.

The Shulamite

16 Behold, you *are* handsome, my beloved!
Yes, pleasant!
Also our bed *is* green.
17 The beams of our houses *are* cedar,
And our rafters of fir.

2 I *am* the rose of Sharon,
And the lily of the valleys.

The Beloved

2 Like a lily among thorns,
So is my love among the daughters.

The Shulamite

3 Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods,
So *is* my beloved among the sons.
I sat down in his shade with great delight,
And his fruit *was* sweet to my taste.

The Shulamite to the Daughters of Jerusalem

4 He brought me to the banqueting house,
And his banner over me *was* love.
5 Sustain me with cakes of raisins,
Refresh me with apples,
For I *am* lovesick.

6 His left hand *is* under my head,
And his right hand embraces me.
7 I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
By the gazelles or by the does of the field,
Do not stir up nor awaken love
Until it pleases.

1:11 [a]Feminine singular, that is, the Shulamite

The Beloved's Request

The Shulamite

8 The voice of my beloved!
Behold, he comes
Leaping upon the mountains,
Skipping upon the hills.
9 My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag.
Behold, he stands behind our wall;
He is looking through the windows,
Gazing through the lattice.

10 My beloved spoke, and said to me:
"Rise up, my love, my fair one,
And come away.
11 For lo, the winter is past,
The rain is over *and* gone.
12 The flowers appear on the earth;
The time of singing has come,
And the voice of the turtledove
Is heard in our land.
13 The fig tree puts forth her green figs,
And the vines *with* the tender grapes
Give a *good* smell.
Rise up, my love, my fair one,
And come away!

14 "O my dove, in the clefts of the rock,
In the secret *places* of the cliff,
Let me see your face,
Let me hear your voice;
For your voice *is* sweet,
And your face *is* lovely."

Her Brothers

15 Catch us the foxes,
The little foxes that spoil the vines,
For our vines *have* tender grapes.

The Shulamite

16 My beloved *is* mine, and I *am* his.
He feeds *his flock* among the lilies.

(To Her Beloved)

17 Until the day breaks
And the shadows flee away,
Turn, my beloved,
And be like a gazelle
Or a young stag
Upon the mountains of Bether.[a]

2:17 [a]Literally *Separation*

it in. Resist the urge to cut it short. Don't interrupt the silence or shatter the solemnity. You are, in a very special way, on holy ground. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Schedule a night to get away from pressing commitments. Create a time when you put the cares of the world on hold, and simply enjoy your family.

EXPLORATION
Husbands and Wives—Genesis 2:23, 24; Proverbs 5:15–19; Ecclesiastes 9:9; 1 Corinthians 7:3–5; Ephesians 5:21–29, 33.

Life LESSONS

Song of Solomon 2:8—3:4

SITUATION
Solomon's lover recalled their early courtship days and even remembered a dream that caused her concern about Solomon's whereabouts.

OBSERVATION
Good memories of courtship can keep fresh and alive the gift of love that God has given to partners in a marriage relationship.

INSPIRATION
How's your marriage?

Consider it your Testore cello. This finely constructed, seldom-seen instrument has reached the category of rare and is fast earning the status of priceless. Few musicians are privileged to play a Testore; even fewer are able to own one.

I happen to know a man who does. He, gulp, loaned it to me for a sermon. Wanting to illustrate the fragile sanctity of marriage,

I asked him to place the nearly-three-centuries-old instrument on the stage, and I explained its worth to the church.

How do you think I treated the relic? Did I twirl it, flip it, and pluck the strings? No way. The cello is far too valuable for my clumsy fingers. Besides, its owner loaned it to me. I dared not dishonor his treasure.

On your wedding day, God loaned you His work of art: an intricately crafted, precisely formed masterpiece. He entrusted you with a one-of-a-kind creation. Value her. Honor him. Having been blessed with a Testore, why fiddle around with anyone else?

David missed this. He collected wives as trophies. He saw spouses as a means to his pleasure, not a part of God's plan. Don't make his mistake.

Be fiercely loyal to one spouse. *Fiercely* loyal. Don't even look twice at someone else. No flirting. No teasing. No loitering at her desk or lingering in his office. Who cares if you come across as rude or a prude? You've made a promise. Keep it. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What could you do to strengthen your relationship? Ask God to show you how.

EXPLORATION

Married Love—Genesis 2:23, 24; 24:67; 29:20; Ruth 2—4; Proverbs 18:22; 1 Corinthians 11:11; Ephesians 5:25–30, 33.

A Troubled Night

The Shulamite

3 By night on my bed I sought the one I love;
I sought him, but I did not find him.
2 "I will rise now," *I said,*
"And go about the city;
In the streets and in the squares
I will seek the one I love."
I sought him, but I did not find him.
3 The watchmen who go about the city found me;
I said,
"Have you seen the one I love?"

4 Scarcely had I passed by them,
When I found the one I love.
I held him and would not let him go,
Until I had brought him to the house of my mother,
And into the chamber of her who conceived me.

5 I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
By the gazelles or by the does of the field,
Do not stir up nor awaken love
Until it pleases.

The Coming of Solomon

The Shulamite

6 Who *is* this coming out of the wilderness
Like pillars of smoke,
Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,
With all the merchant's fragrant powders?
7 Behold, it *is* Solomon's couch,
With sixty valiant men around it,
Of the valiant of Israel.
8 They all hold swords,
Being expert in war.
Every man *has* his sword on his thigh
Because of fear in the night.

9 Of the wood of Lebanon
Solomon the King
Made himself a palanquin:[a]
10 He made its pillars *of* silver,
Its support *of* gold,
Its seat *of* purple,
Its interior paved *with* love
By the daughters of Jerusalem.
11 Go forth, O daughters of Zion,
And see King Solomon with the crown
With which his mother crowned him

3:9 [a]A portable enclosed chair

On the day of his wedding,
The day of the gladness of his heart.

The Bridegroom Praises the Bride

The Beloved

4 Behold, you *are* fair, my love!
Behold, you *are* fair!
You *have* dove's eyes behind your veil.
Your hair *is* like a flock of goats,
Going down from Mount Gilead.
2 Your teeth *are* like a flock of shorn *sheep*
Which have come up from the washing,
Every one of which bears twins,
And none *is* barren among them.
3 Your lips *are* like a strand of scarlet,
And your mouth is lovely.
Your temples behind your veil
Are like a piece of pomegranate.
4 Your neck *is* like the tower of David,
Built for an armory,
On which hang a thousand bucklers,
All shields of mighty men.
5 Your two breasts *are* like two fawns,
Twins of a gazelle,
Which feed among the lilies.

6 Until the day breaks
And the shadows flee away,
I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh
And to the hill of frankincense.

7 You *are* all fair, my love,
And *there is* no spot in you.
8 Come with me from Lebanon, *my* spouse,
With me from Lebanon.
Look from the top of Amana,
From the top of Senir and Hermon,
From the lions' dens,
From the mountains of the leopards.

9 You have ravished my heart,
My sister, *my* spouse;
You have ravished my heart
With one *look* of your eyes,
With one link of your necklace.
10 How fair is your love,
My sister, *my* spouse!
How much better than wine is your love,
And the scent of your perfumes
Than all spices!
11 Your lips, O *my* spouse,

Life Lessons

Song of Solomon
3:5—5:1

SITUATION
Solomon recalled the occasion when he declared his love to his bride. He offered his hand in marriage, and she accepted.

OBSERVATION
The Song of Solomon attests to the joy that comes from following guidelines from God.

INSPIRATION
Your spouse is not your trophy but your treasure.

Don't pay the price David paid. Can we flip ahead a few chapters to his final hours? To see the ultimate cost of a neglected family, look at the way our hero dies.

David is hours from the grave. A chill has set in that blankets can't remove. Servants decide he needs a person to warm him, someone to hold him tight as he takes his final breaths.

Do they turn to one of his wives? No. Do they call on one of his children? No. They seek "for a lovely young woman . . . and she cared for the king, and served him; but the king did not know her" (1 Kings 1:3, 4).

I suspect that David would have traded all his conquered crowns for the tender arms of a wife. But it was too late. He died in the care of a stranger, because he made strangers out of his family.

But it's not too late for you.

Make your wife the object of your highest devotion. Make your husband the recipient of your deepest

passion. Love the one who wears your ring.

And cherish the children who share your name.

Succeed at home first. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Think of a couple you know at church or within your family whose marriage relationship you admire. Ask them how they have been able to maintain a healthy marriage. Study the passages below and make your own list of guidelines that God gives for having a strong marriage.

EXPLORATION

Love and Marriage—Genesis 2:24, 25; Proverbs 5:18–20; Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10; 9:9; Ephesians 5:22–33; Hebrews 13:4.

Life Lessons

Song of Solomon 5:2—6:3

SITUATION

Misunderstandings sprang up between Solomon and his wife. The bride took steps to heal the marriage breach. The growing maturity in this marriage was indicated by references to friendship and an understanding that Solomon and his bride belong exclusively to each other.

OBSERVATION

Marriage has several elements: love, commitment, sexual desire, admiration, and friendship. As a marriage matures, so does the commitment to resolve problems and to deepen the friendship.

INSPIRATION

Be quick to understand, God is not antisex. Dismiss

Drip as the honeycomb;
Honey and milk *are* under your tongue;
And the fragrance of your garments
Is like the fragrance of Lebanon.

12 A garden enclosed
Is my sister, *my* spouse,
A spring shut up,
A fountain sealed.
13 Your plants *are* an orchard of pomegranates
With pleasant fruits,
Fragrant henna with spikenard,
14 Spikenard and saffron,
Calamus and cinnamon,
With all trees of frankincense,
Myrrh and aloes,
With all the chief spices—
15 A fountain of gardens,
A well of living waters,
And streams from Lebanon.

The Shulamite

16 Awake, O north *wind,*
And come, O south!
Blow upon my garden,
That its spices may flow out.
Let my beloved come to his garden
And eat its pleasant fruits.

The Beloved

5 I have come to my garden, my sister, *my* spouse;
I have gathered my myrrh with my spice;
I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey;
I have drunk my wine with my milk.

(To His Friends)

Eat, O friends!
Drink, yes, drink deeply,
O beloved ones!

The Shulamite's Troubled Evening

The Shulamite

2 I sleep, but my heart is awake;
It is the voice of my beloved!
He knocks, *saying,*
"Open for me, my sister, my love,
My dove, my perfect one;
For my head is covered with dew,
My locks with the drops of the night."

3 I have taken off my robe;
How can I put it on *again?*

I have washed my feet;
How can I defile them?
4 My beloved put his hand
By the latch *of the door,*
And my heart yearned for him.
5 I arose to open for my beloved,
And my hands dripped *with* myrrh,
My fingers with liquid myrrh,
On the handles of the lock.

6 I opened for my beloved,
But my beloved had turned away *and* was gone.
My heart leaped up when he spoke.
I sought him, but I could not find him;
I called him, but he gave me no answer.
7 The watchmen who went about the city found me.
They struck me, they wounded me;
The keepers of the walls
Took my veil away from me.
8 I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
If you find my beloved,
That you tell him I *am* lovesick!

The Daughters of Jerusalem

9 What *is* your beloved
More than *another* beloved,
O fairest among women?
What *is* your beloved
More than *another* beloved,
That you so charge us?

The Shulamite

10 My beloved *is* white and ruddy,
Chief among ten thousand.
11 His head *is like* the finest gold;
His locks *are* wavy,
And black as a raven.
12 His eyes *are* like doves
By the rivers of waters,
Washed with milk,
And fitly set.
13 His cheeks *are* like a bed of spices,
Banks of scented herbs.
His lips *are* lilies,
Dripping liquid myrrh.

14 His hands *are* rods of gold
Set with beryl.
His body *is* carved ivory
Inlaid *with* sapphires.
15 His legs *are* pillars of marble
Set on bases of fine gold.
His countenance *is* like Lebanon,

any notion that God is anti-affection and anti-intercourse. After all, he developed the whole package. Sex was his idea. From His perspective, sex is nothing short of holy.

He views sexual intimacy the way I view our family Bible. Passed down from my father's side, the volume is one hundred years old and twelve inches thick. Replete with lithographs, scribblings, and a family tree, it is, in my estimation, beyond value. Hence, I use it carefully.

When I need a stepstool, I don't reach for the Bible. If the foot of my bed breaks, I don't use the family Bible as a prop. When we need old paper for wrapping, we don't rip a sheet out of this book. We reserve the heirloom for special times and keep it in a chosen place.

Regard sex the same way—as a holy gift to be opened in a special place at special times. The special place is marriage, and the time is with your spouse. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

The sexual relationship is reserved for marriage alone and is meant to be a special bind between husband and wife. Keep it special. Keep it intimate between you and your spouse alone.

EXPLORATION

Commitment—Ruth 1:16, 17; 1 Samuel 20:17; Proverbs 17:17; 18:24; 27:17; Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10; Mark 10:6–9; John 15:13; Romans 12:5; Ephesians 5:25–33.

Excellent as the cedars.
16 His mouth *is* most sweet,
Yes, he *is* altogether lovely.
This *is* my beloved,
And this *is* my friend,
O daughters of Jerusalem!

The Daughters of Jerusalem

6 Where has your beloved gone,
O fairest among women?
Where has your beloved turned aside,
That we may seek him with you?

The Shulamite

2 My beloved has gone to his garden,
To the beds of spices,
To feed *his flock* in the gardens,
And to gather lilies.
3 I *am* my beloved's,
And my beloved *is* mine.
He feeds *his flock* among the lilies.

Praise of the Shulamite's Beauty

The Beloved

4 O my love, you *are as* beautiful as Tirzah,
Lovely as Jerusalem,
Awesome as *an army* with banners!
5 Turn your eyes away from me,
For they have overcome me.
Your hair *is* like a flock of goats
Going down from Gilead.
6 Your teeth *are* like a flock of sheep
Which have come up from the washing;
Every one bears twins,
And none *is* barren among them.
7 Like a piece of pomegranate
Are your temples behind your veil.

8 There are sixty queens
And eighty concubines,
And virgins without number.
9 My dove, my perfect one,
Is the only one,
The only one of her mother,
The favorite of the one who bore her.
The daughters saw her
And called her blessed,
The queens and the concubines,
And they praised her.

10 Who is she who looks forth as the morning,
Fair as the moon,

Life Lessons

Song of Solomon 6:4—7:9

SITUATION
King Solomon expressed his love for his bride.

OBSERVATION
The Song of Solomon is traditionally considered to be a love poem. God used marriage as an illustration of Christ's love for the church.

INSPIRATION
What is more beautiful than a bride? One of the side benefits of being a minister is that I get an early glimpse of the bride as she stands at the top of the aisle. And I have to say that I have never seen an ugly bride. I've seen some grooms that could use an alteration or two, but never a bride. Maybe it is the aura of whiteness that clings to her as dew clings to a rose. Or perhaps it is the diamonds that glisten in her eyes. Or maybe it's the blush of love that pinks her cheeks or the bouquet of promises she carries. Whatever it is, there is the feeling that when you see a bride you are seeing the purest beauty the world can boast.

A bride. A commitment robed in elegance. "I'll be with you forever." Tomorrow bringing hope to today. Promised purity faithfully delivered.

When you read that our heavenly home is similar to a bride, tell me, doesn't it make you want to go home? (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What are you doing to get ready for your spiritual wedding with Christ? Will you be pure, sinless, clean, without a spot? Get ready

Clear as the sun,
Awesome as *an army* with banners?

The Shulamite

11 I went down to the garden of nuts
To see the verdure of the valley,
To see whether the vine had budded
And the pomegranates had bloomed.
12 Before I was even aware,
My soul had made me
As the chariots of my noble people.[a]

The Beloved and His Friends

13 Return, return, O Shulamite;
Return, return, that we may look upon you!

The Shulamite

What would you see in the Shulamite—
As it were, the dance of the two camps?[a]

Expressions of Praise

The Beloved

7 How beautiful are your feet in sandals,
O prince's daughter!
The curves of your thighs *are* like jewels,
The work of the hands of a skillful workman.
2 Your navel *is* a rounded goblet;
It lacks no blended beverage.
Your waist *is* a heap of wheat
Set about with lilies.
3 Your two breasts *are* like two fawns,
Twins of a gazelle.
4 Your neck *is* like an ivory tower,
Your eyes *like* the pools in Heshbon
By the gate of Bath Rabbim.
Your nose *is* like the tower of Lebanon
Which looks toward Damascus.
5 Your head *crowns* you like *Mount* Carmel,
And the hair of your head *is* like purple;
A king *is* held captive by *your* tresses.

6 How fair and how pleasant you are,
O love, with your delights!
7 This stature of yours is like a palm tree,
And your breasts *like* its clusters.
8 I said, "I will go up to the palm tree,
I will take hold of its branches."
Let now your breasts be like clusters of the vine,
The fragrance of your breath like apples,
9 And the roof of your mouth like the best wine.

6:12 [a]Hebrew *Ammi Nadib* **6:13** [a]Hebrew *Mahanaim*

by being faithful today. When someone asks you to compromise your standards, say no. If they ask you to help them with something questionable, refuse.

EXPLORATION
Bride and Bridegroom—Isaiah 62:5; Ezekiel 16:8.

Life Lessons

Song of Solomon 7:10—8:4

SITUATION
King Solomon knew that love between a husband and wife should be enjoyed and celebrated. God made human bodies to be enjoyable to their spouses.

OBSERVATION
Enjoy your spouse! Celebrate love! Never awaken these passions outside of marriage, and never let anything interfere with your enjoyment.

INSPIRATION
Sex according to God's plan nourishes the soul. Consider His plan. Two children of God make a covenant with each other. They disable the ejection seats. They burn the bridge back to Momma's house. They fall into each other's arms beneath the canopy of God's blessing, encircled by the tall fence of fidelity. Both know the other will be there in the morning. Both know the other will stay even as skin wrinkles and vigor fades. Each gives the other exclusive for-your-eyes-only privileges. Gone is the guilt. Gone the undisciplined lust. What remains is a celebration of permanence, a tender moment in which the body continues what the mind and the soul have already begun. A time in which "they were both naked, the

man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (Genesis 2:25).

Such sex honors God. And such sex satisfies God's children. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Your sexual relationship with your spouse can be honoring to God. Sex according to God's plan satisfies your soul. Don't let anything lure you away from what God has given you in your spouse.

EXPLORATION
Forgiveness—Matthew 6:12–15; 18:21–35; Luke 17:3.

Life LESSONS

Song of Solomon 8:5–14

SITUATION
Solomon described love as strong, jealous, unquenchable, priceless, and irresistible.

OBSERVATION
The power of love that bonds husband and wife together provides them with satisfaction and enjoyment.

INSPIRATION
Relationships. America's most precious resource. Take our oil, take our weapons, but don't take what holds us together—relationships. A nation's strength is measured by the premium it puts on its own people. When people value people, an impenetrable web is drawn, a web of vitality and security.

A relationship. The delicate fusion of two human beings. The intricate weaving of two lives; two sets of moods, mentalities, and temperaments. Two intermingling hearts, both seeking solace and security.

A relationship. It has

The Shulamite

The wine goes *down* smoothly for my beloved,
Moving gently the lips of sleepers.[a]
10 I *am* my beloved's,
And his desire *is* toward me.

11 Come, my beloved,
Let us go forth to the field;
Let us lodge in the villages.
12 Let us get up early to the vineyards;
Let us see if the vine has budded,
Whether the grape blossoms are open,
And the pomegranates are in bloom.
There I will give you my love.
13 The mandrakes give off a fragrance,
And at our gates *are* pleasant *fruits,*
All manner, new and old,
Which I have laid up for you, my beloved.

8 Oh, that you were like my brother,
Who nursed at my mother's breasts!
If I should find you outside,
I would kiss you;
I would not be despised.
2 I would lead you *and* bring you
Into the house of my mother,
She *who* used to instruct me.
I would cause you to drink of spiced wine,
Of the juice of my pomegranate.

(To the Daughters of Jerusalem)

3 His left hand *is* under my head,
And his right hand embraces me.
4 I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
Do not stir up nor awaken love
Until it pleases.

Love Renewed in Lebanon

A Relative

5 Who *is* this coming up from the wilderness,
Leaning upon her beloved?

I awakened you under the apple tree.
There your mother brought you forth;
There she *who* bore you brought *you* forth.

The Shulamite to Her Beloved

6 Set me as a seal upon your heart,
As a seal upon your arm;
For love *is as* strong as death,

7:9 [a]Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *lips and teeth*.

Jealousy *as* cruel as the grave;[a]
Its flames *are* flames of fire,
A most vehement flame.[b]

7 Many waters cannot quench love,
Nor can the floods drown it.
If a man would give for love
All the wealth of his house,
It would be utterly despised.

The Shulamite's Brothers

8 We have a little sister,
And she has no breasts.
What shall we do for our sister
In the day when she is spoken for?
9 If she *is* a wall,
We will build upon her
A battlement of silver;
And if she *is* a door,
We will enclose her
With boards of cedar.

The Shulamite

10 I *am* a wall,
And my breasts like towers;
Then I became in his eyes
As one who found peace.
11 Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Hamon;
He leased the vineyard to keepers;
Everyone was to bring for its fruit
A thousand silver *coins*.

(To Solomon)

12 My own vineyard *is* before me.
You, O Solomon, *may have* a thousand,
And those who tend its fruit two
hundred.

The Beloved

13 You who dwell in the gardens,
The companions listen for your
voice—
Let me hear it!

The Shulamite

14 Make haste, my beloved,
And be like a gazelle
Or a young stag
On the mountains of spices.

8:6 [a]Or *Sheol* [b]Literally *A flame of* YAH (a poetic form of *YHWH, the* LORD)

more power than any nuclear bomb and more potential than any promising seed. Nothing will drive a man to greater courage than a relationship. Nothing will spawn greater devotion than a relationship. Nothing will fire the heat of a patriot or purge the cynicism of a rebel like a relationship. . . .

What matters most in life is not what ladders we climb or what ownings we accumulate. What matters most is a relationship.

What steps are you taking to protect your "possessions"? What measures are you using to insure that your relationships are strong and healthy? What are you doing to solidify the bridges between you and those in your world?

Do you resolve conflict as soon as possible, or do you "allow the sun to go down on your wrath"? Do you verbalize your love every day to your mate and children? Do you look for chances to forgive? Do you pray daily for those in your life? Do you count the lives of your family members and friends more important than your own?

Our Master knew the value of a relationship. It was through relationships that He changed the world. His movement thrived not on personality or power, but on championing the value of a person. He built bridges and crossed them. Touching the leper . . . uniting the estranged . . . exalting the prostitute. And what was that He said about loving your neighbor as yourself?

It's a wise man who values people above possessions. Many wealthy men have died paupers because they gave their lives to things and not to people. And many paupers have left this earth in contentment because they loved their neighbors. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How can you show love by giving up your desires in order to be more available for your family? How could you put your friends' needs before your own? Could you do this for an enemy?

EXPLORATION

Love—John 3:16; 10:10, 11; Romans 5:8; Ephesians 5:1, 2; Philippians 2:6–8; 1 Peter 4:8; 1 John 3:18; 4:10.

THE BOOK OF

ISAIAH

INTRODUCTION

Isaiah was a blueblood among the prophets. His Hebrew was classic. His style was noble. His circles were influential. But his message was bare-knuckled.

Through the reigns of four kings he proclaimed one message: God will not forever wink at wrong.

He spoke with a grit in his gut and a fire in his eyes like one who had stood in hell and seen heaven, for that is exactly what had happened. Isaiah saw God.

Whether what he saw was in the sky or in his head matters little compared to the truth that it was in his heart. The lights danced and the angels chanted back and forth, "Holy, Holy, Holy," as if they had nothing else to say, and they didn't—for that is all you can say before Him who is holy.

There are those who boast about having a vision of God like they boast about seeing the president. Not so with Isaiah. When he saw God he didn't update his resume, he begged for mercy.

"So I said: 'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts'" (6:5).

No sooner is the mercy requested than it is received. An angel purges his mouth with a hot coal, teaching us that the only mouth worthy of speaking for God is the one cleansed by God.

Isaiah was never the same after that. *Send me!* he volunteered. And so God sent. And so Isaiah preached. He preached with the passion and fury of a man who'd seen his life pass before his eyes.

For he had. He preached with the passion and fury of a man sent by God. For he was.

And he preached with the passion and fury of a man who longed to join the angels and spend eternity singing, "Holy, Holy, Holy" at the top of his lungs.

Something tells me that's what he is doing right now.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: The prophet Isaiah

Date Written: 700–650 B.C.

Key Themes:

- God's purposes will stand against all earthly forces.
- God promised a Savior through Isaiah's prophecy, which was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.
- God's salvation would be available to all people.

Key Verse:

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).

Contents:

I. Local Prophecies 1:1—35:10
II. Hezekiah's Reign 36:1—39:8
III. The Coming Messiah 40:1—56:12
IV. The Messiah for All People 57:1—66:24

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, *and* Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

The Wickedness of Judah

2 Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth!
For the Lord has spoken:
"I have nourished and brought up children,
And they have rebelled against Me;
3 The ox knows its owner
And the donkey its master's crib;
But Israel does not know,
My people do not consider."

4 Alas, sinful nation,
A people laden with iniquity,
A brood of evildoers,
Children who are corrupters!
They have forsaken the Lord,
They have provoked to anger
The Holy One of Israel,
They have turned away backward.

5 Why should you be stricken again?
You will revolt more and more.
The whole head is sick,
And the whole heart faints.
6 From the sole of the foot even to the head,
There is no soundness in it,
But wounds and bruises and putrefying sores;
They have not been closed or bound up,
Or soothed with ointment.

7 Your country *is* desolate,
Your cities *are* burned with fire;
Strangers devour your land in your presence;
And *it is* desolate, as overthrown by strangers.
8 So the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard,
As a hut in a garden of cucumbers,
As a besieged city.
9 Unless the Lord of hosts
Had left to us a very small remnant,
We would have become like Sodom,
We would have been made like Gomorrah.

10 Hear the word of the Lord,
You rulers of Sodom;
Give ear to the law of our God,
You people of Gomorrah:
11 "To what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?"
Says the Lord.
"I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams

Life Lessons

Isaiah 1:1–31

SITUATION
Isaiah revealed Judah's impending doom. God vowed not to listen to the prayers of His people because of their excessive sin. But God assured He would restore Israel after purging it of sin.

OBSERVATION
A loving and patient God continued to offer hope to the Israelites. He offered forgiveness if they repented.

INSPIRATION
In fact, it seems God's favorite word is "come."

"*Come,* let us talk about these things. Though your sins are like scarlet, they can be as white as snow."

"All you who are thirsty, *come* and drink."

"*Come* to me all, all of you who are tired and have heavy loads, and I will give you rest."

"*Come* to the wedding feast."

"*Come* follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

"Let anyone who is thirsty *come* to me and drink."

God is a God who invites. God is a God who calls. God is a God who opens the door and waves His hand pointing pilgrims to a full table.

His invitation is not just for a meal; however, it is for life. An invitation to come into His kingdom and take up residence in a tearless, graveless, painless world. Who can come? Whoever wishes. The invitation is at once universal and personal. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
To repent means being both

remorseful for your sin and also acting so that you do not repeat the sin again. What sin are you enjoying? Repent of it. Then put the past behind and live a new day.

EXPLORATION

God's Forgiveness—Genesis 50:15–21; 1 Chronicles 21:8; Luke 11:4; Acts 8:18–23; Romans 12:17–21; 1 John 1:9.

We will never be pure until we admit we are filthy. And we will never be able to wash the feet of those who have hurt us until we allow Jesus, the one we have hurt, to wash ours.

—Max Lucado (A Gentle Thunder)

And the fat of fed cattle.
I do not delight in the blood of bulls,
Or of lambs or goats.

12 "When you come to appear before Me,
Who has required this from your hand,
To trample My courts?
13 Bring no more futile sacrifices;
Incense is an abomination to Me.
The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies—
I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting.
14 Your New Moons and your appointed feasts
My soul hates;
They are a trouble to Me,
I am weary of bearing *them*.
15 When you spread out your hands,
I will hide My eyes from you;
Even though you make many prayers,
I will not hear.
Your hands are full of blood.

16 "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean;
Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes.
Cease to do evil,
17 Learn to do good;
Seek justice,
Rebuke the oppressor;[a]
Defend the fatherless,
Plead for the widow.

18 "Come now, and let us reason together,"
Says the Lord,
"Though your sins are like scarlet,
They shall be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson,
They shall be as wool.
19 If you are willing and obedient,
You shall eat the good of the land;
20 But if you refuse and rebel,
You shall be devoured by the sword";
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

The Degenerate City

21 How the faithful city has become a harlot!
It was full of justice;
Righteousness lodged in it,
But now murderers.
22 Your silver has become dross,
Your wine mixed with water.
23 Your princes *are* rebellious,

1:17 [a]Some ancient versions read *the oppressed.*

And companions of thieves;
Everyone loves bribes,
And follows after rewards.
They do not defend the fatherless,
Nor does the cause of the widow come before them.

24 Therefore the Lord says,
The Lord of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel,
"Ah, I will rid Myself of My adversaries,
And take vengeance on My enemies.
25 I will turn My hand against you,
And thoroughly purge away your dross,
And take away all your alloy.
26 I will restore your judges as at the first,
And your counselors as at the beginning.
Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city."

27 Zion shall be redeemed with justice,
And her penitents with righteousness.
28 The destruction of transgressors and of sinners *shall be* together,
And those who forsake the Lord shall be consumed.
29 For they[a] shall be ashamed of the terebinth trees
Which you have desired;
And you shall be embarrassed because of the gardens
Which you have chosen.
30 For you shall be as a terebinth whose leaf fades,
And as a garden that has no water.
31 The strong shall be as tinder,
And the work of it as a spark;
Both will burn together,
And no one shall quench *them*.

The Future House of God

2 The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

2 Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
That the mountain of the Lord's house
Shall be established on the top of the mountains,
And shall be exalted above the hills;
And all nations shall flow to it.
3 Many people shall come and say,
"Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
He will teach us His ways,
And we shall walk in His paths."
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

1:29 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Septuagint, and Vulgate; some Hebrew manuscripts and Targum read *you*.

Life Lessons

Isaiah 2:1—4:6

SITUATION
Isaiah's vision told both of God's judgment of the wicked and the promise of His coming kingdom for the righteous.

OBSERVATION
God can never approve of sin, but He longs to reward those who follow Him.

INSPIRATION
Imagine a man born with resistance [to the bubonic plague]. The bacterium can't penetrate his system unless he allows it to do so. And, incredibly, he does. He pursues the infected and makes this offer: "Touch my hand. Give me your disease, and receive my health."

The boil-and-fever-ridden have nothing to lose. They look at his extended hand and reach to touch it. True to the man's word, bacteria pass from their system into his. But their relief spells his anguish. His skin erupts and his body heaves. And as the healed stand in awe, the disease bearer hobbles away.

Our history books tell no such story. But our Bible does.

"He took the punishment, and that made us whole. Through his bruises we get healed. . . . GOD has piled all our sins, everything we've done wrong on him, on him. . . . He took on his own shoulders the sin of the many, he took up the cause of all the black sheep" (Isaiah 53:5–6, 12 MSG).

Christ responds to universal sin with a universal sacrifice, taking on the sins of the entire world. This is Christ's work *for* you. But God's salvation song has

two verses. He not only took your place on the Cross; He takes His place in your heart. This is the second stanza: Christ's work *in* you.

"It is no longer I who live," Paul explained, "but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

Or as he told one church: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you inside God's kingdom or do you find yourself peeking in, to see if it is for you? You cannot have one foot in and one foot out. Choose to be in God's kingdom. It will mean eternal rewards and fellowship with God.

EXPLORATION

Wickedness or Righteousness—Psalm 1; Proverbs 3:33; Ezekiel 18:20, 21; Malachi 3:18; Matthew 25:46; 1 Peter 3:12.

4 He shall judge between the nations,
And rebuke many people;
They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war anymore.

The Day of the Lord

5 O house of Jacob, come and let us walk
In the light of the Lord.

6 For You have forsaken Your people, the house of Jacob,
Because they are filled with eastern ways;
They *are* soothsayers like the Philistines,
And they are pleased with the children of foreigners.
7 Their land is also full of silver and gold,
And there is no end to their treasures;
Their land is also full of horses,
And there is no end to their chariots.
8 Their land is also full of idols;
They worship the work of their own hands,
That which their own fingers have made.
9 People bow down,
And each man humbles himself;
Therefore do not forgive them.

10 Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust,
From the terror of the Lord
And the glory of His majesty.
11 The lofty looks of man shall be humbled,
The haughtiness of men shall be bowed down,
And the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.

12 For the day of the Lord of hosts
Shall come upon everything proud and lofty,
Upon everything lifted up—
And it shall be brought low—
13 Upon all the cedars of Lebanon *that are* high and lifted up,
And upon all the oaks of Bashan;
14 Upon all the high mountains,
And upon all the hills *that are* lifted up;
15 Upon every high tower,
And upon every fortified wall;
16 Upon all the ships of Tarshish,
And upon all the beautiful sloops.
17 The loftiness of man shall be bowed down,
And the haughtiness of men shall be brought low;
The Lord alone will be exalted in that day,
18 But the idols He shall utterly abolish.

19 They shall go into the holes of the rocks,
And into the caves of the earth,

From the terror of the Lord
And the glory of His majesty,
When He arises to shake the earth
mightily.

20 In that day a man will cast away his idols
of silver
And his idols of gold,
Which they made, *each* for himself to
worship,
To the moles and bats,
21 To go into the clefts of the rocks,
And into the crags of the rugged rocks,
From the terror of the Lord
And the glory of His majesty,
When He arises to shake the earth
mightily.

22 Sever yourselves from such a man,
Whose breath *is* in his nostrils;
For of what account is he?

Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem

3 For behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts,
Takes away from Jerusalem and from
Judah
The stock and the store,
The whole supply of bread and the whole
supply of water;
2 The mighty man and the man of war,
The judge and the prophet,
And the diviner and the elder;
3 The captain of fifty and the honorable
man,
The counselor and the skillful artisan,
And the expert enchanter.

4 "I will give children *to be* their princes,
And babes shall rule over them.
5 The people will be oppressed,
Every one by another and every one by
his neighbor;
The child will be insolent toward the
elder,
And the base toward the honorable."

6 When a man takes hold of his brother
In the house of his father, *saying,*
"You have clothing;
You be our ruler,
And *let* these ruins *be* under your
power,"[a]
7 In that day he will protest, saying,
"I cannot cure *your* ills,
For in my house *is* neither food nor
clothing;
Do not make me a ruler of the people."

8 For Jerusalem stumbled,
And Judah is fallen,
Because their tongue and their doings
Are against the Lord,
To provoke the eyes of His glory.
9 The look on their countenance witnesses
against them,
And they declare their sin as Sodom;
They do not hide *it.*
Woe to their soul!
For they have brought evil upon
themselves.

10 "Say to the righteous that *it shall be* well
with them,
For they shall eat the fruit of their doings.
11 Woe to the wicked! *It shall be* ill *with
him,*
For the reward of his hands shall be given
him.
12 *As for* My people, children *are* their
oppressors,
And women rule over them.
O My people! Those who lead you cause
you to err,
And destroy the way of your paths."

Oppression and Luxury Condemned

13 The Lord stands up to plead,
And stands to judge the people.
14 The Lord will enter into judgment
With the elders of His people
And His princes:
"For you have eaten up the vineyard;
The plunder of the poor *is* in your houses.
15 What do you mean by crushing My
people
And grinding the faces of the poor?"
Says the Lord God of hosts.

16 Moreover the Lord says:

3:6 [a] Literally *hand*

"Because the daughters of Zion are
haughty,
And walk with outstretched necks
And wanton eyes,
Walking and mincing *as* they go,
Making a jingling with their feet,
17 Therefore the Lord will strike with a scab
The crown of the head of the daughters of
Zion,
And the Lord will uncover their secret
parts."

18 In that day the Lord will take away the
finery:
The jingling anklets, the scarves, and the
crescents;
19 The pendants, the bracelets, and the
veils;
20 The headdresses, the leg ornaments, and
the headbands;
The perfume boxes, the charms,
21 and the rings;
The nose jewels,
22 the festal apparel, and the mantles;
The outer garments, the purses,
23 and the mirrors;
The fine linen, the turbans, and the
robes.

24 And so it shall be:

Instead of a sweet smell there will be a
stench;
Instead of a sash, a rope;
Instead of well-set hair, baldness;
Instead of a rich robe, a girding of
sackcloth;
And branding instead of beauty.
25 Your men shall fall by the sword,
And your mighty in the war.

26 Her gates shall lament and mourn,
And she *being* desolate shall sit on the
ground.

4 And in that day seven women shall take
hold of one man, saying,

"We will eat our own food and wear our
own apparel;
Only let us be called by your name,
To take away our reproach."

The Renewal of Zion

2 In that day the Branch of the Lord shall
be beautiful and glorious;
And the fruit of the earth *shall be*
excellent and appealing
For those of Israel who have escaped.

3 And it shall come to pass that *he who is*
left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be
called holy—everyone who is recorded among
the living in Jerusalem. 4 When the Lord has
washed away the filth of the daughters of
Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from
her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by
the spirit of burning, 5 then the Lord will
create above every dwelling place of Mount
Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and
smoke by day and the shining of a flaming
fire by night. For over all the glory there *will*
be a covering. 6 And there will be a tabernacle
for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a
place of refuge, and for a shelter from storm
and rain.

God's Disappointing Vineyard

5 Now let me sing to my Well-beloved
A song of my Beloved regarding His
vineyard:

My Well-beloved has a vineyard
On a very fruitful hill.
2 He dug it up and cleared out its
stones,
And planted it with the choicest vine.
He built a tower in its midst,
And also made a winepress in it;
So He expected *it* to bring forth *good*
grapes,
But it brought forth wild grapes.

3 "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and
men of Judah,
Judge, please, between Me and My
vineyard.
4 What more could have been done to My
vineyard
That I have not done in it?
Why then, when I expected *it* to bring
forth *good* grapes,
Did it bring forth wild grapes?
5 And now, please let Me tell you what I will
do to My vineyard:

I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned;
And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.
6 I will lay it waste;
It shall not be pruned or dug,
But there shall come up briers and thorns.
I will also command the clouds
That they rain no rain on it."

7 For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts *is* the house of Israel,
And the men of Judah are His pleasant plant.
He looked for justice, but behold, oppression;
For righteousness, but behold, a cry *for help.*

Impending Judgment on Excesses

8 Woe to those who join house to house;
They add field to field,
Till *there is* no place
Where they may dwell alone in the midst of the land!
9 In my hearing the Lord of hosts *said,*
"Truly, many houses shall be desolate,
Great and beautiful ones, without inhabitant.
10 For ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath,
And a homer of seed shall yield one ephah."

11 Woe to those who rise early in the morning,
That they may follow intoxicating drink;
Who continue until night, *till* wine inflames them!
12 The harp and the strings,
The tambourine and flute,
And wine are in their feasts;
But they do not regard the work of the Lord,
Nor consider the operation of His hands.

13 Therefore my people have gone into captivity,
Because *they have* no knowledge;
Their honorable men *are* famished,
And their multitude dried up with thirst.
14 Therefore Sheol has enlarged itself
And opened its mouth beyond measure;
Their glory and their multitude and their pomp,
And he who is jubilant, shall descend into it.
15 People shall be brought down,
Each man shall be humbled,
And the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled.
16 But the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment,
And God who is holy shall be hallowed in righteousness.
17 Then the lambs shall feed in their pasture,
And in the waste places of the fat ones strangers shall eat.

18 Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity,
And sin as if with a cart rope;
19 That say, "Let Him make speed *and* hasten His work,

Life Lessons

Isaiah 5:1–30

SITUATION
In this passage, God condemns the nation of Israel for turning its back on the poor and exploiting them. He expected His people to be just and generous, a source of blessing, not proud and sinful, and a source of bloodshed.

OBSERVATION
God provides the means to be generous. Therefore, generosity gives glory to God. Most of all, God wants to see us give cheerfully.

INSPIRATION
Second-milers: they're easy to recognize. They're the ones who do more than demanded. And do so with joy and grace! They're the folks who seek to serve, not be served. Retaliate, not in kind, but in kindness. It was Jesus who created what we might deem the Society of the Second Mile.

Second-milers read Jesus' statement "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (see Acts 20:35) and nod their heads. When they hear the instruction "If your first concern is to look after yourself, you'll never find yourself" (Matthew 10:39 MSG), they understand. They've discovered this truth: "Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self" (Luke 9:24 MSG).

The real reward rests at the base of the second-mile post.

Think of it this way. Imagine yourself as a twelve-year-old facing a sink of dirty dishes. You don't want to wash them. You'd

rather play with your friends or watch television. But your mom has made it clear: clean the dishes.

You groan, moan, and wonder how you might place yourself for adoption. Then, from who knows where, a wacky idea strikes you. What if you surprise your mom by cleaning, not just the dishes, but the entire kitchen? You begin to smile. "I'll sweep the floor and wipe down the cabinets. Maybe reorganize the refrigerator!" And from some unknown source comes a shot of energy, a surge of productivity. A dull task becomes an adventure. Why? Liberation! You've passed from slave to volunteer.

This is the joy of the second mile.

Have you found it? Your day moves with the speed of an ice floe and the excitement of a quilting tournament. You do what is required—math problems and one chapter in literature— but no more. You are reliable, dependable, and quite likely bored. You dream of Fridays, holidays, a different family or a different job, when maybe all you need is a different attitude. Give your day a chance.

Daily do a deed for which you cannot be repaid.
(From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Our gifts not only help others, but they encourage us, too. How have you been helped by giving? How have you been blessed by receiving?

EXPLORATION

Generosity—Psalm 37:21–26; 112:5; Proverbs 11:25; 22:9; 1 Timothy 6:18.

That we may see *it;*
And let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and
come,
That we may know *it.*"

20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil;
Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness;
Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

21 Woe to *those who are* wise in their own eyes,
And prudent in their own sight!

22 Woe to men mighty at drinking wine,
Woe to men valiant for mixing intoxicating drink,
23 Who justify the wicked for a bribe,
And take away justice from the righteous man!

24 Therefore, as the fire devours the stubble,
And the flame consumes the chaff,
So their root will be as rottenness,
And their blossom will ascend like dust;
Because they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts,
And despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.
25 Therefore the anger of the Lord is aroused against His people;
He has stretched out His hand against them
And stricken them,
And the hills trembled.
Their carcasses *were* as refuse in the midst of the streets.

For all this His anger is not turned away,
But His hand *is* stretched out still.

26 He will lift up a banner to the nations from afar,
And will whistle to them from the end of the earth;
Surely they shall come with speed, swiftly.
27 No one will be weary or stumble among them,
No one will slumber or sleep;
Nor will the belt on their loins be loosed,
Nor the strap of their sandals be broken;
28 Whose arrows *are* sharp,
And all their bows bent;
Their horses' hooves will seem like flint,
And their wheels like a whirlwind.
29 Their roaring *will be* like a lion,
They will roar like young lions;
Yes, they will roar
And lay hold of the prey;
They will carry *it* away safely,
And no one will deliver.
30 In that day they will roar against them
Like the roaring of the sea.
And if *one* looks to the land,

Behold, darkness *and* sorrow;
And the light is darkened by the clouds.

Isaiah Called to Be a Prophet

6 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a
throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His *robe* filled the
temple. 2 Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two
he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.
3 And one cried to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy *is* the Lord of hosts;
The whole earth *is* full of His glory!"

4 And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried
out, and the house was filled with smoke.
5 So I said:

"Woe *is* me, for I am undone!
Because I *am* a man of unclean lips,
And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;
For my eyes have seen the King,
The Lord of hosts."

6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live
coal *which* he had taken with the tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth *with it,* and said:

"Behold, this has touched your lips;
Your iniquity is taken away,
And your sin purged."

8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying:

"Whom shall I send,
And who will go for Us?"

Then I said, "Here *am* I! Send me."
9 And He said, "Go, and tell this people:

'Keep on hearing, but do not understand;
Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'

10 "Make the heart of this people dull,
And their ears heavy,
And shut their eyes;
Lest they see with their eyes,
And hear with their ears,
And understand with their heart,
And return and be healed."

11 Then I said, "Lord, how long?"
And He answered:

Life Lessons

Isaiah 6:1—7:25

SITUATION
Isaiah recalled the commission God had given him. Isaiah carried a message of both hope and judgment. He described and predicted the coming Messiah: Jesus Christ.

OBSERVATION
We are commissioned to tell others about God and His plan for salvation.

INSPIRATION
When [Isaiah] sees the holiness of God, Isaiah does not boast or swagger. He takes no notes, plans no sermon series, launches no seminar tours. Instead, he falls on his face and begs for mercy. "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5).

The God-given vision was not about Isaiah but about God and His glory. Isaiah gets the point. "It's not about me. It's all about Him." He finds humility, not through seeking it, but through seeking Him. One glimpse and the prophet claims citizenship among the infected and diseased—the "unclean," a term used to describe those with leprosy. God's holiness silences human boasting.

And God's mercy makes us holy. Look what happens next.

"Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: 'Behold, this

has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged'" (6:6, 7).

Isaiah makes no request. He asks for no grace. Indeed, he likely assumed mercy was impossible. But God, who is quick to pardon and full of mercy, purges Isaiah of his sin and redirects his life.

God solicits a spokesman. "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" (6:8).

Isaiah's heart and hand shoot skyward. "Here am I! Send me" (6:8). A glimpse of God's holiness and Isaiah had to speak. As if he'd found the source of the river, ridden the rage of the canyon. As if he'd seen what Moses had seen—God Himself. Albeit a glimpse, but a God-glimpse nonetheless.

And he was different as a result.

Holy different. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Have you known someone for some time but have never shared Christ with that person? Create an opportunity to share about the most important aspect of your life.

EXPLORATION

The Road to Salvation—Romans 3:23; 5:8; 6:23; 10:10–13.

"Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant,
The houses are without a man,
The land is utterly desolate,
12 The Lord has removed men far away,
And the forsaken places *are* many in the midst of the land.
13 But yet a tenth *will be* in it,
And will return and be for consuming,
As a terebinth tree or as an oak,
Whose stump *remains* when it is cut down.
So the holy seed *shall be* its stump."

Isaiah Sent to King Ahaz

7 Now it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, *that* Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to *make* war against it, but could not prevail against it. 2 And it was told to the house of David, saying, "Syria's forces are deployed in Ephraim." So his heart and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind.

3 Then the Lord said to Isaiah, "Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-Jashub[a] your son, at the end of the aqueduct from the upper pool, on the highway to the Fuller's Field, 4 and say to him: 'Take heed, and be quiet; do not fear or be faint-hearted for these two stubs of smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria, and the son of Remaliah. 5 Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah have plotted evil against you, saying, 6 "Let us go up against Judah and trouble it, and let us make a gap in its wall for ourselves, and set a king over them, the son of Tabel"— 7 thus says the Lord God:

"It shall not stand,
Nor shall it come to pass.
8 For the head of Syria *is* Damascus,
And the head of Damascus *is* Rezin.
Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken,
So that it will not *be* a people.
9 The head of Ephraim *is* Samaria,
And the head of Samaria *is* Remaliah's son.
If you will not believe,
Surely you shall not be established."'"

The Immanuel Prophecy

10 Moreover the Lord spoke again to Ahaz, saying, 11 "Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above."

12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord!"

13 Then he said, "Hear now, O house of David! *Is it* a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.[a] 15 Curds and honey He

7:3 [a]Literally *A Remnant Shall Return* **7:14** [a]Literally *God-With-Us*

shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil
and choose the good. 16For before the Child
shall know to refuse the evil and choose the
good, the land that you dread will be forsaken
by both her kings. 17The Lord will bring the
king of Assyria upon you and your people and
your father's house—days that have not come
since the day that Ephraim departed from
Judah."

18 And it shall come to pass in that day
That the Lord will whistle for the fly
That *is* in the farthest part of the rivers of
Egypt,
And for the bee that *is* in the land of
Assyria.
19 They will come, and all of them will
rest
In the desolate valleys and in the clefts of
the rocks,
And on all thorns and in all pastures.

20 In the same day the Lord will shave with a
hired razor,
With those from beyond the River,[a] with
the king of Assyria,
The head and the hair of the legs,
And will also remove the beard.

7:20 [a]That is, the Euphrates

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: Immanuel, God With Us

He could have given up. No one would have known otherwise. Jesus could have given up.

One look at the womb could have discouraged Him. God is as unbridled as the air and limitless as the sky. Would He reduce His world to the belly of a girl for nine months?

And nine months? There is another reason to quit. Heaven has no months. Heaven has no time. Or, perhaps better said, heaven has all the time. It's we who are running out. Ours passes so quickly that we measure it by the second. Wouldn't Christ rather stay on the other side of the ridge of time? . . .

And the stable. Is that not yet another reason for Christ to back out? Stables are smelly, dirty. Stables have no linoleum floors or oxygen tanks. How are they going to cut the umbilical cord? And who is going to cut the umbilical cord? Joseph? A small-time carpenter from a one-camel town? Is there not a better father for God? Someone with an education, a pedigree. Someone with a bit of clout? This fellow couldn't even swing a room at the hotel. You think he's got what it takes to be the father to the Maker of the universe? . . .

Jesus could have given up. Imagine the change He had to make, the distance He had to travel. What would it be like to become flesh?

Love goes the distance . . . and Christ traveled from limitless eternity to be confined by time in order to become one of us. He didn't have to. He could have given up. At any step along the way He could have called it quits.

He didn't, because He is love. And "love . . . endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:4–7). He endured the distance. What's more, He endured the resistance.

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory" (John 1:14). (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 940.

21 It shall be in that day
That a man will keep alive a young cow and two sheep;
22 So it shall be, from the abundance of milk they give,
That he will eat curds;
For curds and honey everyone will eat who is left in the land.

23 It shall happen in that day,
That wherever there could be a thousand vines
Worth a thousand *shekels* of silver,
It will be for briers and thorns.
24 With arrows and bows *men* will come there,
Because all the land will become briers and thorns.

25 And to any hill which could be dug with the hoe,
You will not go there for fear of briers and thorns;
But it will become a range for oxen
And a place for sheep to roam.

Assyria Will Invade the Land

8 Moreover the Lord said to me, "Take a large scroll, and write on it with a man's pen concerning Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz.[a] 2 And I will take for Myself faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah."

3 Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said to me, "Call his name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz; 4 for before the child shall have knowledge to cry 'My father' and 'My mother,' the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be taken away before the king of Assyria."

5 The Lord also spoke to me again, saying:

6 "Inasmuch as these people refused
The waters of Shiloah that flow softly,
And rejoice in Rezin and in Remaliah's son;
7 Now therefore, behold, the Lord brings up over them
The waters of the River,[a] strong and mighty—
The king of Assyria and all his glory;
He will go up over all his channels
And go over all his banks.
8 He will pass through Judah,
He will overflow and pass over,
He will reach up to the neck;
And the stretching out of his wings
Will fill the breadth of Your land, O Immanuel.[a]

9 "Be shattered, O you peoples, and be broken in pieces!
Give ear, all you from far countries.
Gird yourselves, but be broken in pieces;
Gird yourselves, but be broken in pieces.
10 Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing;

8:1 [a]Literally *Speed the Spoil, Hasten the Booty* **8:7** [a]That is, the Euphrates
8:8 [a]Literally *God-With-Us*

Life Lessons

Isaiah 8:1—10:34

SITUATION
Isaiah brought a shocking announcement that God planned to deliver Israel into the hands of Assyria. Israel would experience difficult days ahead. But during these hard times, God would not forget about His people.

OBSERVATION
God judges sin. But He also restores His people into a peaceful relationship with Himself.

INSPIRATION
Next time the arid desert winds blow, defining you by yesterday's struggles, reach for God's goblet of grace and drink. Grace defines who you are. The parent you can't please is as mistaken as the doting uncle you can't disappoint. People hold no clout. Only God does. According to Him, you are His. Period. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). . . .

Your deeds don't save you. And your deeds don't keep you saved. Grace does. The next time big brother starts dispensing more snarls than twin Dobermans, loosen your sandals, set your ring on your finger, and quote the apostle of grace who said, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15:10). (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Rejoice because you have peace with God! Celebrate God's forgiveness for you.

Speak the word, but it will not stand,
For God *is* with us."[a]

Fear God, Heed His Word

[11] For the Lord spoke thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying:

[12] "Do not say, 'A conspiracy,'
Concerning all that this people call a conspiracy,
Nor be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.
[13] The Lord of hosts, Him you shall hallow;
Let Him *be* your fear,
And *let* Him *be* your dread.
[14] He will be as a sanctuary,
But a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense
To both the houses of Israel,
As a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.
[15] And many among them shall stumble;
They shall fall and be broken,
Be snared and taken."

[16] Bind up the testimony,
Seal the law among my disciples.
[17] And I will wait on the Lord,
Who hides His face from the house of Jacob;
And I will hope in Him.
[18] Here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me!
We are for signs and wonders in Israel
From the Lord of hosts,
Who dwells in Mount Zion.

[19] And when they say to you, "Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter," should not a people seek their God? *Should they seek* the dead on behalf of the living? [20] To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, *it is* because *there* is no light in them.

[21] They will pass through it hard-pressed and hungry; and it shall happen, when they are hungry, that they will be enraged and curse their king and their God, and look upward. [22] Then they will look to the earth, and see trouble and darkness, gloom of anguish; and *they will be* driven into darkness.

The Government of the Promised Son

9 Nevertheless the gloom *will* not *be* upon her who *is* distressed,
As when at first He lightly esteemed
The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
And afterward more heavily oppressed *her,*
By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,
In Galilee of the Gentiles.
[2] The people who walked in darkness

8:10 [a]Hebrew *Immanuel*

Demonstrate God's peace to others through your relationships. Help your coworkers and family to meet their needs. Relieve the disappointments of others.

EXPLORATION
Peace—Psalm 29:11; 119:165; Isaiah 26:3; 48:18; John 14:27; Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:14; Philippians 4:7; Colossians 1:20.

Our guilty conscience becomes a curtain that separates us from God. As a result, we hide from our Master.

—Max Lucado (He Chose the Nails)

Have seen a great light;
Those who dwelt in the land of the
shadow of death,
Upon them a light has shined.

3 You have multiplied the nation
And increased its joy;[a]
They rejoice before You
According to the joy of harvest,
As *men* rejoice when they divide the spoil.
4 For You have broken the yoke of his
burden
And the staff of his shoulder,
The rod of his oppressor,
As in the day of Midian.
5 For every warrior's sandal from the noisy
battle,
And garments rolled in blood,
Will be used for burning *and* fuel of fire.

6 For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His
shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7 Of the increase of *His* government and
peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His
kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment
and justice

9:3 [a]Following Qere and Targum; Kethib and Vulgate read *not increased joy;* Septuagint reads *Most of the people You brought down in Your joy.*

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: The Son of Man

He lived among us. He donned the costliest of robes: a human body. He made a throne out of a manger and a royal court out of some cows. He took a common name—Jesus—and made it holy. He took common people and made them the same. He could have lived over us or away from us. But He didn't. He lived among us.

He became a friend of the sinner and brother of the poor. He touched their sores and felt their tears and paid for their mistakes. He entered a tomb and came out and pledged that we'd do the same. And to us all, and to all the frightened Freds of the world, He shared the same message. "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. . . . I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1, 3).

And how do we respond?

Some pretend He doesn't exist. They occupy themselves with a study of the piano and ask no questions about the Maestro.

Others hear Him, but don't believe Him. It's not easy to believe that God would go so far to take us home.

But then, a few decide to give it a try. They venture out of their corners and peek up through the opening. Each day they look toward the sky. They, like Simeon, "wait for" and "look forward to" the day Christ comes (2 Peter 3:11). They know there is more to life than the belly of a piano, and they want to be ready when Christ comes. (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 959.

From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

The Punishment of Samaria

8 The Lord sent a word against Jacob,
And it has fallen on Israel.
9 All the people will know—
Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria—
Who say in pride and arrogance of heart:
10 "The bricks have fallen down,
But we will rebuild with hewn stones;
The sycamores are cut down,
But we will replace *them* with cedars."
11 Therefore the Lord shall set up
The adversaries of Rezin against him,
And spur his enemies on,
12 The Syrians before and the Philistines behind;
And they shall devour Israel with an open mouth.

For all this His anger is not turned away,
But His hand *is* stretched out still.

13 For the people do not turn to Him who strikes them,
Nor do they seek the Lord of hosts.
14 Therefore the Lord will cut off head and tail from Israel,
Palm branch and bulrush in one day.
15 The elder and honorable, he *is* the head;
The prophet who teaches lies, he *is* the tail.
16 For the leaders of this people cause *them* to err,
And *those who are* led by them are destroyed.
17 Therefore the Lord will have no joy in their young men,
Nor have mercy on their fatherless and widows;
For everyone *is* a hypocrite and an evildoer,
And every mouth speaks folly.

For all this His anger is not turned away,
But His hand *is* stretched out still.

18 For wickedness burns as the fire;
It shall devour the briers and thorns,
And kindle in the thickets of the forest;
They shall mount up *like* rising smoke.
19 Through the wrath of the Lord of hosts
The land is burned up,
And the people shall be as fuel for the fire;
No man shall spare his brother.
20 And he shall snatch on the right hand
And be hungry;
He shall devour on the left hand
And not be satisfied;
Every man shall eat the flesh of his own arm.
21 Manasseh *shall devour* Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasseh;
Together they *shall be* against Judah.

For all this His anger is not turned away,
But His hand *is* stretched out still.

10 "Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees,
Who write misfortune,
Which they have prescribed
2 To rob the needy of justice,
And to take what is right from the poor of My people,
That widows may be their prey,
And *that* they may rob the fatherless.
3 What will you do in the day of punishment,
And in the desolation *which* will come from afar?
To whom will you flee for help?
And where will you leave your glory?
4 Without Me they shall bow down among the prisoners,
And they shall fall among the slain."

For all this His anger is not turned away,
But His hand *is* stretched out still.

Arrogant Assyria Also Judged

5 "Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger
And the staff in whose hand is My indignation.
6 I will send him against an ungodly nation,
And against the people of My wrath
I will give him charge,
To seize the spoil, to take the prey,
And to tread them down like the mire of the streets.

7 Yet he does not mean so,
Nor does his heart think so;
But *it is* in his heart to destroy,
And cut off not a few nations.
8 For he says,
'*Are* not my princes altogether kings?
9 *Is* not Calno like Carchemish?
Is not Hamath like Arpad?
Is not Samaria like Damascus?
10 As my hand has found the kingdoms of the idols,
Whose carved images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria,
11 As I have done to Samaria and her idols,
Shall I not do also to Jerusalem and her idols?' "

12 Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Lord has performed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, *that He will say,* "I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks."
13 For he says:

"By the strength of my hand I have done *it,*
And by my wisdom, for I am prudent;
Also I have removed the boundaries of the people,
And have robbed their treasuries;
So I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant *man.*
14 My hand has found like a nest the riches of the people,
And as one gathers eggs *that are* left,
I have gathered all the earth;
And there was no one who moved *his* wing,
Nor opened *his* mouth with even a peep."

15 Shall the ax boast itself against him who chops with it?
Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it?
As if a rod could wield *itself* against those who lift it up,
Or as if a staff could lift up, *as if it were* not wood!
16 Therefore the Lord, the Lord[a] of hosts,
Will send leanness among his fat ones;
And under his glory
He will kindle a burning
Like the burning of a fire.
17 So the Light of Israel will be for a fire,
And his Holy One for a flame;
It will burn and devour
His thorns and his briers in one day.
18 And it will consume the glory of his forest and of his fruitful field,
Both soul and body;
And they will be as when a sick man wastes away.
19 Then the rest of the trees of his forest
Will be so few in number
That a child may write them.

The Returning Remnant of Israel

20 And it shall come to pass in that day
That the remnant of Israel,
And such as have escaped of the house of Jacob,
Will never again depend on him who defeated them,
But will depend on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.
21 The remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob,
To the Mighty God.
22 For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea,
A remnant of them will return;
The destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness.
23 For the Lord God of hosts
Will make a determined end
In the midst of all the land.

24 Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts: "O My people, who dwell in Zion, do not be afraid of the Assyrian. He shall strike you with a rod and lift up his staff against you, in the manner of Egypt. 25 For yet a very little while and the indignation will cease, as will My anger in their destruction." 26 And the Lord of hosts will stir up a scourge for him like the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb; *as* His rod was on the sea, so will He lift it up in the manner of Egypt.

10:16 [a]Following Bomberg; Masoretic Text and Dead Sea Scrolls read *YHWH* (*the Lord*).

27 It shall come to pass in that day
That his burden will be taken away from your shoulder,
And his yoke from your neck,
And the yoke will be destroyed because of the anointing oil.

28 He has come to Aiath,
He has passed Migron;
At Michmash he has attended to his equipment.
29 They have gone along the ridge,
They have taken up lodging at Geba.
Ramah is afraid,
Gibeah of Saul has fled.
30 Lift up your voice,
O daughter of Gallim!
Cause it to be heard as far as Laish—
O poor Anathoth![a]
31 Madmenah has fled,
The inhabitants of Gebim seek refuge.
32 As yet he will remain at Nob that day;
He will shake his fist at the mount of the daughter of Zion,
The hill of Jerusalem.

33 Behold, the Lord,
The Lord of hosts,
Will lop off the bough with terror;
Those of high stature *will be* hewn down,
And the haughty will be humbled.
34 He will cut down the thickets of the forest with iron,
And Lebanon will fall by the Mighty One.

The Reign of Jesse's Offspring

11 There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,
And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.
2 The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him,
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The Spirit of counsel and might,
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.

3 His delight *is* in the fear of the Lord,
And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes,
Nor decide by the hearing of His ears;
4 But with righteousness He shall judge the poor,
And decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.
5 Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins,
And faithfulness the belt of His waist.

6 "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,

10:30 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint and Syriac read *Listen to her, O Anathoth.*

Life Lessons

Isaiah 11:1—12:6

SITUATION
Isaiah prophesied about Jesus, who would establish a kingdom of peace and prosperity.

OBSERVATION
Jesus Christ ushered in a kingdom where God reigns in righteousness and justice. We will realize it fully when He comes again.

INSPIRATION
As we behold Him, we become like Him.

I experienced this principle firsthand when an opera singer visited our church. We didn't know his voice was trained. You couldn't have known by his corduroy coat and loafers. No tuxedo, cummerbund, or silk tie. His appearance raised no eyebrow, but his voice certainly did. I should know. He was in the pew behind mine.

His vibrato made dentures rattle and rafters shake. He tried to contain himself. But how can a tuba hide in a room of piccolos?

For a moment I was startled. But within a verse, I was inspired. Emboldened by his volume, I lifted mine. Did I sing better? Not even I could hear me. My warbles were lost in his talent. But did I try harder? No doubt. His power brought out the best in me.

Could your world use a little music? If so, invite heaven's baritone to cut loose. He may look as common as the guy next door, but just wait till you see what He can do. Who knows? A few songs with Him might change the way you sing.

Forever. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Is your behavior appropriate for a citizen of God's kingdom? Make adjustments so that you are fair in your business, loving to your family, considerate to your friends, and honest in everything you do.

EXPLORATION
God's Kingdom—Matthew 6:33; Luke 12:32–34; 1 Corinthians 15:23–28; Hebrews 12:28; James 2:5.

The leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
The calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
And a little child shall lead them.
7 The cow and the bear shall graze;
Their young ones shall lie down together;
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
8 The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole,
And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den.
9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord
As the waters cover the sea.

10 "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse,
Who shall stand as a banner to the people;
For the Gentiles shall seek Him,
And His resting place shall be glorious."

11 It shall come to pass in that day
That the Lord shall set His hand again the second time
To recover the remnant of His people who are left,
From Assyria and Egypt,
From Pathros and Cush,
From Elam and Shinar,
From Hamath and the islands of the sea.

12 He will set up a banner for the nations,
And will assemble the outcasts of Israel,
And gather together the dispersed of Judah
From the four corners of the earth.
13 Also the envy of Ephraim shall depart,
And the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off;
Ephraim shall not envy Judah,
And Judah shall not harass Ephraim.
14 But they shall fly down upon the shoulder of the Philistines
toward the west;
Together they shall plunder the people of the East;
They shall lay their hand on Edom and Moab;
And the people of Ammon shall obey them.
15 The Lord will utterly destroy[a] the tongue of the Sea of
Egypt;
With His mighty wind He will shake His fist over the River,[b]
And strike it in the seven streams,
And make *men* cross over dry-shod.
16 There will be a highway for the remnant of His people
Who will be left from Assyria,
As it was for Israel
In the day that he came up from the land of Egypt.

11:15 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Septuagint, Syriac, and Targum read *dry up*. [b]That is, the Euphrates

A Hymn of Praise

12 And in that day you will say:

"O Lord, I will praise You;
Though You were angry with me,
Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me.
2 Behold, God *is* my salvation,
I will trust and not be afraid;
'For Yah, the Lord, *is* my strength and song;
He also has become my salvation.'"[a]

3 Therefore with joy you will draw water
From the wells of salvation.

4 And in that day you will say:

"Praise the Lord, call upon His name;
Declare His deeds among the peoples,
Make mention that His name is exalted.
5 Sing to the Lord,
For He has done excellent things;
This *is* known in all the earth.
6 Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion,
For great *is* the Holy One of Israel in your midst!"

Proclamation Against Babylon

13 The burden against Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw.

2 "Lift up a banner on the high mountain,
Raise your voice to them;
Wave your hand, that they may enter the gates of the nobles.
3 I have commanded My sanctified ones;
I have also called My mighty ones for My anger—
Those who rejoice in My exaltation."

4 The noise of a multitude in the mountains,
Like that of many people!
A tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together!
The Lord of hosts musters
The army for battle.
5 They come from a far country,
From the end of heaven—
The Lord and His weapons of indignation,
To destroy the whole land.

6 Wail, for the day of the Lord *is* at hand!
It will come as destruction from the Almighty.
7 Therefore all hands will be limp,
Every man's heart will melt,

12:2 [a]Exodus 15:2

Life Lessons

Isaiah 13:1—21:17

SITUATION
Isaiah reminded Israel not to make alliances with pagan nations. If the people sought God, His strength would be adequate to protect them. God promised to punish each neighboring country for its arrogance, rebellion, and immorality.

OBSERVATION
God expects His people as a group to stand up for truth.

INSPIRATION
Need unchanging truth to trust? Try God's. His truth never wavers.

Would that we could say the same. We've learned to season our words with salt, we eat them so often. Our opinions change like Rodeo Drive fashion trends. (Weren't your convictions about child rearing stronger before you had kids? Do you know any Republicans who used to be Democrats and vice versa?) Our convictions tend to change.

Good to know God's don't. His view of right and wrong is the same with you and me as it was with Adam and Eve. "The word of our God stands forever" (Isaiah 40:8). "Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven. . . . All Your commandments are truth. . . . You have founded them forever" (Psalm 119:89, 151, 152).

Your outlook may change. My convictions may sway, but "the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). And since it can't, since His truth will not waver, God's ways will never alter.

He will always hate sin and love sinners, despise the proud and exalt the humble. He will always

convict the evildoer and comfort the heavy-hearted. He never changes direction midstream, recalibrates the course midway home, or amends the heavenly Constitution. God will always be the same. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you know how your representatives in Congress have voted on moral issues? Do their votes align with God's desires? Write your representatives in Congress. Ask their position on specific issues. Write them with your support or concerns. Next election, know the position of all the candidates.

EXPLORATION

Nations—Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 18:9–13; Isaiah 14:1, 2.

If pride goes before the fall, then shame is what keeps you from getting up after one.

—Max Lucado (He Chose the Nails)

8 And they will be afraid.
Pangs and sorrows will take hold of *them;*
They will be in pain as a woman in childbirth;
They will be amazed at one another;
Their faces *will be like* flames.

9 Behold, the day of the Lord comes,
Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger,
To lay the land desolate;
And He will destroy its sinners from it.
10 For the stars of heaven and their constellations
Will not give their light;
The sun will be darkened in its going forth,
And the moon will not cause its light to shine.

11 "I will punish the world for *its* evil,
And the wicked for their iniquity;
I will halt the arrogance of the proud,
And will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.
12 I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold,
A man more than the golden wedge of Ophir.
13 Therefore I will shake the heavens,
And the earth will move out of her place,
In the wrath of the Lord of hosts
And in the day of His fierce anger.
14 It shall be as the hunted gazelle,
And as a sheep that no man takes up;
Every man will turn to his own people,
And everyone will flee to his own land.
15 Everyone who is found will be thrust through,
And everyone who is captured will fall by the sword.
16 Their children also will be dashed to pieces before their eyes;
Their houses will be plundered
And their wives ravished.

17 "Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them,
Who will not regard silver;
And *as for* gold, they will not delight in it.
18 Also *their* bows will dash the young men to pieces,
And they will have no pity on the fruit of the womb;
Their eye will not spare children.
19 And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms,
The beauty of the Chaldeans' pride,
Will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.
20 It will never be inhabited,
Nor will it be settled from generation to generation;
Nor will the Arabian pitch tents there,
Nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there.
21 But wild beasts of the desert will lie there,
And their houses will be full of owls;
Ostriches will dwell there,
And wild goats will caper there.

22 The hyenas will howl in their citadels,
And jackals in their pleasant palaces.
Her time *is* near to come,
And her days will not be prolonged."

Mercy on Jacob

14 For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob,
and will still choose Israel, and settle
them in their own land. The strangers will be
joined with them, and they will cling to the
house of Jacob. 2Then people will take them
and bring them to their place, and the house
of Israel will possess them for servants and
maids in the land of the Lord; they will take
them captive whose captives they were, and
rule over their oppressors.

Fall of the King of Babylon

3It shall come to pass in the day the Lord
gives you rest from your sorrow, and from
your fear and the hard bondage in which you
were made to serve, 4that you will take up this
proverb against the king of Babylon, and say:

"How the oppressor has ceased,
The golden[a] city ceased!
5 The Lord has broken the staff of the
wicked,
The scepter of the rulers;
6 He who struck the people in wrath with a
continual stroke,
He who ruled the nations in anger,
Is persecuted *and* no one hinders.
7 The whole earth is at rest *and* quiet;
They break forth into singing.
8 Indeed the cypress trees rejoice over you,
And the cedars of Lebanon,
Saying, 'Since you were cut down,
No woodsman has come up against us.'

9 "Hell from beneath is excited about you,
To meet *you* at your coming;
It stirs up the dead for you,
All the chief ones of the earth;
It has raised up from their thrones
All the kings of the nations.
10 They all shall speak and say to you:
'Have you also become as weak as we?
Have you become like us?
11 Your pomp is brought down to Sheol,
And the sound of your stringed
instruments;
The maggot is spread under you,
And worms cover you.'

The Fall of Lucifer

12 "How you are fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer,[a] son of the morning!
How you are cut down to the ground,
You who weakened the nations!
13 For you have said in your heart:
'I will ascend into heaven,
I will exalt my throne above the stars of
God;
I will also sit on the mount of the
congregation
On the farthest sides of the north;
14 I will ascend above the heights of the
clouds,
I will be like the Most High.'
15 Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol,
To the lowest depths of the Pit.

16 "Those who see you will gaze at you,
And consider you, *saying:*
'*Is* this the man who made the earth
tremble,
Who shook kingdoms,
17 Who made the world as a wilderness
And destroyed its cities,
Who did not open the house of his
prisoners?'

18 "All the kings of the nations,
All of them, sleep in glory,
Everyone in his own house;
19 But you are cast out of your grave
Like an abominable branch,
Like the garment of those who are slain,
Thrust through with a sword,
Who go down to the stones of the pit,
Like a corpse trodden underfoot.
20 You will not be joined with them in
burial,
Because you have destroyed your land
And slain your people.
The brood of evildoers shall never be
named.
21 Prepare slaughter for his children
Because of the iniquity of their fathers,

14:4 [a]Or *insolent* **14:12** [a]Literally *Day Star*

Lest they rise up and possess the land,
And fill the face of the world with cities."

Babylon Destroyed

22 "For I will rise up against them," says the
Lord of hosts,
"And cut off from Babylon the name and
remnant,
And offspring and posterity," says the
Lord.
23 "I will also make it a possession for the
porcupine,
And marshes of muddy water;
I will sweep it with the broom of
destruction," says the Lord of hosts.

Assyria Destroyed

24 The Lord of hosts has sworn, saying,
"Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come
to pass,
And as I have purposed, *so* it shall stand:
25 That I will break the Assyrian in My land,
And on My mountains tread him
underfoot.
Then his yoke shall be removed from
them,
And his burden removed from their
shoulders.
26 This *is* the purpose that is purposed
against the whole earth,
And this *is* the hand that is stretched out
over all the nations.
27 For the Lord of hosts has purposed,
And who will annul *it?*
His hand *is* stretched out,
And who will turn it back?"

Philistia Destroyed

28 This is the burden which came in the year
that King Ahaz died.

29 "Do not rejoice, all you of Philistia,
Because the rod that struck you is broken;
For out of the serpent's roots will come
forth a viper,
And its offspring *will be* a fiery flying
serpent.
30 The firstborn of the poor will feed,
And the needy will lie down in safety;
I will kill your roots with famine,
And it will slay your remnant.
31 Wail, O gate! Cry, O city!
All you of Philistia *are* dissolved;
For smoke will come from the north,
And no one *will be* alone in his appointed
times."

32 What will they answer the messengers of
the nation?
That the Lord has founded Zion,
And the poor of His people shall take
refuge in it.

Proclamation Against Moab

15 The burden against Moab.
Because in the night Ar of Moab is laid
waste
And destroyed,
Because in the night Kir of Moab is laid
waste
And destroyed,
2 He has gone up to the temple[a] and
Dibon,
To the high places to weep.
Moab will wail over Nebo and over
Medeba;
On all their heads *will be* baldness,
And every beard cut off.
3 In their streets they will clothe themselves
with sackcloth;
On the tops of their houses
And in their streets
Everyone will wail, weeping bitterly.
4 Heshbon and Elealeh will cry out,
Their voice shall be heard as far as Jahaz;
Therefore the armed soldiers[a] of Moab
will cry out;
His life will be burdensome to him.

5 "My heart will cry out for Moab;
His fugitives *shall flee* to Zoar,
Like a three-year-old heifer.[a]
For by the Ascent of Luhith
They will go up with weeping;
For in the way of Horonaim
They will raise up a cry of destruction,
6 For the waters of Nimrim will be desolate,

15:2 [a]Hebrew *bayith,* literally *house* **15:4** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint and Syriac read *loins.* **15:5** [a]Or *The Third Eglath,* an unknown city (compare Jeremiah 48:34)

For the green grass has withered away;
The grass fails, there is nothing green.
7 Therefore the abundance they have
gained,
And what they have laid up,
They will carry away to the Brook of the
Willows.
8 For the cry has gone all around the
borders of Moab,
Its wailing to Eglaim
And its wailing to Beer Elim.
9 For the waters of Dimon[a] will be full of
blood;
Because I will bring more upon Dimon,[b]
Lions upon him who escapes from
Moab,
And on the remnant of the land."

Moab Destroyed

16 Send the lamb to the ruler of the land,
From Sela to the wilderness,
To the mount of the daughter of Zion.
2 For it shall be as a wandering bird thrown
out of the nest;
So shall be the daughters of Moab at the
fords of the Arnon.

3 "Take counsel, execute judgment;
Make your shadow like the night in the
middle of the day;
Hide the outcasts,
Do not betray him who escapes.
4 Let My outcasts dwell with you, O Moab;
Be a shelter to them from the face of the
spoiler.
For the extortioner is at an end,
Devastation ceases,
The oppressors are consumed out of the
land.
5 In mercy the throne will be established;
And One will sit on it in truth, in the
tabernacle of David,
Judging and seeking justice and
hastening righteousness."

6 We have heard of the pride of Moab—
He is very proud—
Of his haughtiness and his pride and his
wrath;
But his lies *shall* not *be* so.
7 Therefore Moab shall wail for Moab;
Everyone shall wail.
For the foundations of Kir Hareseth you
shall mourn;
Surely *they are* stricken.

8 For the fields of Heshbon languish,
And the vine of Sibmah;
The lords of the nations have broken
down its choice plants,
Which have reached to Jazer
And wandered through the wilderness.
Her branches are stretched out,
They are gone over the sea.
9 Therefore I will bewail the vine of
Sibmah,
With the weeping of Jazer;
I will drench you with my tears,
O Heshbon and Elealeh;
For battle cries have fallen
Over your summer fruits and your
harvest.

10 Gladness is taken away,
And joy from the plentiful field;
In the vineyards there will be no singing,
Nor will there be shouting;
No treaders will tread out wine in the
presses;
I have made their shouting cease.
11 Therefore my heart shall resound like a
harp for Moab,
And my inner being for Kir Heres.

12 And it shall come to pass,
When it is seen that Moab is weary on the
high place,
That he will come to his sanctuary to
pray;
But he will not prevail.

13 This *is* the word which the Lord has spoken concerning Moab since that time. 14 But now the Lord has spoken, saying, "Within three years, as the years of a hired man, the glory of Moab will be despised with all that great multitude, and the remnant *will be* very small *and* feeble."

15:9 [a] Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Dead Sea Scrolls and Vulgate read *Dibon;* Septuagint reads *Rimon.*
[b] Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Dead Sea Scrolls and Vulgate read *Dibon;* Septuagint reads *Rimon.*

Proclamation Against Syria and Israel

17 The burden against Damascus.

"Behold, Damascus will cease from *being* a
city,
And it will be a ruinous heap.
2 The cities of Aroer *are* forsaken;[a]
They will be for flocks
Which lie down, and no one will make
them afraid.
3 The fortress also will cease from Ephraim,
The kingdom from Damascus,
And the remnant of Syria;
They will be as the glory of the children of
Israel,"
Says the Lord of hosts.

4 "In that day it shall come to pass
That the glory of Jacob will wane,
And the fatness of his flesh grow lean.
5 It shall be as when the harvester gathers
the grain,
And reaps the heads with his arm;
It shall be as he who gathers heads of
grain
In the Valley of Rephaim.
6 Yet gleaning grapes will be left in it,
Like the shaking of an olive tree,
Two *or* three olives at the top of the
uppermost bough,
Four *or* five in its most fruitful
branches,"
Says the Lord God of Israel.

7 In that day a man will look to his Maker,
And his eyes will have respect for the
Holy One of Israel.
8 He will not look to the altars,
The work of his hands;
He will not respect what his fingers have
made,
Nor the wooden images[a] nor the incense
altars.

9 In that day his strong cities will be as a
forsaken bough[a]
And an uppermost branch,[b]
Which they left because of the children of
Israel;
And there will be desolation.

10 Because you have forgotten the God of
your salvation,
And have not been mindful of the Rock of
your stronghold,
Therefore you will plant pleasant plants
And set out foreign seedlings;
11 In the day you will make your plant to
grow,
And in the morning you will make your
seed to flourish;
But the harvest *will be* a heap of ruins
In the day of grief and desperate sorrow.

12 Woe to the multitude of many people
Who make a noise like the roar of the
seas,
And to the rushing of nations
That make a rushing like the rushing of
mighty waters!
13 The nations will rush like the rushing of
many waters;
But *God* will rebuke them and they will
flee far away,
And be chased like the chaff of the
mountains before the wind,
Like a rolling thing before the
whirlwind.
14 Then behold, at eventide, trouble!
And before the morning, he *is* no more.
This *is* the portion of those who
plunder us,
And the lot of those who rob us.

Proclamation Against Ethiopia

18 Woe to the land shadowed with
buzzing wings,
Which *is* beyond the rivers of Ethiopia,
2 Which sends ambassadors by sea,
Even in vessels of reed on the waters,
saying,
"Go, swift messengers, to a nation tall and
smooth *of skin,*
To a people terrible from their beginning
onward,

17:2 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *It shall be forsaken forever;* Targum reads *Its cities shall be forsaken and desolate.* **17:8** [a]Hebrew *Asherim,* Canaanite deities **17:9** [a]Septuagint reads *Hivites;* Targum reads *laid waste;* Vulgate reads *as the plows.* [b]Septuagint reads *Amorites;* Targum reads *in ruins;* Vulgate reads *corn.*

A nation powerful and treading down,
Whose land the rivers divide."

3 All inhabitants of the world and dwellers
on the earth:
When he lifts up a banner on the
mountains, you see *it;*
And when he blows a trumpet, you
hear *it.*
4 For so the Lord said to me,
"I will take My rest,
And I will look from My dwelling place
Like clear heat in sunshine,
Like a cloud of dew in the heat of
harvest."
5 For before the harvest, when the bud is
perfect
And the sour grape is ripening in the
flower,
He will both cut off the sprigs with
pruning hooks
And take away *and* cut down the
branches.
6 They will be left together for the
mountain birds of prey
And for the beasts of the earth;
The birds of prey will summer on
them,
And all the beasts of the earth will winter
on them.

7 In that time a present will be brought to
the Lord of hosts
From[a] a people tall and smooth *of skin,*
And from a people terrible from their
beginning onward,
A nation powerful and treading down,
Whose land the rivers divide—
To the place of the name of the Lord of
hosts,
To Mount Zion.

Proclamation Against Egypt

19 The burden against Egypt.

Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud,
And will come into Egypt;
The idols of Egypt will totter at His
presence,
And the heart of Egypt will melt in its
midst.

2 "I will set Egyptians against Egyptians;
Everyone will fight against his brother,
And everyone against his neighbor,
City against city, kingdom against
kingdom.
3 The spirit of Egypt will fail in its midst;
I will destroy their counsel,
And they will consult the idols and the
charmers,
The mediums and the sorcerers.
4 And the Egyptians I will give
Into the hand of a cruel master,
And a fierce king will rule over them,"
Says the Lord, the Lord of hosts.

5 The waters will fail from the sea,
And the river will be wasted and dried up.
6 The rivers will turn foul;
The brooks of defense will be emptied
and dried up;
The reeds and rushes will wither.
7 The papyrus reeds by the River,[a] by the
mouth of the River,
And everything sown by the River,
Will wither, be driven away, and be no
more.
8 The fishermen also will mourn;
All those will lament who cast hooks into
the River,
And they will languish who spread nets
on the waters.
9 Moreover those who work in fine flax
And those who weave fine fabric will be
ashamed;
10 And its foundations will be broken.
All who make wages *will be* troubled of
soul.

11 Surely the princes of Zoan *are* fools;
Pharaoh's wise counselors give foolish
counsel.
How do you say to Pharaoh, "I *am* the son
of the wise,
The son of ancient kings?"
12 Where *are* they?
Where are your wise men?

18:7 [a]Following Dead Sea Scrolls, Septuagint, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text omits *From;* Targum reads *To.* **19:7** [a]That is, the Nile

Let them tell you now,
And let them know what the Lord of hosts
has purposed against Egypt.
13 The princes of Zoan have become fools;
The princes of Noph[a] are deceived;
They have also deluded Egypt,
Those who are the mainstay of its tribes.
14 The Lord has mingled a perverse spirit in
her midst;
And they have caused Egypt to err in all
her work,
As a drunken man staggers in his vomit.
15 Neither will there be *any* work for Egypt,
Which the head or tail,
Palm branch or bulrush, may do.[a]

16 In that day Egypt will be like women, and will be afraid and fear because of the waving of the hand of the Lord of hosts, which He waves over it. 17 And the land of Judah will be a terror to Egypt; everyone who makes mention of it will be afraid in himself, because of the counsel of the Lord of hosts which He has determined against it.

Egypt, Assyria, and Israel Blessed

18 In that day five cities in the land of Egypt will speak the language of Canaan and swear by the Lord of hosts; one will be called the City of Destruction.[a]

19 In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord at its border. 20 And it will be for a sign and for a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt; for they will cry to the Lord because of the oppressors, and He will send them a Savior and a Mighty One, and He will deliver them. 21 Then the Lord will be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the Lord in that day, and will make sacrifice and offering; yes, they will make a vow to the Lord and perform *it.* 22 And the Lord will strike Egypt, He will strike and heal *it;* they will return to the Lord, and He will be entreated by them and heal them.

23 In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will serve with the Assyrians.

24 In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria—a blessing in the midst of the land, 25 whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, "Blessed *is* Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance."

The Sign Against Egypt and Ethiopia

20 In the year that Tartan[a] came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him, and he fought against Ashdod and took it, 2 at the same time the Lord spoke by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, "Go, and remove the sackcloth from your body, and take your sandals off your feet." And he did so, walking naked and barefoot.

3 Then the Lord said, "Just as My servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot three years *for* a sign and a wonder against Egypt and Ethiopia, 4 so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians as prisoners and the Ethiopians as captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. 5 Then they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation and Egypt their glory. 6 And the inhabitant of this territory will say in that day, 'Surely such *is* our expectation, wherever we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria; and how shall we escape?' "

The Fall of Babylon Proclaimed

21 The burden against the Wilderness of the Sea.

As whirlwinds in the South pass through,
So it comes from the desert, from a
terrible land.
2 A distressing vision is declared to me;
The treacherous dealer deals
treacherously,
And the plunderer plunders.
Go up, O Elam!
Besiege, O Media!
All its sighing I have made to cease.

19:13 [a]That is, ancient Memphis **19:15** [a]Compare Isaiah 9:14–16 **19:18** [a]Some Hebrew manuscripts, Arabic, Dead Sea Scrolls, Targum, and Vulgate read *Sun;* Septuagint reads *Asedek* (literally *Righteousness*). **20:1** [a]Or *the Commander in Chief*

3 Therefore my loins are filled with pain;
Pangs have taken hold of me, like the
pangs of a woman in labor.
I was distressed when *I* heard *it;*
I was dismayed when *I* saw *it.*
4 My heart wavered, fearfulness
frightened me;
The night for which I longed He turned
into fear for me.
5 Prepare the table,
Set a watchman in the tower,
Eat and drink.
Arise, you princes,
Anoint the shield!

6 For thus has the Lord said to me:
"Go, set a watchman,
Let him declare what he sees."
7 And he saw a chariot *with* a pair of
horsemen,
A chariot of donkeys, *and* a chariot of
camels,
And he listened earnestly with great care.
8 Then he cried, "A lion,[a] my Lord!
I stand continually on the watchtower in
the daytime;
I have sat at my post every night.
9 And look, here comes a chariot of men
with a pair of horsemen!"
Then he answered and said,
"Babylon is fallen, is fallen!
And all the carved images of her gods
He has broken to the ground."

10 Oh, my threshing and the grain of my
floor!
That which I have heard from the Lord of
hosts,
The God of Israel,
I have declared to you.

Proclamation Against Edom

11 The burden against Dumah.

He calls to me out of Seir,
"Watchman, what of the night?
Watchman, what of the night?"
12 The watchman said,
"The morning comes, and also the night.
If you will inquire, inquire;
Return! Come back!"

Proclamation Against Arabia

13 The burden against Arabia.

In the forest in Arabia you will lodge,
O you traveling companies of Dedanites.
14 O inhabitants of the land of Tema,
Bring water to him who is thirsty;
With their bread they met him who fled.
15 For they fled from the swords, from the
drawn sword,
From the bent bow, and from the distress
of war.

16 For thus the Lord has said to me: "Within a year, according to the year of a hired man, all the glory of Kedar will fail; 17 and the remainder of the number of archers, the mighty men of the people of Kedar, will be diminished; for the Lord God of Israel has spoken *it.*"

Proclamation Against Jerusalem

22 The burden against the Valley of Vision.

What ails you now, that you have all gone
up to the housetops,
2 You who are full of noise,
A tumultuous city, a joyous city?
Your slain *men are* not slain with the sword,
Nor dead in battle.
3 All your rulers have fled together;
They are captured by the archers.
All who are found in you are bound
together;
They have fled from afar.
4 Therefore I said, "Look away from me,
I will weep bitterly;
Do not labor to comfort me
Because of the plundering of the
daughter of my people."

5 For *it is* a day of trouble and treading
down and perplexity
By the Lord God of hosts
In the Valley of Vision—
Breaking down the walls
And of crying to the mountain.
6 Elam bore the quiver
With chariots of men *and* horsemen,
And Kir uncovered the shield.
7 It shall come to pass *that* your choicest
valleys

21:8 [a]Dead Sea Scrolls read *Then the observer cried.*

Shall be full of chariots,
And the horsemen shall set themselves in array at the gate.

8 He removed the protection of Judah.
You looked in that day to the armor of the House of the Forest;
9 You also saw the damage to the city of David,
That it was great;
And you gathered together the waters of the lower pool.
10 You numbered the houses of Jerusalem,
And the houses you broke down
To fortify the wall.
11 You also made a reservoir between the two walls
For the water of the old pool.
But you did not look to its Maker,
Nor did you have respect for Him who fashioned it long ago.

12 And in that day the Lord God of hosts
Called for weeping and for mourning,
For baldness and for girding with sackcloth.
13 But instead, joy and gladness,
Slaying oxen and killing sheep,
Eating meat and drinking wine:
"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"

14 Then it was revealed in my hearing by the Lord of hosts,
"Surely for this iniquity there will be no atonement for you,
Even to your death," says the Lord God of hosts.

The Judgment on Shebna

15 Thus says the Lord God of hosts:

"Go, proceed to this steward,
To Shebna, who *is* over the house, *and say:*
16 'What have you here, and whom have you here,
That you have hewn a sepulcher here,
As he who hews himself a sepulcher on high,
Who carves a tomb for himself in a rock?
17 Indeed, the Lord will throw you away violently,
O mighty man,
And will surely seize you.
18 He will surely turn violently and toss you like a ball
Into a large country;
There you shall die, and there your glorious chariots
Shall be the shame of your master's house.
19 So I will drive you out of your office,
And from your position he will pull you down.[a]

20 'Then it shall be in that day,
That I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah;

22:19 [a]Septuagint omits *he will pull you down;* Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate read *I will pull you down.*

Life Lessons

Isaiah 22:1—23:18

SITUATION
Isaiah foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and Tyre. Both cities would be destroyed for ignoring God and trusting in their own ingenuity.

OBSERVATION
When faced with a dilemma, ask God for His help and guidance rather than depending on your own resources.

INSPIRATION
The greatest example of this humility is none other than Jesus Christ. Who had more reason to boast than He? Yet He never did. He walked on water but never strutted on the beach. He turned a basket into a buffet but never demanded applause. A liberator and a prophet came to visit Him, but He never dropped names in His sermon. He could have. "Just the other day I was conferring with Moses and Elijah." But Jesus never thumped His chest. He refused even to take credit. "I can of Myself do nothing" (John 5:30). He was utterly reliant upon the Father and the Holy Spirit. "All by myself"? Jesus never spoke such words. If He didn't, how dare we?

We can rise too high but can never stoop too low. What gift are you giving that He did not first give? What truth are you teaching that He didn't first teach? You love. But who loved you first? You serve. But who served the most? What are you doing for God that He could not do alone?

How kind of Him to use us. How wise of us to

21 I will clothe him with your robe
And strengthen him with your belt;
I will commit your responsibility into his hand.
He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem
And to the house of Judah.
22 The key of the house of David
I will lay on his shoulder;
So he shall open, and no one shall shut;
And he shall shut, and no one shall open.
23 I will fasten him *as* a peg in a secure place,
And he will become a glorious throne to his father's house.

24 'They will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the posterity, all vessels of small quantity, from the cups to all the pitchers. 25 In that day,' says the Lord of hosts, 'the peg that is fastened in the secure place will be removed and be cut down and fall, and the burden that *was* on it will be cut off; for the Lord has spoken.' "

Proclamation Against Tyre

23 The burden against Tyre.

Wail, you ships of Tarshish!
For it is laid waste,
So that there is no house, no harbor;
From the land of Cyprus[a] it is revealed to them.

2 Be still, you inhabitants of the coastland,
You merchants of Sidon,
Whom those who cross the sea have filled.[a]
3 And on great waters the grain of Shihor,
The harvest of the River,[a] *is* her revenue;
And she is a marketplace for the nations.

4 Be ashamed, O Sidon;
For the sea has spoken,
The strength of the sea, saying,
"I do not labor, nor bring forth children;
Neither do I rear young men,
Nor bring up virgins."
5 When the report *reaches* Egypt,
They also will be in agony at the report of Tyre.

6 Cross over to Tarshish;
Wail, you inhabitants of the coastland!
7 *Is* this your joyous *city,*
Whose antiquity *is* from ancient days,
Whose feet carried her far off to dwell?

23:1 [a]Hebrew *Kittim,* western lands, especially Cyprus **23:2** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Septuagint and Targum read *Passing over the water;* Dead Sea Scrolls read *Your messengers passing over the sea.* **23:3** [a]That is, the Nile

remember. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Pride can keep us from asking God for help. Are you too self-confident? Too self-assured? God asks you to give up your self-dependence and give Him your heart.

EXPLORATION
God's Help—Genesis 18:14; Exodus 4:14; Leviticus 20:22–23; Deuteronomy 7:21–24; Psalm 9:13, 14; 115:9–11; Matthew 9:23–26; Luke 18:35–43.

Life Lessons

Isaiah 24:1—27:13

SITUATION
God would step in and judge sin. Life would not be business as usual. God, the deliverer and comforter of Zion, would punish oppressors and preserve His people.

OBSERVATION
God offers us perfect peace. God will judge the world and destroy death. His people will enjoy eternity with Him.

INSPIRATION
Just because a king gives you armor, you don't have to wear it. David didn't. When he volunteered to go *mano a mano* with Goliath, King Saul tried to clothe the shepherd boy with soldier's armor. After all, Goliath stood over nine feet tall. He wore a bronze helmet and a 125-pound coat of mail. He bore bronze leggings and carried a javelin and a spear with a 15-pound head (1 Samuel 17:4–7 NLT). And David? David had a slingshot. This is a VW Bug playing blink with an eighteen-wheeler, a salmon daring the grizzly to bring it on. . . .

David rejected the armor, selected the stones, lobotomized the giant, and taught us a powerful lesson: what fits others might not fit you. Indeed, what fits *the king* might not fit you. Just because someone hands you armor, you don't have to wear it. Just because someone gives you advice, a job, or a promotion, you don't have to accept it. Let your uniqueness define your path of life. "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You,

8 Who has taken this counsel against Tyre, the crowning *city,*
Whose merchants *are* princes,
Whose traders *are* the honorable of the earth?
9 The Lord of hosts has purposed it,
To bring to dishonor the pride of all glory,
To bring into contempt all the honorable of the earth.

10 Overflow through your land like the River,[a]
O daughter of Tarshish;
There is no more strength.
11 He stretched out His hand over the sea,
He shook the kingdoms;
The Lord has given a commandment against Canaan
To destroy its strongholds.
12 And He said, "You will rejoice no more,
O you oppressed virgin daughter of Sidon.
Arise, cross over to Cyprus;
There also you will have no rest."

13 Behold, the land of the Chaldeans,
This people *which* was not;
Assyria founded it for wild beasts of the desert.
They set up its towers,
They raised up its palaces,
And brought it to ruin.

14 Wail, you ships of Tarshish!
For your strength is laid waste.

15 Now it shall come to pass in that day that Tyre will be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king. At the end of seventy years it will happen to Tyre as *in* the song of the harlot:

16 "Take a harp, go about the city,
You forgotten harlot;
Make sweet melody, sing many songs,
That you may be remembered."

17 And it shall be, at the end of seventy years, that the Lord will deal with Tyre. She will return to her hire, and commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth. 18 Her gain and her pay will be set apart for the Lord; it will not be treasured nor laid up, for her gain will be for those who dwell before the Lord, to eat sufficiently, and for fine clothing.

Impending Judgment on the Earth

24 Behold, the Lord makes the earth empty and makes it waste,
Distorts its surface
And scatters abroad its inhabitants.
2 And it shall be:

23:10 [a]That is, the Nile

As with the people, so with the priest;
As with the servant, so with his master;
As with the maid, so with her mistress;
As with the buyer, so with the seller;
As with the lender, so with the borrower;
As with the creditor, so with the debtor.
3 The land shall be entirely emptied and utterly plundered,
For the Lord has spoken this word.

4 The earth mourns *and* fades away,
The world languishes *and* fades away;
The haughty people of the earth languish.
5 The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants,
Because they have transgressed the laws,
Changed the ordinance,
Broken the everlasting covenant.
6 Therefore the curse has devoured the earth,
And those who dwell in it are desolate.
Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned,
And few men *are* left.

7 The new wine fails, the vine languishes,
All the merry-hearted sigh.
8 The mirth of the tambourine ceases,
The noise of the jubilant ends,
The joy of the harp ceases.
9 They shall not drink wine with a song;
Strong drink is bitter to those who drink it.
10 The city of confusion is broken down;
Every house is shut up, so that none may go in.
11 *There is* a cry for wine in the streets,
All joy is darkened,
The mirth of the land is gone.
12 In the city desolation is left,
And the gate is stricken with destruction.
13 When it shall be thus in the midst of the land among the people,
It shall be like the shaking of an olive tree,
Like the gleaning of grapes when the vintage is done.

14 They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing;
For the majesty of the Lord
They shall cry aloud from the sea.
15 Therefore glorify the Lord in the dawning light,
The name of the Lord God of Israel in the coastlands of the sea.
16 From the ends of the earth we have heard songs:
"Glory to the righteous!"
But I said, "I am ruined, ruined!
Woe to me!
The treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously,
Indeed, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously."

because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:3). (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Peace can seem elusive in our world. We strive for more and more, hoping that the promotion or the raise or the move to a new location will finally bring us peace. Then we discover that we did not find peace at all. We can only find real peace when we keep our focus on God. Where is your focus today?

EXPLORATION

Peace—John 14:27; Galatians 5:22. Pressure—Philippians 3:12–14.

God, I have a question: Why do you love your children? I don't want to sound irreverent, but only heaven knows how much pain we've brought you.

—Max Lucado (A Gentle Thunder)

17 Fear and the pit and the snare
Are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth.
18 And it shall be
That he who flees from the noise of the fear
Shall fall into the pit,
And he who comes up from the midst of the pit
Shall be caught in the snare;
For the windows from on high are open,
And the foundations of the earth are shaken.

19 The earth is violently broken,
The earth is split open,
The earth is shaken exceedingly.
20 The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard,
And shall totter like a hut;
Its transgression shall be heavy upon it,
And it will fall, and not rise again.

21 It shall come to pass in that day
That the Lord will punish on high the host of exalted ones,
And on the earth the kings of the earth.
22 They will be gathered together,
As prisoners are gathered in the pit,
And will be shut up in the prison;
After many days they will be punished.
23 Then the moon will be disgraced
And the sun ashamed;
For the Lord of hosts will reign
On Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
And before His elders, gloriously.

Praise to God

25 O Lord, You *are* my God.
I will exalt You,
I will praise Your name,
For You have done wonderful *things;*
Your counsels of old *are* faithfulness *and* truth.
2 For You have made a city a ruin,
A fortified city a ruin,
A palace of foreigners to be a city no more;
It will never be rebuilt.
3 Therefore the strong people will glorify You;
The city of the terrible nations will fear You.
4 For You have been a strength to the poor,
A strength to the needy in his distress,
A refuge from the storm,
A shade from the heat;
For the blast of the terrible ones *is* as a storm *against* the wall.
5 You will reduce the noise of aliens,
As heat in a dry place;
As heat in the shadow of a cloud,
The song of the terrible ones will be diminished.

6 And in this mountain
The Lord of hosts will make for all people
A feast of choice pieces,
A feast of wines on the lees,
Of fat things full of marrow,
Of well-refined wines on the lees.
7 And He will destroy on this mountain
The surface of the covering cast over all people,
And the veil that is spread over all nations.
8 He will swallow up death forever,
And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces;
The rebuke of His people
He will take away from all the earth;
For the Lord has spoken.

9 And it will be said in that day:
"Behold, this *is* our God;
We have waited for Him, and He will save us.
This *is* the Lord;
We have waited for Him;
We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

10 For on this mountain the hand of the Lord will rest,
And Moab shall be trampled down under Him,
As straw is trampled down for the refuse heap.
11 And He will spread out His hands in their midst
As a swimmer reaches out to swim,
And He will bring down their pride
Together with the trickery of their hands.
12 The fortress of the high fort of your walls
He will bring down, lay low,

And bring to the ground, down to the dust.

A Song of Salvation

26 In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:

"We have a strong city;
God will appoint salvation *for* walls and bulwarks.
2 Open the gates,
That the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in.
3 You will keep *him* in perfect peace,
Whose mind *is* stayed *on You,*
Because he trusts in You.
4 Trust in the Lord forever,
For in Yah, the Lord, *is* everlasting strength.[a]
5 For He brings down those who dwell on high,
The lofty city;
He lays it low,
He lays it low to the ground,
He brings it down to the dust.
6 The foot shall tread it down—

26:4 [a]Or *Rock of Ages*

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: The One Who Takes Away Our Shame

I invite you to think carefully about the supreme test Jesus faced in the race. Hebrews 12:2 offers this intriguing statement: "[Jesus] endured the cross, despising the shame."

Shame is a feeling of disgrace, embarrassment, humiliation. Forgive me for stirring the memory, but don't you have a shameful moment in your history? Can you imagine the horror you would feel if everyone knew about it? What if a videotape of that event were played before your family and friends? How would you feel?

That is exactly what Jesus felt. Why? you ask. He never did anything worthy of shame. No, but we did. And since on the Cross God made Him become sin (2 Corinthians 5:21), Jesus was covered with shame. He was shamed before His family. Stripped naked before His own mother and loved ones. Shamed before His fellow men. Forced to carry a cross until the weight caused Him to stumble. Shamed before His church. The pastors and elders of His day mocked Him, calling Him names. Shamed before the city of Jerusalem. Condemned to die a criminal's death. Parents likely pointed to Him from a distance and told their children, "That's what they do to evil men."

But the shame before men didn't compare with the shame Jesus felt before His father. Our individual shame seems too much to bear. Can you imagine bearing the collective shame of all humanity? One wave of shame after another was dumped on Jesus. Though He never cheated, He was convicted as a cheat. Though He never stole, heaven regarded Him as a thief. Though He never lied, He was considered a liar. Though He never lusted, He bore the shame of an adulterer. Though He always believed, He endured the disgrace of an infidel. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 998.

The feet of the poor
And the steps of the needy."

7 The way of the just *is* uprightness;
O Most Upright,
You weigh the path of the just.
8 Yes, in the way of Your judgments,
O Lord, we have waited for You;
The desire of *our* soul *is* for Your name
And for the remembrance of You.
9 With my soul I have desired You in the night,
Yes, by my spirit within me I will seek You early;
For when Your judgments *are* in the earth,
The inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.

10 Let grace be shown to the wicked,
Yet he will not learn righteousness;
In the land of uprightness he will deal unjustly,
And will not behold the majesty of the Lord.
11 Lord, *when* Your hand is lifted up, they will not see.
But they will see and be ashamed
For *their* envy of people;
Yes, the fire of Your enemies shall devour them.

12 Lord, You will establish peace for us,
For You have also done all our works in us.
13 O Lord our God, masters besides You
Have had dominion over us;
But by You only we make mention of Your name.
14 *They are* dead, they will not live;
They are deceased, they will not rise.
Therefore You have punished and destroyed them,
And made all their memory to perish.
15 You have increased the nation, O Lord,
You have increased the nation;
You are glorified;
You have expanded all the borders of the land.
16 Lord, in trouble they have visited You,
They poured out a prayer *when* Your chastening *was* upon them.
17 As a woman with child
Is in pain and cries out in her pangs,
When she draws near the time of her delivery,
So have we been in Your sight, O Lord.
18 We have been with child, we have been in pain;
We have, as it were, brought forth wind;
We have not accomplished any deliverance in the earth,
Nor have the inhabitants of the world fallen.

19 Your dead shall live;
Together with my dead body[a] they shall arise.
Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust;
For your dew *is like* the dew of herbs,
And the earth shall cast out the dead.

Take Refuge from the Coming Judgment

20 Come, my people, enter your chambers,
And shut your doors behind you;
Hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment,
Until the indignation is past.
21 For behold, the Lord comes out of His place
To punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity;
The earth will also disclose her blood,
And will no more cover her slain.

27 In that day the Lord with His severe sword, great and strong,
Will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent,
Leviathan that twisted serpent;
And He will slay the reptile that *is* in the sea.

The Restoration of Israel

2 In that day sing to her,
"A vineyard of red wine![a]
3 I, the Lord, keep it,

26:19 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Syriac and Targum read *their dead bodies;* Septuagint reads *those in the tombs*. **27:2** [a]Following Masoretic Text (Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica*), Bomberg, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text (*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*), some Hebrew manuscripts, and Septuagint read *delight;* Targum reads *choice vineyard*.

I water it every moment;
Lest any hurt it,
I keep it night and day.
4 Fury *is* not in Me.
Who would set briers *and* thorns
Against Me in battle?
I would go through them,
I would burn them together.
5 Or let him take hold of My strength,
That he may make peace with Me;
And he shall make peace with Me."

6 Those who come He shall cause to take root in Jacob;
Israel shall blossom and bud,
And fill the face of the world with fruit.

7 Has He struck Israel as He struck those who struck him?
Or has He been slain according to the slaughter of those who were slain by Him?
8 In measure, by sending it away,
You contended with it.
He removes *it* by His rough wind
In the day of the east wind.
9 Therefore by this the iniquity of Jacob will be covered;
And this *is* all the fruit of taking away his sin:
When he makes all the stones of the altar
Like chalkstones that are beaten to dust,
Wooden images[a] and incense altars shall not stand.

10 Yet the fortified city *will be* desolate,
The habitation forsaken and left like a wilderness;
There the calf will feed, and there it will lie down
And consume its branches.
11 When its boughs are withered, they will be broken off;
The women come *and* set them on fire.
For it *is* a people of no understanding;
Therefore He who made them will not have mercy on them,
And He who formed them will show them no favor.

12 And it shall come to pass in that day
That the Lord will thresh,
From the channel of the River[a] to the Brook of Egypt;
And you will be gathered one by one,
O you children of Israel.

13 So it shall be in that day:
The great trumpet will be blown;
They will come, who are about to perish in the land of Assyria,
And they who are outcasts in the land of Egypt,
And shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem.

Woe to Ephraim and Jerusalem

28 Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim,
Whose glorious beauty *is* a fading flower
Which *is* at the head of the verdant valleys,
To those who are overcome with wine!
2 Behold, the Lord has a mighty and strong one,
Like a tempest of hail and a destroying storm,
Like a flood of mighty waters overflowing,
Who will bring *them* down to the earth with *His* hand.
3 The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim,
Will be trampled underfoot;
4 And the glorious beauty is a fading flower
Which *is* at the head of the verdant valley,
Like the first fruit before the summer,
Which an observer sees;
He eats it up while it is still in his hand.

5 In that day the Lord of hosts will be
For a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty
To the remnant of His people,
6 For a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment,
And for strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.

7 But they also have erred through wine,
And through intoxicating drink are out of the way;

27:9 [a]Hebrew *Asherim,* Canaanite deities **27:12** [a]That is, the Euphrates

The priest and the prophet have erred through intoxicating
drink,
They are swallowed up by wine,
They are out of the way through intoxicating drink;
They err in vision, they stumble *in* judgment.
8 For all tables are full of vomit *and* filth;
No place *is clean.*

9 "Whom will he teach knowledge?
And whom will he make to understand the message?
Those *just* weaned from milk?
Those *just* drawn from the breasts?
10 For precept *must be* upon precept, precept upon precept,
Line upon line, line upon line,
Here a little, there a little."

11 For with stammering lips and another tongue
He will speak to this people,
12 To whom He said, "This *is* the rest *with which*
You may cause the weary to rest,"
And, "This *is* the refreshing";
Yet they would not hear.
13 But the word of the Lord was to them,
"Precept upon precept, precept upon precept,
Line upon line, line upon line,
Here a little, there a little,"
That they might go and fall backward, and be broken
And snared and caught.

14 Therefore hear the word of the Lord, you scornful men,
Who rule this people who *are* in Jerusalem,
15 Because you have said, "We have made a covenant with death,
And with Sheol we are in agreement.
When the overflowing scourge passes through,
It will not come to us,
For we have made lies our refuge,
And under falsehood we have hidden ourselves."

A Cornerstone in Zion

16 Therefore thus says the Lord God:

"Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation,
A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation;
Whoever believes will not act hastily.
17 Also I will make justice the measuring line,
And righteousness the plummet;
The hail will sweep away the refuge of lies,
And the waters will overflow the hiding place.
18 Your covenant with death will be annulled,
And your agreement with Sheol will not stand;
When the overflowing scourge passes through,
Then you will be trampled down by it.

Life Lessons

Isaiah 28:1—31:9

SITUATION
God warned Judah by using Israel as an example. God offered peace and protection if Israel repented and turned to Him, but the people jeered and scoffed at God's Word. They preferred to trust Assyria and Egypt.

OBSERVATION
God's righteousness is the standard by which everyone is measured. Yet, while God requires righteousness, He also helps and shows His people the right way to go.

INSPIRATION
Get the point? God is righteous. His decrees are righteous (Romans 1:32). His judgment is righteous (Romans 2:5). His requirements are righteous (Romans 8:4). His acts are righteous (Daniel 9:16). Daniel declared, "Our God is righteous in all the works which He does" (Daniel 9:14).

God is never wrong. He has never rendered a wrong decision, experienced the wrong attitude, taken the wrong path, said the wrong thing, or acted the wrong way. He is never too late or too early, too loud or too soft, too fast or too slow. He has always been and always will be right. He is righteous.

When it comes to righteousness, God runs the table without so much as a bank shot. And when it comes to righteousness, we don't know which end of the cue stick to hold. Hence, our plight.

Will God, who is righteous, spend eternity with those who are not? Would Harvard admit a third-grade dropout? If

19 As often as it goes out it will take you;
For morning by morning it will pass over,
And by day and by night;
It will be a terror just to understand the report."

20 For the bed is too short to stretch out *on,*
And the covering so narrow that one cannot wrap himself *in it.*
21 For the Lord will rise up as *at* Mount Perazim,
He will be angry as in the Valley of Gibeon—
That He may do His work, His awesome work,
And bring to pass His act, His unusual act.
22 Now therefore, do not be mockers,
Lest your bonds be made strong;
For I have heard from the Lord God of hosts,
A destruction determined even upon the whole earth.

Listen to the Teaching of God

23 Give ear and hear my voice,
Listen and hear my speech.
24 Does the plowman keep plowing all day to sow?
Does he keep turning his soil and breaking the clods?
25 When he has leveled its surface,
Does he not sow the black cummin
And scatter the cummin,
Plant the wheat in rows,
The barley in the appointed place,
And the spelt in its place?
26 For He instructs him in right judgment,
His God teaches him.

27 For the black cummin is not threshed with a threshing sledge,
Nor is a cartwheel rolled over the cummin;
But the black cummin is beaten out with a stick,
And the cummin with a rod.
28 Bread *flour* must be ground;
Therefore he does not thresh it forever,
Break *it with* his cartwheel,
Or crush it *with* his horsemen.
29 This also comes from the Lord of hosts,
Who is wonderful in counsel *and* excellent in guidance.

Woe to Jerusalem

29 "Woe to Ariel,[a] to Ariel, the city *where* David dwelt!
Add year to year;
Let feasts come around.
2 Yet I will distress Ariel;
There shall be heaviness and sorrow,
And it shall be to Me as Ariel.
3 I will encamp against you all around,
I will lay siege against you with a mound,

29:1 [a]That is, Jerusalem

it did, the act might be benevolent, but it wouldn't be right. If God accepted the unrighteous, the invitation would be even nicer, but would He be right? Would He be right to overlook our sins? Lower His standards? No. He wouldn't be right. And if God is anything, He is right.

He told Isaiah that righteousness would be His plumb line, the standard by which His house is measured (Isaiah 28:17). (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Though we are unrighteous by nature, we can have a righteous standing because of Christ's death on our behalf. Study the Scriptures to determine what it means to be righteous in His sight.

EXPLORATION

Righteousness—Romans 3:19–26; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 6:4–7; Philippians 3:8, 9.

And I will raise siegeworks against you.
4 You shall be brought down,
You shall speak out of the ground;
Your speech shall be low, out of the dust;
Your voice shall be like a medium's, out of the ground;
And your speech shall whisper out of the dust.

5 "Moreover the multitude of your foes
Shall be like fine dust,
And the multitude of the terrible ones
Like chaff that passes away;
Yes, it shall be in an instant, suddenly.
6 You will be punished by the Lord of hosts
With thunder and earthquake and great noise,
With storm and tempest
And the flame of devouring fire.
7 The multitude of all the nations who fight against Ariel,
Even all who fight against her and her fortress,
And distress her,
Shall be as a dream of a night vision.
8 It shall even be as when a hungry man dreams,
And look—he eats;
But he awakes, and his soul is still empty;
Or as when a thirsty man dreams,
And look—he drinks;
But he awakes, and indeed *he is* faint,
And his soul still craves:
So the multitude of all the nations shall be,
Who fight against Mount Zion."

The Blindness of Disobedience

9 Pause and wonder!
Blind yourselves and be blind!
They are drunk, but not with wine;
They stagger, but not with intoxicating drink.
10 For the Lord has poured out on you
The spirit of deep sleep,
And has closed your eyes, namely, the prophets;
And He has covered your heads, *namely,* the seers.

11 The whole vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed, which *men* deliver to one who is literate, saying, "Read this, please."
And he says, "I cannot, for it *is* sealed."
12 Then the book is delivered to one who is illiterate, saying, "Read this, please."
And he says, "I am not literate."
13 Therefore the Lord said:

"Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths
And honor Me with their lips,
But have removed their hearts far from Me,
And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men,
14 Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work
Among this people,
A marvelous work and a wonder;
For the wisdom of their wise *men* shall perish,
And the understanding of their prudent *men* shall be hidden."

15 Woe to those who seek deep to hide their counsel far from the Lord,
And their works are in the dark;
They say, "Who sees us?" and, "Who knows us?"
16 Surely you have things turned around!
Shall the potter be esteemed as the clay;
For shall the thing made say of him who made it,
"He did not make me"?
Or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it,
"He has no understanding"?

Future Recovery of Wisdom

17 *Is* it not yet a very little while
Till Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field,
And the fruitful field be esteemed as a forest?
18 In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book,
And the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness.
19 The humble also shall increase *their* joy in the Lord,
And the poor among men shall rejoice
In the Holy One of Israel.

20 For the terrible one is brought to nothing,
The scornful one is consumed,
And all who watch for iniquity are cut off—
21 Who make a man an offender by a word,
And lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate,
And turn aside the just by empty words.

22 Therefore thus says the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob:

"Jacob shall not now be ashamed,
Nor shall his face now grow pale;
23 But when he sees his children,
The work of My hands, in his midst,
They will hallow My name,
And hallow the Holy One of Jacob,
And fear the God of Israel.
24 These also who erred in spirit will come to understanding,
And those who complained will learn doctrine."

Futile Confidence in Egypt

30 "Woe to the rebellious children," says the Lord,
"Who take counsel, but not of Me,
And who devise plans, but not of My Spirit,
That they may add sin to sin;
2 Who walk to go down to Egypt,
And have not asked My advice,
To strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh,
And to trust in the shadow of Egypt!
3 Therefore the strength of Pharaoh
Shall be your shame,
And trust in the shadow of Egypt
Shall be *your* humiliation.
4 For his princes were at Zoan,
And his ambassadors came to Hanes.
5 They were all ashamed of a people *who* could not benefit them,
Or be help or benefit,
But a shame and also a reproach."

6 The burden against the beasts of the South.
Through a land of trouble and anguish,
From which *came* the lioness and lion,
The viper and fiery flying serpent,
They will carry their riches on the backs of young donkeys,
And their treasures on the humps of camels,
To a people *who* shall not profit;
7 For the Egyptians shall help in vain and to no purpose.
Therefore I have called her
Rahab-Hem-Shebeth.[a]

A Rebellious People

8 Now go, write it before them on a tablet,
And note it on a scroll,
That it may be for time to come,
Forever and ever:
9 That this *is* a rebellious people,
Lying children,
Children *who* will not hear the law of the Lord;
10 Who say to the seers, "Do not see,"
And to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us right things;
Speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits.
11 Get out of the way,
Turn aside from the path,
Cause the Holy One of Israel
To cease from before us."

12 Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel:

"Because you despise this word,
And trust in oppression and perversity,
And rely on them,
13 Therefore this iniquity shall be to you
Like a breach ready to fall,
A bulge in a high wall,
Whose breaking comes suddenly, in an instant.
14 And He shall break it like the breaking of the potter's vessel,
Which is broken in pieces;
He shall not spare.
So there shall not be found among its fragments
A shard to take fire from the hearth,
Or to take water from the cistern."

30:7 [a] Literally *Rahab Sits Idle*

15 For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One
of Israel:

"In returning and rest you shall be saved;
In quietness and confidence shall be your
strength."
But you would not,
16 And you said, "No, for we will flee on
horses"—
Therefore you shall flee!
And, "We will ride on swift *horses*"—
Therefore those who pursue you shall be
swift!

17 One thousand *shall flee* at the threat of one,
At the threat of five you shall flee,
Till you are left as a pole on top of a
mountain
And as a banner on a hill.

God Will Be Gracious

18 Therefore the Lord will wait, that He may
be gracious to you;
And therefore He will be exalted, that He
may have mercy on you.
For the Lord *is* a God of justice;
Blessed *are* all those who wait for Him.

19 For the people shall dwell in Zion at
Jerusalem;
You shall weep no more.
He will be very gracious to you at the
sound of your cry;
When He hears it, He will answer you.
20 And *though* the Lord gives you
The bread of adversity and the water of
affliction,
Yet your teachers will not be moved into a
corner anymore,
But your eyes shall see your teachers.
21 Your ears shall hear a word behind you,
saying,
"This *is* the way, walk in it,"
Whenever you turn to the right hand
Or whenever you turn to the left.
22 You will also defile the covering of your
images of silver,
And the ornament of your molded images
of gold.
You will throw them away as an unclean
thing;
You will say to them, "Get away!"

23 Then He will give the rain for your seed
With which you sow the ground,
And bread of the increase of the earth;
It will be fat and plentiful.
In that day your cattle will feed
In large pastures.
24 Likewise the oxen and the young donkeys
that work the ground
Will eat cured fodder,
Which has been winnowed with the
shovel and fan.
25 There will be on every high mountain
And on every high hill
Rivers *and* streams of waters,
In the day of the great slaughter,
When the towers fall.
26 Moreover the light of the moon will be as
the light of the sun,
And the light of the sun will be
sevenfold,
As the light of seven days,
In the day that the Lord binds up the
bruise of His people
And heals the stroke of their wound.

Judgment on Assyria

27 Behold, the name of the Lord comes from
afar,
Burning *with* His anger,
And *His* burden *is* heavy;
His lips are full of indignation,
And His tongue like a devouring fire.
28 His breath is like an overflowing stream,
Which reaches up to the neck,
To sift the nations with the sieve of
futility;
And *there shall be* a bridle in the jaws of
the people,
Causing *them* to err.

29 You shall have a song
As in the night *when* a holy festival is
kept,
And gladness of heart as when one goes
with a flute,
To come into the mountain of the Lord,
To the Mighty One of Israel.
30 The Lord will cause His glorious voice to
be heard,
And show the descent of His arm,
With the indignation of *His* anger
And the flame of a devouring fire,

With scattering, tempest, and hailstones.
31 For through the voice of the Lord
Assyria will be beaten down,
As He strikes with the rod.
32 And *in* every place where the staff of
punishment passes,
Which the Lord lays on him,
It will be with tambourines and harps;
And in battles of brandishing He will fight
with it.
33 For Tophet *was* established of old,
Yes, for the king it is prepared.
He has made *it* deep and large;
Its pyre *is* fire with much wood;
The breath of the Lord, like a stream of
brimstone,
Kindles it.

The Folly of Not Trusting God

31 Woe to those who go down to Egypt
for help,
And rely on horses,
Who trust in chariots because *they are*
many,
And in horsemen because they are very
strong,
But who do not look to the Holy One of
Israel,
Nor seek the Lord!
2 Yet He also *is* wise and will bring disaster,
And will not call back His words,
But will arise against the house of
evildoers,
And against the help of those who work
iniquity.
3 Now the Egyptians *are* men, and not God;
And their horses are flesh, and not spirit.
When the Lord stretches out His hand,
Both he who helps will fall,
And he who is helped will fall down;
They all will perish together.

God Will Deliver Jerusalem

4 For thus the Lord has spoken to me:

"As a lion roars,
And a young lion over his prey
(When a multitude of shepherds is
summoned against him,
He will not be afraid of their voice
Nor be disturbed by their noise),
So the Lord of hosts will come down
To fight for Mount Zion and for its hill.
5 Like birds flying about,
So will the Lord of hosts defend
Jerusalem.
Defending, He will also deliver *it;*
Passing over, He will preserve *it.*"

6 Return *to Him* against whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted. 7 For in that day every man shall throw away his idols of silver and his idols of gold—sin, which your own hands have made for yourselves.

8 "Then Assyria shall fall by a sword not of
man,
And a sword not of mankind shall devour
him.
But he shall flee from the sword,
And his young men shall become forced
labor.
9 He shall cross over to his stronghold for
fear,
And his princes shall be afraid of the
banner,"
Says the Lord,
Whose fire *is* in Zion
And whose furnace *is* in Jerusalem.

A Reign of Righteousness

32 Behold, a king will reign in
righteousness,
And princes will rule with justice.
2 A man will be as a hiding place from the
wind,
And a cover from the tempest,
As rivers of water in a dry place,
As the shadow of a great rock in a weary
land.
3 The eyes of those who see will not be
dim,
And the ears of those who hear will listen.
4 Also the heart of the rash will understand
knowledge,
And the tongue of the stammerers will be
ready to speak plainly.

5 The foolish person will no longer be
called generous,
Nor the miser said *to be* bountiful;
6 For the foolish person will speak
foolishness,
And his heart will work iniquity:

To practice ungodliness,
To utter error against the Lord,
To keep the hungry unsatisfied,
And he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail.
7 Also the schemes of the schemer *are* evil;
He devises wicked plans
To destroy the poor with lying words,
Even when the needy speaks justice.
8 But a generous man devises generous things,
And by generosity he shall stand.

Consequences of Complacency

9 Rise up, you women who are at ease,
Hear my voice;
You complacent daughters,
Give ear to my speech.
10 In a year and *some* days
You will be troubled, you complacent women;
For the vintage will fail,
The gathering will not come.
11 Tremble, you *women* who are at ease;
Be troubled, you complacent ones;
Strip yourselves, make yourselves bare,
And gird *sackcloth* on *your* waists.

12 People shall mourn upon their breasts
For the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine.
13 On the land of my people will come up thorns *and* briers,
Yes, on all the happy homes *in* the joyous city;
14 Because the palaces will be forsaken,
The bustling city will be deserted.
The forts and towers will become lairs forever,
A joy of wild donkeys, a pasture of flocks—
15 Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high,
And the wilderness becomes a fruitful field,
And the fruitful field is counted as a forest.

The Peace of God's Reign

16 Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,
And righteousness remain in the fruitful field.
17 The work of righteousness will be peace,
And the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance
forever.
18 My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation,
In secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places,
19 Though hail comes down on the forest,
And the city is brought low in humiliation.

20 Blessed *are* you who sow beside all waters,
Who send out freely the feet of the ox and the donkey.

Life Lessons

Isaiah 32:1—35:10

SITUATION
Isaiah spoke of God's coming judgment on both individuals and nations surrounding Judah. People's motives were clear to God, and He rewarded those who lived by His commandments and were honest. He punished sinners.

OBSERVATION
Although slow to anger, God punishes sin. Only the faithful will know God's bounty and security.

INSPIRATION
John the Baptist saw a dove and believed. James Whittaker saw a sea gull and believed. Who's to say the one who sent the first didn't send the second?

James Whittaker was a member of the handpicked crew that flew the B-17 Flying Fortress captained by Eddie Rickenbacker. Anybody who remembers October of 1942 remembers the day Rickenbacker and his crew were reported lost at sea.

Somewhere over the Pacific, out of radio range, the plane ran out of fuel and crashed into the ocean. The nine men spent the next month floating in three rafts. They battled the heat, the storms, and the water. Sharks, some ten feet long, would ram their nine-foot boats. After only eight days their rations were eaten or destroyed by saltwater. It would take a miracle to survive.

One morning after their daily devotions, Rickenbacker leaned his head back against the raft and pulled his hat over his eyes. A bird landed on his

A Prayer in Deep Distress

33 Woe to you who plunder, though you *have* not *been* plundered;
And you who deal treacherously, though they have not dealt treacherously with you!
When you cease plundering,
You will be plundered;
When you make an end of dealing treacherously,
They will deal treacherously with you.

2 O Lord, be gracious to us;
We have waited for You.
Be their[a] arm every morning,
Our salvation also in the time of trouble.
3 At the noise of the tumult the people shall flee;
When You lift Yourself up, the nations shall be scattered;
4 And Your plunder shall be gathered
Like the gathering of the caterpillar;
As the running to and fro of locusts,
He shall run upon them.

5 The Lord is exalted, for He dwells on high;
He has filled Zion with justice and righteousness.
6 Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times,
And the strength of salvation;
The fear of the Lord *is* His treasure.

7 Surely their valiant ones shall cry outside,
The ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly.
8 The highways lie waste,
The traveling man ceases.
He has broken the covenant,
He has despised the cities,[a]
He regards no man.
9 The earth mourns *and* languishes,
Lebanon is shamed *and* shriveled;
Sharon is like a wilderness,
And Bashan and Carmel shake off *their fruits.*

Impending Judgment on Zion

10 "Now I will rise," says the Lord;
"Now I will be exalted,
Now I will lift Myself up.
11 You shall conceive chaff,
You shall bring forth stubble;
Your breath, *as* fire, shall devour you.
12 And the people shall be *like* the burnings of lime;

33:2 [a]Septuagint omits *their;* Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate read *our*. **33:8** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Dead Sea Scrolls read *witnesses;* Septuagint omits *cities;* Targum reads *They have been removed from their cities.*

head. He peered out from under his hat. Every eye was on him. He instinctively knew it was a sea gull.

Rickenbacker caught it, and the crew ate it. The bird's intestines were used for bait to catch fish . . . and the crew survived to tell the story. A story about a stranded crew with no hope or help in sight. A story about prayers offered and prayers answered. A story about a visitor from an unknown land traveling a great distance to give his life as a sacrifice.

A story of salvation.

A story much like our own. Weren't we, like the crew, stranded? Weren't we, like the crew, praying? And weren't we, like the crew, rescued by a visitor we've never seen through a sacrifice we'll never forget?

You may have heard the Rickenbacker story before. You may have even heard it from me. You may have read it in one of my books. Coreen Schwenk did. She was engaged to the only crew member who did not survive, young Sgt. Alex Kacymarcyck. As a result of a 1985 reunion of the crew, Mrs. Schwenk learned that the widow of James Whittaker lived only eighty miles from her house. The two women met and shared their stories.

After reading this story in my book *In the Eye of the Storm,* Mrs. Schwenk felt compelled to write to me. The real miracle, she informed me, was not a bird on the head of Eddie Rickenbacker but a change in the heart of James Whittaker. The greatest event of that day was not the rescue of a crew but the rescue of a soul.

James Whittaker was an unbeliever. The plane crash didn't change his unbelief. The days facing death didn't

cause him to reconsider his destiny. In fact, Mrs. Whittaker said her husband grew irritated with John Bartak, a crew member who continually read his Bible privately and aloud.

But his protests didn't stop Bartak from reading. Nor did Whittaker's resistance stop the Word from penetrating his soul. Unknown to Whittaker, the soil of his heart was being plowed. For it was one morning after a Bible reading that the sea gull landed on Captain Rickenbacker's head.

And at that moment Jim became a believer.

I chuckled when I read the letter. Not at the letter; I believe every word of it. Nor at James Whittaker. I have every reason to believe his conversion was real. But I had to chuckle at . . . please excuse me . . . I had to chuckle at God.

Isn't that just like Him? Who would go to such extremes to save a soul? Such an effort to get a guy's attention. The rest of the world is occupied with Germany and Hitler. Every headline is reporting the actions of Roosevelt and Churchill. The globe is locked in a battle for freedom . . . and the Father is in the Pacific sending a missionary pigeon to save a soul. Oh, the lengths to which God will go to get our attention and win our affection. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Have you ever surrendered your life to God? Have you ever asked Him to forgive your sins? Pray and ask Him to be your Lord and Savior. Tell Him you are sorry for your sins. Tell your pastor that you accept Christ as your Savior.

Like thorns cut up they shall be burned in the fire.
13 Hear, you *who are* afar off, what I have done;
And you *who are* near, acknowledge My might."

14 The sinners in Zion are afraid;
Fearfulness has seized the hypocrites:
"Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire?
Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"
15 He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly,
He who despises the gain of oppressions,
Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes,
Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed,
And shuts his eyes from seeing evil:
16 He will dwell on high;
His place of defense *will be* the fortress of rocks;
Bread will be given him,
His water *will be* sure.

The Land of the Majestic King

17 Your eyes will see the King in His beauty;
They will see the land that is very far off.
18 Your heart will meditate on terror:
"Where *is* the scribe?
Where *is* he who weighs?
Where *is* he who counts the towers?"
19 You will not see a fierce people,
A people of obscure speech, beyond perception,
Of a stammering tongue *that you* cannot understand.

20 Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feasts;
Your eyes will see Jerusalem, a quiet home,
A tabernacle *that* will not be taken down;
Not one of its stakes will ever be removed,
Nor will any of its cords be broken.
21 But there the majestic Lord *will be* for us
A place of broad rivers *and* streams,
In which no galley with oars will sail,
Nor majestic ships pass by
22 (For the Lord *is* our Judge,
The Lord *is* our Lawgiver,
The Lord *is* our King;
He will save us);
23 Your tackle is loosed,
They could not strengthen their mast,
They could not spread the sail.

Then the prey of great plunder is divided;
The lame take the prey.
24 And the inhabitant will not say, "I am sick";
The people who dwell in it *will be* forgiven *their* iniquity.

Judgment on the Nations

34 Come near, you nations, to hear;
And heed, you people!
Let the earth hear, and all that is in it,
The world and all things that come forth from it.
2 For the indignation of the Lord *is* against all nations,
And *His* fury against all their armies;
He has utterly destroyed them,
He has given them over to the slaughter.
3 Also their slain shall be thrown out;
Their stench shall rise from their corpses,
And the mountains shall be melted with their blood.
4 All the host of heaven shall be dissolved,
And the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll;
All their host shall fall down
As the leaf falls from the vine,
And as *fruit* falling from a fig tree.

5 "For My sword shall be bathed in heaven;
Indeed it shall come down on Edom,
And on the people of My curse, for judgment.
6 The sword of the Lord is filled with blood,
It is made overflowing with fatness,
With the blood of lambs and goats,
With the fat of the kidneys of rams.
For the Lord has a sacrifice in Bozrah,
And a great slaughter in the land of Edom.
7 The wild oxen shall come down with them,
And the young bulls with the mighty bulls;
Their land shall be soaked with blood,
And their dust saturated with fatness."

8 For *it is* the day of the Lord's vengeance,
The year of recompense for the cause of Zion.
9 Its streams shall be turned into pitch,
And its dust into brimstone;
Its land shall become burning pitch.
10 It shall not be quenched night or day;
Its smoke shall ascend forever.
From generation to generation it shall lie waste;
No one shall pass through it forever and ever.
11 But the pelican and the porcupine shall possess it,
Also the owl and the raven shall dwell in it.
And He shall stretch out over it
The line of confusion and the stones of emptiness.
12 They shall call its nobles to the kingdom,
But none *shall be* there, and all its princes shall be nothing.

13 And thorns shall come up in its palaces,
Nettles and brambles in its fortresses;
It shall be a habitation of jackals,
A courtyard for ostriches.

EXPLORATION
Judgment—Deuteronomy 7:2; Matthew 3:10; 13:30.

Stepping from the throne, He removed His robe of light and wrapped Himself in skin: pigmented, human skin. The light of the universe entered a dark, wet womb. He who angels worship nestled Himself in the placenta of a peasant, was birthed into the cold night, and then slept on cow's hay.

—Max Lucado (In the Grip of Grace)

14 The wild beasts of the desert shall also
meet with the jackals,
And the wild goat shall bleat to its
companion;
Also the night creature shall rest there,
And find for herself a place of rest.
15 There the arrow snake shall make her
nest and lay *eggs*
And hatch, and gather *them* under her
shadow;
There also shall the hawks be gathered,
Every one with her mate.

16 "Search from the book of the Lord, and
read:
Not one of these shall fail;
Not one shall lack her mate.
For My mouth has commanded it, and
His Spirit has gathered them.
17 He has cast the lot for them,
And His hand has divided it among them
with a measuring line.
They shall possess it forever;
From generation to generation they shall
dwell in it."

The Future Glory of Zion

35 The wilderness and the wasteland
shall be glad for them,
And the desert shall rejoice and blossom
as the rose;
2 It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice,
Even with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
The excellence of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the Lord,
The excellency of our God.

3 Strengthen the weak hands,
And make firm the feeble knees.
4 Say to those *who are* fearful-hearted,
"Be strong, do not fear!
Behold, your God will come *with*
vengeance,
With the recompense of God;
He will come and save you."

5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
And the ears of the deaf shall be
unstopped.
6 Then the lame shall leap like a deer,
And the tongue of the dumb sing.
For waters shall burst forth in the
wilderness,
And streams in the desert.
7 The parched ground shall become a
pool,
And the thirsty land springs of water;
In the habitation of jackals, where each
lay,
There shall be grass with reeds and
rushes.

8 A highway shall be there, and a road,
And it shall be called the Highway of
Holiness.
The unclean shall not pass over it,
But it *shall be* for others.
Whoever walks the road, although a fool,
Shall not go astray.
9 No lion shall be there,
Nor shall *any* ravenous beast go up on it;
It shall not be found there.
But the redeemed shall walk *there,*
10 And the ransomed of the Lord shall
return,
And come to Zion with singing,
With everlasting joy on their heads.
They shall obtain joy and gladness,
And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Sennacherib Boasts Against the Lord

36 Now it came to pass in the fourteenth
year of King Hezekiah *that* Sennacherib
king of Assyria came up against all the fortified
cities of Judah and took them. 2 Then the king
of Assyria sent *the* Rabshakeh[a] with a great
army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jeru-
salem. And he stood by the aqueduct from
the upper pool, on the highway to the Fuller's
Field. 3 And Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who
was over the household, Shebna the scribe,
and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came
out to him.

4 Then *the* Rabshakeh said to them, "Say
now to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king,
the king of Assyria: "What confidence is this
in which you trust? 5 I say you speak of having
plans and power for war; but *they are* mere

36:2 [a] A title, probably *Chief of Staff* or *Governor*

words. Now in whom do you trust, that you rebel against me? 6Look! You are trusting in the staff of this broken reed, Egypt, on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So *is* Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him.

7"But if you say to me, 'We trust in the Lord our God,' *is it* not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and said to Judah and Jerusalem, 'You shall worship before this altar'?" ' 8Now therefore, I urge you, give a pledge to my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses—if you are able on your part to put riders on them! 9How then will you repel one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put your trust in Egypt for chariots and horsemen? 10Have I now come up without the Lord against this land to destroy it? The Lord said to me, 'Go up against this land, and destroy it.' "

11Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah said to *the* Rabshakeh, "Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand *it;* and do not speak to us in Hebrew[a] in the hearing of the people who *are* on the wall."

12But *the* Rabshakeh said, "Has my master sent me to your master and to you to speak these words, and not to the men who sit on the wall, who will eat and drink their own waste with you?"

13Then *the* Rabshakeh stood and called out with a loud voice in Hebrew, and said, "Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria! 14Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you; 15nor let Hezekiah make you trust in the Lord, saying, "The Lord will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria." ' 16Do not listen to Hezekiah; for thus says the king of Assyria: 'Make *peace* with me *by a* present and come out to me; and every one of you eat from his own vine and every one from his own fig tree, and every one of you drink the waters of his own cistern; 17until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards. 18*Beware* lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, "The Lord will deliver us." Has any one of the gods of the nations delivered its land from the hand of the king of Assyria? 19Where *are* the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where *are* the gods of Sepharvaim? Indeed, have they delivered Samaria from my hand? 20Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their countries from my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?' "

21But they held their peace and answered him not a word; for the king's commandment was, "Do not answer him." 22Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who *was* over the household, Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with *their* clothes torn, and told him the words of *the* Rabshakeh.

Isaiah Assures Deliverance

37 And so it was, when King Hezekiah heard *it,* that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord. 2Then he sent Eliakim, who *was* over the household, Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with

36:11 [a]Literally *Judean*

Life Lessons

Isaiah 36:1—39:8

SITUATION
King Hezekiah reigned in Israel during a time when the people had forgotten about God. Unlike his predecessors, Hezekiah tried to restore the worship of God. During these reforms, the expanding Assyrian empire threatened his kingdom.

OBSERVATION
Hezekiah was miraculously healed by God. But chapter 39 records his pride and Isaiah's announcement of judgment.

INSPIRATION
Gradually our big God changes us. And, gratefully, we lust less, love more, lash out less, look heavenward more. We pay bills, pay attention to spouses, pay respect to parents. People notice the difference. They applaud us. Promote us. Admire us. Appoint us. We dare to outlive our lives. We—who came to Christ as sinful, soiled, and small—accomplish things. We build orphanages, lead companies, deliver the confused out of depression and the sick out of disease. Why, we even write books. We don't feel so small anymore. People talk to us as if we are something special.

"You have great influence."

"What strong faith you have."

"We need mighty saints like you."

Feels nice. Kudos become ladder rungs, and we begin to elevate ourselves. We shed our smallness, discard the Clark Kent glasses, and don a Superman swagger.

We forget. We forget who brought us here. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What accomplishments, awards, or recognitions bring you the most satisfaction? Since pride can often be hard to detect, ask a good friend, spouse, or family member to evaluate you. Take time to ask God to replace that pride with a spirit of humility.

EXPLORATION
Pride—Proverbs 8:13; 16:18; Romans 12:3; 1 Corinthians 13:4; Philippians 2:3; James 4:6.

sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz. 3 And they said to him, "Thus says Hezekiah: 'This day *is* a day of trouble and rebuke and blasphemy; for the children have come to birth, but *there is* no strength to bring them forth. 4 It may be that the Lord your God will hear the words of *the* Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to reproach the living God, and will rebuke the words which the Lord your God has heard. Therefore lift up *your* prayer for the remnant that is left.' "

5 So the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah. 6 And Isaiah said to them, "Thus you shall say to your master, 'Thus says the Lord: "Do not be afraid of the words which you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. 7 Surely I will send a spirit upon him, and he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land." ' "

Sennacherib's Threat and Hezekiah's Prayer

8 Then *the* Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah, for he heard that he had departed from Lachish. 9 And the king heard concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, "He has come out to make war with you." So when he heard *it,* he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, 10 "Thus you shall speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying: 'Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, "Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria." 11 Look! You have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by utterly destroying them; and shall you be delivered? 12 Have the gods of the nations delivered those whom my fathers have destroyed, Gozan and Haran and Rezeph, and the people of Eden who *were* in Telassar? 13 Where *is* the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah?' "

14 And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord. 15 Then Hezekiah prayed to the Lord, saying: 16 "O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, *the One* who dwells *between* the cherubim, You *are* God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. 17 Incline Your ear, O Lord, and hear; open Your eyes, O Lord, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. 18 Truly, Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their lands, 19 and have cast their gods into the fire; for they *were* not gods, but the work of men's hands—wood and stone. Therefore they destroyed them. 20 Now therefore, O Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You *are* the Lord, You alone."

The Word of the Lord Concerning Sennacherib

21 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel, 'Because you have prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Assyria, 22 this *is* the word which the Lord has spoken concerning him:

"The virgin, the daughter of Zion,
Has despised you, laughed you to scorn;

The daughter of Jerusalem
Has shaken *her* head behind your back!

23 "Whom have you reproached and
blasphemed?
Against whom have you raised *your* voice,
And lifted up your eyes on high?
Against the Holy One of Israel.
24 By your servants you have reproached the
Lord,
And said, 'By the multitude of my chariots
I have come up to the height of the
mountains,
To the limits of Lebanon;
I will cut down its tall cedars
And its choice cypress trees;
I will enter its farthest height,
To its fruitful forest.
25 I have dug and drunk water,
And with the soles of my feet I have dried
up
All the brooks of defense.'

26 "Did you not hear long ago
How I made it,
From ancient times that I formed it?
Now I have brought it to pass,
That you should be
For crushing fortified cities *into* heaps of
ruins.
27 Therefore their inhabitants *had* little
power;
They were dismayed and confounded;
They were *as* the grass of the field
And the green herb,
As the grass on the housetops
And *grain* blighted before it is grown.

28 "But I know your dwelling place,
Your going out and your coming in,
And your rage against Me.
29 Because your rage against Me and your
tumult
Have come up to My ears,
Therefore I will put My hook in your nose
And My bridle in your lips,
And I will turn you back
By the way which you came."'

30 "This *shall be* a sign to you:
You shall eat this year such as grows of
itself,
And the second year what springs from
the same;
Also in the third year sow and reap,
Plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them.
31 And the remnant who have escaped of
the house of Judah
Shall again take root downward,
And bear fruit upward.
32 For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant,
And those who escape from Mount Zion.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

33 "Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria:

'He shall not come into this city,
Nor shoot an arrow there,
Nor come before it with shield,
Nor build a siege mound against it.
34 By the way that he came,
By the same shall he return;
And he shall not come into this city,'
Says the Lord.
35 'For I will defend this city, to save it
For My own sake and for My servant
David's sake.'"

Sennacherib's Defeat and Death

36 Then the angel[a] of the Lord went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when *people* arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead. 37 So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned *home,* and remained at Nineveh. 38 Now it came to pass, as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Then Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.

Hezekiah's Life Extended

38 In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, "Thus says the Lord: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.'"

37:36 [a]Or *Angel*

2 Then Hezekiah turned his face toward
the wall, and prayed to the Lord, 3 and said,
"Remember now, O Lord, I pray, how I have
walked before You in truth and with a loyal
heart, and have done *what is* good in Your
sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

4 And the word of the Lord came to Isaiah,
saying, 5 "Go and tell Hezekiah, 'Thus says the
Lord, the God of David your father: "I have
heard your prayer, I have seen your tears;
surely I will add to your days fifteen years. 6 I
will deliver you and this city from the hand of
the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city." '
7 And this *is* the sign to you from the Lord, that
the Lord will do this thing which He has spo-
ken: 8 Behold, I will bring the shadow on the
sundial, which has gone down with the sun on
the sundial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward."
So the sun returned ten degrees on the dial by
which it had gone down.

9 This is the writing of Hezekiah king of
Judah, when he had been sick and had recov-
ered from his sickness:

10 I said,
"In the prime of my life
I shall go to the gates of Sheol;
I am deprived of the remainder of my
years."
11 I said,
"I shall not see Yah,
The Lord[a] in the land of the living;
I shall observe man no more among the
inhabitants of the world.[b]
12 My life span is gone,
Taken from me like a shepherd's tent;
I have cut off my life like a weaver.
He cuts me off from the loom;
From day until night You make an end of
me.
13 I have considered until morning—
Like a lion,
So He breaks all my bones;
From day until night You make an end of
me.
14 Like a crane *or* a swallow, so I chattered;
I mourned like a dove;
My eyes fail *from looking* upward.
O Lord,[a] I am oppressed;
Undertake for me!

15 "What shall I say?
He has both spoken to me,[a]
And He Himself has done *it.*
I shall walk carefully all my years
In the bitterness of my soul.
16 O Lord, by these *things men* live;
And in all these *things is* the life of my
spirit;
So You will restore me and make me live.
17 Indeed *it was* for *my own* peace
That I had great bitterness;
But You have lovingly *delivered* my soul
from the pit of corruption,
For You have cast all my sins behind Your
back.
18 For Sheol cannot thank You,
Death cannot praise You;
Those who go down to the pit cannot
hope for Your truth.
19 The living, the living man, he shall praise
You,
As I *do* this day;
The father shall make known Your truth
to the children.

20 "The Lord *was ready* to save me;
Therefore we will sing my songs with
stringed instruments
All the days of our life, in the house of the
Lord."

21 Now Isaiah had said, "Let them take a
lump of figs, and apply *it* as a poultice on the
boil, and he shall recover."

22 And Hezekiah had said, "What *is* the sign
that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?"

The Babylonian Envoys

39 At that time Merodach-Baladan[a] the
son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent
letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard
that he had been sick and had recovered. 2 And
Hezekiah was pleased with them, and showed
them the house of his treasures—the silver
and gold, the spices and precious ointment,

38:11 [a]Hebrew *Yah, Yah* [b]Following some Hebrew manuscripts; Masoretic Text and Vulgate read *rest;* Septuagint omits *among the inhabitants of the world;* Targum reads *land.* **38:14** [a]Following Bomberg; Masoretic Text and Dead Sea Scrolls read *Lord.* **38:15** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Dead Sea Scrolls and Targum read *And shall I say to Him;* Septuagint omits first half of this verse. **39:1** [a]Spelled *Berodach-Baladan* in 2 Kings 20:12

and all his armory—all that was found among his treasures. There was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them.

3 Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah, and said to him, "What did these men say, and from where did they come to you?"

So Hezekiah said, "They came to me from a far country, from Babylon."

4 And he said, "What have they seen in your house?"

So Hezekiah answered, "They have seen all that *is* in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them."

5 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the Lord of hosts: 6 'Behold, the days are coming when all that *is* in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the Lord. 7 'And they shall take away *some* of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.' "

8 So Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the Lord which you have spoken *is* good!" For he said, "At least there will be peace and truth in my days."

God's People Are Comforted

40 "Comfort, yes, comfort My people!"
Says your God.
2 "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her,
That her warfare is ended,
That her iniquity is pardoned;
For she has received from the Lord's hand
Double for all her sins."

3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
"Prepare the way of the Lord;
Make straight in the desert[a]
A highway for our God.
4 Every valley shall be exalted
And every mountain and hill brought low;
The crooked places shall be made straight
And the rough places smooth;
5 The glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
And all flesh shall see *it* together;
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

6 The voice said, "Cry out!"
And he[a] said, "What shall I cry?"

"All flesh *is* grass,
And all its loveliness *is* like the flower of the field.
7 The grass withers, the flower fades,

40:3 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint omits *in the desert*. **40:6** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Dead Sea Scrolls, Septuagint, and Vulgate read *I*.

Life Lessons

Isaiah 40:1—41:29

SITUATION
God promised to remain faithful to His people. The Jews felt that God had ignored them, but God would rescue them from captivity.

OBSERVATION
Because He is perfect, all-powerful, and knows everything, God transcends nature. Mysteriously, though, He still concerns Himself with our lives.

INSPIRATION
"To whom then will you liken God?" the prophet invites (Isaiah 40:18). To whom indeed? "Human hands can't serve his needs—for he has no needs" (Acts 17:25 NLT). You and I start our days needy. Indeed, basic needs prompt us to climb out of bed. Not God. Uncreated and self-sustaining, He depends on nothing and no one. Never taken a nap or a breath. Needs no food, counsel, or physician. "The Father has life in Himself" (John 5:26). Life is to God what wetness is to water and air is to wind. He is not just alive but life itself. God is, without help.

Hence, He always is. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God" (Psalm 90:2).

God never began and will never cease. He exists endlessly, always. "The number of His years is unsearchable" (Job 36:26 NASB).

Even so, let's try to search them. Let every speck of sand, from the Sahara to

South Beach, represent a billion years of God's existence. With some super vacuum, suck and then blow all the particles into a mountain, and count how many you have. Multiply your total by a billion and listen as God reminds: "They don't represent a fraction of my existence." (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Is anything in your life guaranteed? Is your career unshakable, your family immortal, your money eternal? Do not base your comfort and enjoyment on what could be gone tomorrow. Only God and His Word will last for ever—let these be the basis of everything in your life.

EXPLORATION

Waiting—Isaiah 52:10; 2 Corinthians 4:1; Hebrews 12:1–3.

Because the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
Surely the people *are* grass.
8 The grass withers, the flower fades,
But the word of our God stands forever."

9 O Zion,
You who bring good tidings,
Get up into the high mountain;
O Jerusalem,
You who bring good tidings,
Lift up your voice with strength,
Lift *it* up, be not afraid;
Say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!"

10 Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong *hand,*
And His arm shall rule for Him;
Behold, His reward *is* with Him,
And His work before Him.
11 He will feed His flock like a shepherd;
He will gather the lambs with His arm,
And carry *them* in His bosom,
And gently lead those who are with young.

12 Who has measured the waters[a] in the hollow of His hand,
Measured heaven with a span
And calculated the dust of the earth in a measure?
Weighed the mountains in scales
And the hills in a balance?
13 Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord,
Or *as* His counselor has taught Him?
14 With whom did He take counsel, and *who* instructed Him,
And taught Him in the path of justice?
Who taught Him knowledge,
And showed Him the way of understanding?

15 Behold, the nations *are* as a drop in a bucket,
And are counted as the small dust on the scales;
Look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing.
16 And Lebanon *is* not sufficient to burn,
Nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering.
17 All nations before Him *are* as nothing,
And they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless.

18 To whom then will you liken God?
Or what likeness will you compare to Him?
19 The workman molds an image,
The goldsmith overspreads it with gold,
And the silversmith casts silver chains.
20 Whoever *is* too impoverished for *such* a contribution

40:12 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Septuagint, and Vulgate; Dead Sea Scrolls read *waters of the sea;* Targum reads *waters of the world.*

Chooses a tree *that* will not rot;
He seeks for himself a skillful workman
To prepare a carved image *that* will not
totter.

21 Have you not known?
Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the
beginning?
Have you not understood from the
foundations of the earth?
22 *It is* He who sits above the circle of the
earth,
And its inhabitants *are* like grasshoppers,
Who stretches out the heavens like a
curtain,
And spreads them out like a tent to dwell
in.
23 He brings the princes to nothing;
He makes the judges of the earth useless.

24 Scarcely shall they be planted,
Scarcely shall they be sown,
Scarcely shall their stock take root in the
earth,
When He will also blow on them,
And they will wither,
And the whirlwind will take them away
like stubble.

25 "To whom then will you liken Me,
Or *to whom* shall I be equal?" says the
Holy One.
26 Lift up your eyes on high,
And see who has created these *things,*
Who brings out their host by number;
He calls them all by name,
By the greatness of His might
And the strength of *His* power;
Not one is missing.

27 Why do you say, O Jacob,
And speak, O Israel:
"My way is hidden from the Lord,
And my just claim is passed over by my
God"?
28 Have you not known?
Have you not heard?
The everlasting God, the Lord,
The Creator of the ends of the earth,
Neither faints nor is weary.
His understanding is unsearchable.
29 He gives power to the weak,
And to *those who have* no might He
increases strength.
30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary,
And the young men shall utterly fall,
31 But those who wait on the Lord
Shall renew *their* strength;
They shall mount up with wings like
eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint.

Israel Assured of God's Help

41 "Keep silence before Me, O coastlands,
And let the people renew *their*
strength!
Let them come near, then let them speak;
Let us come near together for judgment.

2 "Who raised up one from the east?
Who in righteousness called him to His
feet?
Who gave the nations before him,
And made *him* rule over kings?
Who gave *them* as the dust *to* his sword,
As driven stubble to his bow?
3 Who pursued them, *and* passed safely
By the way *that* he had not gone with his
feet?
4 Who has performed and done *it,*
Calling the generations from the
beginning?
'I, the Lord, am the first;
And with the last I *am* He.'"

5 The coastlands saw *it* and feared,
The ends of the earth were afraid;
They drew near and came.
6 Everyone helped his neighbor,
And said to his brother,
"Be of good courage!"
7 So the craftsman encouraged the
goldsmith;
He who smooths *with* the hammer
inspired him who strikes the anvil,
Saying, "It *is* ready for the soldering";
Then he fastened it with pegs,
That it might not totter.

8 "But you, Israel, *are* My servant,
Jacob whom I have chosen,
The descendants of Abraham My friend.

9 *You* whom I have taken from the ends of the earth,
And called from its farthest regions,
And said to you,
'You *are* My servant,
I have chosen you and have not cast you away:
10 Fear not, for I *am* with you;
Be not dismayed, for I *am* your God.
I will strengthen you,
Yes, I will help you,
I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'

11 "Behold, all those who were incensed against you
Shall be ashamed and disgraced;
They shall be as nothing,
And those who strive with you shall perish.
12 You shall seek them and not find them—
Those who contended with you.
Those who war against you
Shall be as nothing,
As a nonexistent thing.
13 For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand,
Saying to you, 'Fear not, I will help you.'

14 "Fear not, you worm Jacob,
You men of Israel!
I will help you," says the Lord
And your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.
15 "Behold, I will make you into a new threshing sledge with sharp teeth;
You shall thresh the mountains and beat *them* small,
And make the hills like chaff.
16 You shall winnow them, the wind shall carry them away,
And the whirlwind shall scatter them;
You shall rejoice in the Lord,
And glory in the Holy One of Israel.

17 "The poor and needy seek water, but *there is* none,
Their tongues fail for thirst.
I, the Lord, will hear them;
I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.
18 I will open rivers in desolate heights,
And fountains in the midst of the valleys;
I will make the wilderness a pool of water,
And the dry land springs of water.
19 I will plant in the wilderness the cedar and the acacia tree,
The myrtle and the oil tree;
I will set in the desert the cypress tree *and* the pine
And the box tree together,
20 That they may see and know,
And consider and understand together,
That the hand of the Lord has done this,
And the Holy One of Israel has created it.

The Futility of Idols

21 "Present your case," says the Lord.
"Bring forth your strong *reasons,*" says the King of Jacob.
22 "Let them bring forth and show us what will happen;
Let them show the former things, what they *were,*
That we may consider them,
And know the latter end of them;
Or declare to us things to come.
23 Show the things that are to come hereafter,
That we may know that you *are* gods;
Yes, do good or do evil,
That we may be dismayed and see *it* together.
24 Indeed you *are* nothing,
And your work *is* nothing;
He who chooses you *is* an abomination.

25 "I have raised up one from the north,
And he shall come;
From the rising of the sun he shall call on My name;
And he shall come against princes as *though* mortar,
As the potter treads clay.
26 Who has declared from the beginning, that we may know?
And former times, that we may say, '*He is* righteous'?
Surely *there is* no one who shows,
Surely *there is* no one who declares,
Surely *there is* no one who hears your words.
27 The first time *I said* to Zion,
'Look, there they are!'

And I will give to Jerusalem one who brings good tidings.
28 For I looked, and *there was* no man;
I looked among them, but *there was* no counselor,
Who, when I asked of them, could answer a word.
29 Indeed they *are* all worthless;[a]
Their works *are* nothing;
Their molded images *are* wind and confusion.

The Servant of the Lord

42 "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold,
My Elect One *in whom* My soul delights!
I have put My Spirit upon Him;
He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.
2 He will not cry out, nor raise *His voice,*
Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.
3 A bruised reed He will not break,
And smoking flax He will not quench;
He will bring forth justice for truth.
4 He will not fail nor be discouraged,
Till He has established justice in the earth;
And the coastlands shall wait for His law."

5 Thus says God the Lord,
Who created the heavens and stretched them out,
Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it,
Who gives breath to the people on it,
And spirit to those who walk on it:
6 "I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness,
And will hold Your hand;
I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people,
As a light to the Gentiles,
7 To open blind eyes,
To bring out prisoners from the prison,
Those who sit in darkness from the prison house.
8 I *am* the Lord, that *is* My name;
And My glory I will not give to another,
Nor My praise to carved images.
9 Behold, the former things have come to pass,
And new things I declare;
Before they spring forth I tell you of them."

Praise to the Lord

10 Sing to the Lord a new song,
And His praise from the ends of the earth,
You who go down to the sea, and all that is in it,
You coastlands and you inhabitants of them!
11 Let the wilderness and its cities lift up *their voice,*
The villages *that* Kedar inhabits.
Let the inhabitants of Sela sing,

41:29 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Dead Sea Scrolls, Syriac, and Targum read *nothing;* Septuagint omits the first line.

Life Lessons

Isaiah 42:1—43:28

SITUATION
Isaiah looked ahead to the time when Jesus would bring justice to the world. Isaiah pointed out that although the Israelites were unfaithful to God, God would still deliver them from captivity (43:8–28).

OBSERVATION
God never gives up on us. He always pursues us when we wander from Him, always drawing us back so that we can do what He has planned for us to do.

INSPIRATION
God made you and broke the mold. "The Lord looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. From the place of His dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth; *He fashions their hearts individually;* He considers all their works" (Psalm 33:13–15). Every single baby is a brand-new idea from the mind of God.

Scan history for your replica; you won't find it. God tailor-made you. He "personally formed and made each one" (Isaiah 43:7 MSG). No box of "backup yous" sits in God's workshop. You aren't one of many bricks in the mason's pile or one of a dozen bolts in the mechanic's drawer. You are it! And if you aren't you, we don't get you. The world misses out.

You are heaven's Halley's Comet; we have one shot at seeing you shine. You offer a gift to society that no one else brings. If you don't bring it, it won't be brought. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Thank God for the lengths

He went to bring you to Himself. Reflect on the extreme measures Jesus took to purchase your salvation. Remember, that as you go through each day, Jesus continues to work in your life helping you be the *you* that you were meant to be.

EXPLORATION

God's Love—Deuteronomy 7:8; Jeremiah 31:3; John 3:16; Romans 5:8; Ephesians 2:4, 5; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 3:1.

When we come to Christ, God not only forgives us, He also adopts us. Through a dramatic series of events, we go from condemned orphans with no hope to adopted children with no fear.

—Max Lucado (The Great House of God)

Let them shout from the top of the mountains.
12 Let them give glory to the Lord,
And declare His praise in the coastlands.
13 The Lord shall go forth like a mighty man;
He shall stir up *His* zeal like a man of war.
He shall cry out, yes, shout aloud;
He shall prevail against His enemies.

Promise of the Lord's Help

14 "I have held My peace a long time,
I have been still and restrained Myself.
Now I will cry like a woman in labor,
I will pant and gasp at once.
15 I will lay waste the mountains and hills,
And dry up all their vegetation;
I will make the rivers coastlands,
And I will dry up the pools.
16 I will bring the blind by a way they did not know;
I will lead them in paths they have not known.
I will make darkness light before them,
And crooked places straight.
These things I will do for them,
And not forsake them.
17 They shall be turned back,
They shall be greatly ashamed,
Who trust in carved images,
Who say to the molded images,
'You *are* our gods.'

18 "Hear, you deaf;
And look, you blind, that you may see.
19 Who *is* blind but My servant,
Or deaf as My messenger *whom* I send?
Who *is* blind as *he who is* perfect,
And blind as the Lord's servant?
20 Seeing many things, but you do not observe;
Opening the ears, but he does not hear."

Israel's Obstinate Disobedience

21 The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake;
He will exalt the law and make *it* honorable.
22 But this *is* a people robbed and plundered;
All of them are snared in holes,
And they are hidden in prison houses;
They are for prey, and no one delivers;
For plunder, and no one says, "Restore!"

23 Who among you will give ear to this?
Who will listen and hear for the time to come?
24 Who gave Jacob for plunder, and Israel to the robbers?
Was it not the Lord,
He against whom we have sinned?

For they would not walk in His ways,
Nor were they obedient to His law.
25 Therefore He has poured on him the fury of His anger
And the strength of battle;
It has set him on fire all around,
Yet he did not know;
And it burned him,
Yet he did not take *it* to heart.

The Redeemer of Israel

43 But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob,
And He who formed you, O Israel:
"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called *you* by your name;
You *are* Mine.
2 When you pass through the waters, I *will be* with you;
And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.
When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned,
Nor shall the flame scorch you.
3 For I *am* the Lord your God,
The Holy One of Israel, your Savior;
I gave Egypt for your ransom,
Ethiopia and Seba in your place.
4 Since you were precious in My sight,
You have been honored,
And I have loved you;
Therefore I will give men for you,
And people for your life.
5 Fear not, for I *am* with you;
I will bring your descendants from the east,
And gather you from the west;
6 I will say to the north, 'Give them up!'
And to the south, 'Do not keep them back!'
Bring My sons from afar,
And My daughters from the ends of the earth—
7 Everyone who is called by My name,
Whom I have created for My glory;
I have formed him, yes, I have made him."

8 Bring out the blind people who have eyes,
And the deaf who have ears.
9 Let all the nations be gathered together,
And let the people be assembled.
Who among them can declare this,
And show us former things?
Let them bring out their witnesses, that they may be justified;
Or let them hear and say, "*It is* truth."
10 "You *are* My witnesses," says the Lord,
"And My servant whom I have chosen,
That you may know and believe Me,
And understand that I *am* He.
Before Me there was no God formed,
Nor shall there be after Me.
11 I, *even* I, *am* the Lord,
And besides Me *there is* no savior.
12 I have declared and saved,
I have proclaimed,
And *there was* no foreign *god* among you;
Therefore you *are* My witnesses,"
Says the Lord, "that I *am* God.
13 Indeed before the day *was,* I *am* He;
And *there is* no one who can deliver out of My hand;
I work, and who will reverse it?"

14 Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer,
The Holy One of Israel:
"For your sake I will send to Babylon,
And bring them all down as fugitives—
The Chaldeans, who rejoice in their ships.
15 I *am* the Lord, your Holy One,
The Creator of Israel, your King."

16 Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea
And a path through the mighty waters,
17 Who brings forth the chariot and horse,
The army and the power
(They shall lie down together, they shall not rise;
They are extinguished, they are quenched like a wick):
18 "Do not remember the former things,
Nor consider the things of old.
19 Behold, I will do a new thing,
Now it shall spring forth;
Shall you not know it?
I will even make a road in the wilderness
And rivers in the desert.
20 The beast of the field will honor Me,
The jackals and the ostriches,
Because I give waters in the wilderness
And rivers in the desert,
To give drink to My people, My chosen.

21 This people I have formed for Myself;
They shall declare My praise.

Pleading with Unfaithful Israel

22 "But you have not called upon Me, O Jacob;
And you have been weary of Me, O Israel.
23 You have not brought Me the sheep for your burnt offerings,
Nor have you honored Me with your sacrifices.
I have not caused you to serve with grain offerings,
Nor wearied you with incense.
24 You have bought Me no sweet cane with money,
Nor have you satisfied Me with the fat of your sacrifices;
But you have burdened Me with your sins,
You have wearied Me with your iniquities.

25 "I, *even* I, *am* He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake;
And I will not remember your sins.
26 Put Me in remembrance;
Let us contend together;
State your *case,* that you may be acquitted.
27 Your first father sinned,
And your mediators have transgressed against Me.
28 Therefore I will profane the princes of the sanctuary;
I will give Jacob to the curse,
And Israel to reproaches.

God's Blessing on Israel

44 "Yet hear now, O Jacob My servant,
And Israel whom I have chosen.
2 Thus says the Lord who made you
And formed you from the womb, *who* will help you:
'Fear not, O Jacob My servant;
And you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.
3 For I will pour water on him who is thirsty,
And floods on the dry ground;
I will pour My Spirit on your descendants,
And My blessing on your offspring;
4 They will spring up among the grass
Like willows by the watercourses.'
5 One will say, 'I *am* the Lord's';
Another will call *himself* by the name of Jacob;
Another will write *with* his hand, 'The Lord's,'
And name *himself* by the name of Israel.

There Is No Other God

6 "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel,
And his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:
'I *am* the First and I *am* the Last;
Besides Me *there is* no God.
7 And who can proclaim as I do?
Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me,

Life Lessons

Isaiah 44:1—46:13

SITUATION
God reaffirmed Israel as His chosen people. He warned them that practicing idolatry was foolish.

OBSERVATION
God reminded the Israelites that worshiping an inanimate object, such as a piece of firewood, as a god was not only futile but stupid.

INSPIRATION
He is "the everlasting God" (Romans 16:26). He invented time and owns the patent. "The day is Yours, the night also is Yours" (Psalm 74:16). He was something before anything else was. When the first angel lifted the first wing, God had already always been.

Most staggering of all, He has never messed up. Not once. The prophet Isaiah described his glimpse of God. He saw six-winged angels. Though sinless, they covered themselves in God's presence. Two wings covered eyes, two wings covered feet, and two carried the angels airborne. They volleyed one phrase back and forth: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:3).

God is holy. Every decision, exact. Each word, appropriate. Never out-of-bounds or out of place. Not even tempted to make a mistake. "God is impervious to evil" (James 1:13 MSG).

Tally this up. No needs. No age. No sin. No wonder He said, "I am God, and there is none like Me" (Isaiah 46:9). (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

Since I appointed the ancient people.
And the things that are coming and shall come,
Let them show these to them.
8 Do not fear, nor be afraid;
Have I not told you from that time, and declared *it?*
You *are* My witnesses.
Is there a God besides Me?
Indeed *there is* no other Rock;
I know not *one.'"*

Idolatry Is Foolishness

9 Those who make an image, all of them *are* useless,
And their precious things shall not profit;
They *are* their own witnesses;
They neither see nor know, that they may be ashamed.
10 Who would form a god or mold an image
That profits him nothing?
11 Surely all his companions would be ashamed;
And the workmen, they *are* mere men.
Let them all be gathered together,
Let them stand up;
Yet they shall fear,
They shall be ashamed together.

12 The blacksmith with the tongs works one in the coals,
Fashions it with hammers,
And works it with the strength of his arms.
Even so, he is hungry, and his strength fails;
He drinks no water and is faint.

13 The craftsman stretches out *his* rule,
He marks one out with chalk;
He fashions it with a plane,
He marks it out with the compass,
And makes it like the figure of a man,
According to the beauty of a man, that it may remain in the house.
14 He cuts down cedars for himself,
And takes the cypress and the oak;
He secures *it* for himself among the trees of the forest.
He plants a pine, and the rain nourishes *it.*

15 Then it shall be for a man to burn,
For he will take some of it and warm himself;
Yes, he kindles *it* and bakes bread;
Indeed he makes a god and worships *it;*
He makes it a carved image, and falls down to it.
16 He burns half of it in the fire;
With this half he eats meat;
He roasts a roast, and is satisfied.
He even warms *himself* and says,
"Ah! I am warm,

APPLICATION
Who created you? Who can you ultimately depend on? Where can you find supreme truth? Where can you find happiness? Did you answer anything but God for these questions? If so, you may be in danger of falling into idolatry. Pull yourself out of that trap and let God be the one you rely on.

EXPLORATION
Idolatry—Exodus 20:3;
1 Samuel 15:23;
1 Corinthians 6:9.

I have seen the fire."
17 And the rest of it he makes into a god,
His carved image.
He falls down before it and worships *it,*
Prays to it and says,
"Deliver me, for you *are* my god!"

18 They do not know nor understand;
For He has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see,
And their hearts, so that they cannot understand.
19 And no one considers in his heart,
Nor *is there* knowledge nor understanding to say,
"I have burned half of it in the fire,
Yes, I have also baked bread on its coals;
I have roasted meat and eaten *it;*
And shall I make the rest of it an abomination?
Shall I fall down before a block of wood?"
20 He feeds on ashes;
A deceived heart has turned him aside;
And he cannot deliver his soul,
Nor say, "*Is there* not a lie in my right hand?"

Israel Is Not Forgotten

21 "Remember these, O Jacob,
And Israel, for you *are* My servant;
I have formed you, you *are* My servant;
O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me!
22 I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions,
And like a cloud, your sins.
Return to Me, for I have redeemed you."

23 Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done *it!*
Shout, you lower parts of the earth;
Break forth into singing, you mountains,
O forest, and every tree in it!
For the Lord has redeemed Jacob,
And glorified Himself in Israel.

Judah Will Be Restored

24 Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer,
And He who formed you from the womb:
"I *am* the Lord, who makes all *things,*
Who stretches out the heavens all alone,
Who spreads abroad the earth by Myself;
25 Who frustrates the signs of the babblers,
And drives diviners mad;
Who turns wise men backward,
And makes their knowledge foolishness;
26 Who confirms the word of His servant,
And performs the counsel of His messengers;
Who says to Jerusalem, 'You shall be inhabited,'
To the cities of Judah, 'You shall be built,'
And I will raise up her waste places;
27 Who says to the deep, 'Be dry!
And I will dry up your rivers';
28 Who says of Cyrus, '*He is* My shepherd,
And he shall perform all My pleasure,
Saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built,"
And to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid." '

Cyrus, God's Instrument

45 "Thus says the Lord to His anointed,
To Cyrus, whose right hand I have held—
To subdue nations before him
And loose the armor of kings,
To open before him the double doors,
So that the gates will not be shut:
2 'I will go before you
And make the crooked places[a] straight;
I will break in pieces the gates of bronze
And cut the bars of iron.
3 I will give you the treasures of darkness
And hidden riches of secret places,
That you may know that I, the Lord,
Who call *you* by your name,
Am the God of Israel.
4 For Jacob My servant's sake,
And Israel My elect,
I have even called you by your name;
I have named you, though you have not known Me.
5 I *am* the Lord, and *there is* no other;
There is no God besides Me.
I will gird you, though you have not known Me,
6 That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting
That *there is* none besides Me.

45:2 [a]Dead Sea Scrolls and Septuagint read *mountains;* Targum reads *I will trample down the walls;* Vulgate reads *I will humble the great ones of the earth.*

I *am* the Lord, and *there is* no other;
7 I form the light and create darkness,
I make peace and create calamity;
I, the Lord, do all these *things.*'

8 "Rain down, you heavens, from above,
And let the skies pour down
righteousness;
Let the earth open, let them bring forth
salvation,
And let righteousness spring up together.
I, the Lord, have created it.

9 "Woe to him who strives with his Maker!
Let the potsherd *strive* with the potsherds
of the earth!
Shall the clay say to him who forms it,
'What are you making?'
Or shall your handiwork *say,* 'He has no
hands'?
10 Woe to him who says to *his* father, 'What
are you begetting?'
Or to the woman, 'What have you
brought forth?' "

11 Thus says the Lord,
The Holy One of Israel, and his Maker:
"Ask Me of things to come concerning My
sons;
And concerning the work of My hands,
you command Me.
12 I have made the earth,
And created man on it.
I—My hands—stretched out the heavens,
And all their host I have commanded.
13 I have raised him up in righteousness,
And I will direct all his ways;
He shall build My city
And let My exiles go free,
Not for price nor reward,"
Says the Lord of hosts.

The Lord, the Only Savior

14 Thus says the Lord:

"The labor of Egypt and merchandise of
Cush
And of the Sabeans, men of stature,
Shall come over to you, and they shall be
yours;
They shall walk behind you,
They shall come over in chains;
And they shall bow down to you.
They will make supplication to you,
saying, 'Surely God *is* in you,
And *there is* no other;
There is no other God.' "

15 Truly You *are* God, who hide Yourself,
O God of Israel, the Savior!
16 They shall be ashamed
And also disgraced, all of them;
They shall go in confusion together,
Who are makers of idols.
17 *But* Israel shall be saved by the Lord
With an everlasting salvation;
You shall not be ashamed or disgraced
Forever and ever.

18 For thus says the Lord,
Who created the heavens,
Who is God,
Who formed the earth and made it,
Who has established it,
Who did not create it in vain,
Who formed it to be inhabited:
"I *am* the Lord, and *there is* no other.
19 I have not spoken in secret,
In a dark place of the earth;
I did not say to the seed of Jacob,
'Seek Me in vain';
I, the Lord, speak righteousness,
I declare things that are right.

20 "Assemble yourselves and come;
Draw near together,
You *who have* escaped from the nations.
They have no knowledge,
Who carry the wood of their carved
image,
And pray to a god *that* cannot save.
21 Tell and bring forth *your case;*
Yes, let them take counsel together.
Who has declared this from ancient time?
Who has told it from that time?
Have not I, the Lord?
And *there is* no other God besides Me,
A just God and a Savior;
There is none besides Me.

22 "Look to Me, and be saved,
All you ends of the earth!
For I *am* God, and *there is* no other.
23 I have sworn by Myself;

The word has gone out of My mouth *in*
righteousness,
And shall not return,
That to Me every knee shall bow,
Every tongue shall take an oath.
24 He shall say,
'Surely in the Lord I have righteousness
and strength.
To Him *men* shall come,
And all shall be ashamed
Who are incensed against Him.
25 In the Lord all the descendants of Israel
Shall be justified, and shall glory.'"

Dead Idols and the Living God

46 Bel bows down, Nebo stoops;
Their idols were on the beasts and on
the cattle.
Your carriages *were* heavily loaded,
A burden to the weary *beast.*
2 They stoop, they bow down together;
They could not deliver the burden,
But have themselves gone into captivity.

3 "Listen to Me, O house of Jacob,
And all the remnant of the house of
Israel,
Who have been upheld *by Me* from birth,
Who have been carried from the womb:
4 Even to *your* old age, I *am* He,
And *even* to gray hairs I will carry *you!*
I have made, and I will bear;
Even I will carry, and will deliver *you.*

5 "To whom will you liken Me, and make *Me*
equal
And compare Me, that we should be alike?
6 They lavish gold out of the bag,
And weigh silver on the scales;
They hire a goldsmith, and he makes it a
god;
They prostrate themselves, yes, they
worship.
7 They bear it on the shoulder, they carry it
And set it in its place, and it stands;
From its place it shall not move.
Though *one* cries out to it, yet it cannot
answer
Nor save him out of his trouble.

8 "Remember this, and show yourselves
men;
Recall to mind, O you transgressors.
9 Remember the former things of old,
For I *am* God, and *there is* no other;
I am God, and *there is* none like Me,
10 Declaring the end from the beginning,
And from ancient times *things* that are
not *yet* done,
Saying, 'My counsel shall stand,
And I will do all My pleasure,'
11 Calling a bird of prey from the east,
The man who executes My counsel, from
a far country.
Indeed I have spoken *it;*
I will also bring it to pass.
I have purposed *it;*
I will also do it.

12 "Listen to Me, you stubborn-hearted,
Who *are* far from righteousness:
13 I bring My righteousness near, it shall not
be far off;
My salvation shall not linger.
And I will place salvation in Zion,
For Israel My glory.

The Humiliation of Babylon

47 "Come down and sit in the dust,
O virgin daughter of Babylon;
Sit on the ground without a throne,
O daughter of the Chaldeans!
For you shall no more be called
Tender and delicate.
2 Take the millstones and grind meal.
Remove your veil,
Take off the skirt,
Uncover the thigh,
Pass through the rivers.
3 Your nakedness shall be uncovered,
Yes, your shame will be seen;
I will take vengeance,
And I will not arbitrate with a man."

4 *As for* our Redeemer, the Lord of hosts *is*
His name,
The Holy One of Israel.

5 "Sit in silence, and go into darkness,
O daughter of the Chaldeans;
For you shall no longer be called
The Lady of Kingdoms.
6 I was angry with My people;
I have profaned My inheritance,

And given them into your hand.
You showed them no mercy;
On the elderly you laid your yoke very heavily.
7 And you said, 'I shall be a lady forever,'
So that you did not take these *things* to heart,
Nor remember the latter end of them.

8 "Therefore hear this now, *you who are* given to pleasures,
Who dwell securely,
Who say in your heart, 'I *am,* and *there is* no one else besides me;
I shall not sit *as* a widow,
Nor shall I know the loss of children';
9 But these two *things* shall come to you
In a moment, in one day:
The loss of children, and widowhood.
They shall come upon you in their fullness
Because of the multitude of your sorceries,
For the great abundance of your enchantments.

10 "For you have trusted in your wickedness;
You have said, 'No one sees me';
Your wisdom and your knowledge have warped you;
And you have said in your heart,
'I *am,* and *there is* no one else besides me.'
11 Therefore evil shall come upon you;
You shall not know from where it arises.
And trouble shall fall upon you;
You will not be able to put it off.
And desolation shall come upon you suddenly,
Which you shall not know.

12 "Stand now with your enchantments
And the multitude of your sorceries,
In which you have labored from your youth—
Perhaps you will be able to profit,
Perhaps you will prevail.
13 You are wearied in the multitude of your counsels;
Let now the astrologers, the stargazers,
And the monthly prognosticators
Stand up and save you
From what shall come upon you.
14 Behold, they shall be as stubble,
The fire shall burn them;
They shall not deliver themselves
From the power of the flame;
It shall not *be* a coal to be warmed by,
Nor a fire to sit before!
15 Thus shall they be to you
With whom you have labored,
Your merchants from your youth;
They shall wander each one to his quarter.
No one shall save you.

Life Lessons

Isaiah 47:1—48:22

SITUATION
Isaiah celebrated the overthrow of Babylon with a song of victory. God continued to rebuke Israel for its stubbornness.

OBSERVATION
Israel had a history of unyielding stubbornness in its relationship with God. This led to idolatry and unnecessary suffering.

INSPIRATION
God has one goal: God. "I have my reputation to keep up" (Isaiah 48:11 MSG).

Surprised? Isn't such an attitude, dare we ask, self-centered? Don't we deem this behavior "self-promotion"? Why does God broadcast Himself?

For the same reason the pilot of the lifeboat does. Think of it this way. You're floundering neck-deep in a dark, cold sea. Ship sinking. Life jacket deflating. Strength waning. Through the inky night comes the voice of a lifeboat pilot. But you cannot see him. What do you want the driver of the lifeboat to do?

Be quiet? Say nothing? Stealth his way through the drowning passengers? By no means! You need volume! Amp it up, buddy! In biblical jargon, you want him to show his glory. You need to hear him say, "I am here. I am strong. I have room for you. I can save you!" Drowning passengers want the pilot to reveal his preeminence. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Does your family name give you confidence? Can you rely on your upstanding church? Does your house

make you feel secure? All securities in this life will fail. Trust completely in God. Let Him be your unfailing security.

EXPLORATION

Repentance—Psalm 32:5; Ezekiel 18:23; 1 John 1:9.
Isaiah 49:1—52:12

I can't tell you how many times I've expected to hit the bottom only to find myself suspended in midair, secured by a pair of nail-pierced hands.

—Max Lucado (A Gentle Thunder)

Israel Refined for God's Glory

48 "Hear this, O house of Jacob,
Who are called by the name of Israel,
And have come forth from the wellsprings of Judah;
Who swear by the name of the Lord,
And make mention of the God of Israel,
But not in truth or in righteousness;
2 For they call themselves after the holy city,
And lean on the God of Israel;
The Lord of hosts *is* His name:

3 "I have declared the former things from the beginning;
They went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it.
Suddenly I did *them,* and they came to pass.
4 Because I knew that you *were* obstinate,
And your neck *was* an iron sinew,
And your brow bronze,
5 Even from the beginning I have declared *it* to you;
Before it came to pass I proclaimed *it* to you,
Lest you should say, 'My idol has done them,
And my carved image and my molded image
Have commanded them.'

6 "You have heard;
See all this.
And will you not declare *it?*
I have made you hear new things from this time,
Even hidden things, and you did not know them.
7 They are created now and not from the beginning;
And before this day you have not heard them,
Lest you should say, 'Of course I knew them.'
8 Surely you did not hear,
Surely you did not know;
Surely from long ago your ear was not opened.
For I knew that you would deal very treacherously,
And were called a transgressor from the womb.

9 "For My name's sake I will defer My anger,
And *for* My praise I will restrain it from you,
So that I do not cut you off.
10 Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver;
I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.
11 For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do *it;*
For how should *My name* be profaned?
And I will not give My glory to another.

God's Ancient Plan to Redeem Israel

12 "Listen to Me, O Jacob,
And Israel, My called:
I *am* He, I *am* the First,
I *am* also the Last.
13 Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth,

And My right hand has stretched out the heavens;
When I call to them,
They stand up together.

14 "All of you, assemble yourselves, and hear!
Who among them has declared these *things?*
The Lord loves him;
He shall do His pleasure on Babylon,
And His arm *shall be against* the Chaldeans.
15 I, *even* I, have spoken;
Yes, I have called him,
I have brought him, and his way will prosper.

16 "Come near to Me, hear this:
I have not spoken in secret from the beginning;
From the time that it was, I *was* there.
And now the Lord God and His Spirit
Have[a] sent Me."

17 Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer,
The Holy One of Israel:
"I *am* the Lord your God,
Who teaches you to profit,
Who leads you by the way you should go.
18 Oh, that you had heeded My commandments!
Then your peace would have been like a river,
And your righteousness like the waves of the sea.
19 Your descendants also would have been like the sand,
And the offspring of your body like the grains of sand;
His name would not have been cut off
Nor destroyed from before Me."

20 Go forth from Babylon!
Flee from the Chaldeans!
With a voice of singing,
Declare, proclaim this,
Utter it to the end of the earth;
Say, "The Lord has redeemed
His servant Jacob!"
21 And they did not thirst
When He led them through the deserts;
He caused the waters to flow from the rock for them;
He also split the rock, and the waters gushed out.

22 "*There* is no peace," says the Lord, "for the wicked."

The Servant, the Light to the Gentiles

49 "Listen, O coastlands, to Me,
And take heed, you peoples from afar!
The Lord has called Me from the womb;

48:16 [a]The Hebrew verb is singular.

Life Lessons

Isaiah 49:1—52:12

SITUATION
Isaiah introduced the purpose of the Servant-Messiah. Isaiah reminded the Israelites of God's previous rescue of them and of the Messiah's future saving work.

OBSERVATION
God has a long history when it comes to being faithful. He has kept His people safe for thousands of years.

INSPIRATION
Christ takes away your sin, and in doing so, He takes away your commonness. No longer need you say, "No one knows me." God knows you. He engraved your name on His hands and keeps your tears in a bottle (Isaiah 49:16; Psalm 56:8). "Lord, You have searched me and known me," David discovered. "You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. . . . You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me" (Psalm 139:1–3, 5).

God knows you. And He is near you! How far is the shepherd from the sheep (John 10:14)? The branch from the vine (John 15:5)? That's how far God is from you. He is near. See how these four words look taped to your bathroom mirror: "God is for me" (Psalm 56:9).

And His kingdom needs you. The poor need you; the lonely need you; the church needs you . . . the

cause of God needs you. You are part of "the over-all purpose he is working out in everything and everyone" (Ephesians 1:11 MSG). The kingdom needs you to discover and deploy your unique skill. Use it to make much out of God. Get the word out. God is with us; we are not alone. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Meditate on the things God has saved you from: hell, drugs, despair, alcohol, sinful habits, hopelessness, restlessness, and selfishness. Thank God for this most wonderful gift of redemption.

EXPLORATION

Redemption—Psalm 31:5; 130:7; Luke 1:68; Romans 3:24; Ephesians 4:30; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:18, 19.

From the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name.
2 And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword;
In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me,
And made Me a polished shaft;
In His quiver He has hidden Me."

3 "And He said to me,
'You *are* My servant, O Israel,
In whom I will be glorified.'
4 Then I said, 'I have labored in vain,
I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain;
Yet surely my just reward *is* with the Lord,
And my work with my God.'"

5 "And now the Lord says,
Who formed Me from the womb *to be* His Servant,
To bring Jacob back to Him,
So that Israel is gathered to Him[a]
(For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the Lord,
And My God shall be My strength),
6 Indeed He says,
'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,
And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

7 Thus says the Lord,
The Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One,
To Him whom man despises,
To Him whom the nation abhors,
To the Servant of rulers:
"Kings shall see and arise,
Princes also shall worship,
Because of the Lord who is faithful,
The Holy One of Israel;
And He has chosen You."

8 Thus says the Lord:

"In an acceptable time I have heard You,
And in the day of salvation I have helped You;
I will preserve You and give You
As a covenant to the people,
To restore the earth,
To cause them to inherit the desolate heritages;
9 That You may say to the prisoners, 'Go forth,'
To those who *are* in darkness, 'Show yourselves.'

49:5 [a]Qere, Dead Sea Scrolls, and Septuagint read *is gathered to Him;* Kethib reads *is not gathered.*

"They shall feed along the roads,
And their pastures *shall be* on all desolate heights.
10 They shall neither hunger nor thirst,
Neither heat nor sun shall strike them;
For He who has mercy on them will lead them,
Even by the springs of water He will guide them.
11 I will make each of My mountains a road,
And My highways shall be elevated.
12 Surely these shall come from afar;
Look! Those from the north and the west,
And these from the land of Sinim."

13 Sing, O heavens!
Be joyful, O earth!
And break out in singing, O mountains!
For the Lord has comforted His people,
And will have mercy on His afflicted.

God Will Remember Zion

14 But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me,
And my Lord has forgotten me."

15 "Can a woman forget her nursing child,
And not have compassion on the son of her womb?
Surely they may forget,
Yet I will not forget you.
16 See, I have inscribed you on the palms *of My hands;*
Your walls *are* continually before Me.
17 Your sons[a] shall make haste;
Your destroyers and those who laid you waste
Shall go away from you.
18 Lift up your eyes, look around and see;
All these gather together *and* come to you.
As I live," says the Lord,
"You shall surely clothe yourselves with them all as an ornament,
And bind them *on you* as a bride *does.*

19 "For your waste and desolate places,
And the land of your destruction,
Will even now be too small for the inhabitants;
And those who swallowed you up will be far away.
20 The children you will have,
After you have lost the others,
Will say again in your ears,
'The place *is* too small for me;
Give me a place where I may dwell.'
21 Then you will say in your heart,
'Who has begotten these for me,
Since I have lost my children and am desolate,
A captive, and wandering to and fro?
And who has brought these up?
There I was, left alone;
But these, where *were* they?' "

22 Thus says the Lord God:

"Behold, I will lift My hand in an oath to the nations,
And set up My standard for the peoples;
They shall bring your sons in *their* arms,
And your daughters shall be carried on *their* shoulders;
23 Kings shall be your foster fathers,
And their queens your nursing mothers;
They shall bow down to you with *their* faces to the earth,
And lick up the dust of your feet.
Then you will know that I *am* the Lord,
For they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me."

24 Shall the prey be taken from the mighty,
Or the captives of the righteous[a] be delivered?

25 But thus says the Lord:

"Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away,
And the prey of the terrible be delivered;
For I will contend with him who contends with you,
And I will save your children.
26 I will feed those who oppress you with their own flesh,
And they shall be drunk with their own blood as with sweet wine.

49:17 [a]Dead Sea Scrolls, Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate read *builders.* **49:24** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Dead Sea Scrolls, Syriac, and Vulgate read *of the mighty;* Septuagint reads *unjustly.*

All flesh shall know
That I, the Lord, *am* your Savior,
And your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."

The Servant, Israel's Hope

50 Thus says the Lord:

"Where *is* the certificate of your mother's divorce,
Whom I have put away?
Or which of My creditors *is it* to whom I have sold you?
For your iniquities you have sold yourselves,
And for your transgressions your mother has been put away.
2 Why, when I came, *was there* no man?
Why, when I called, *was there* none to answer?
Is My hand shortened at all that it cannot redeem?
Or have I no power to deliver?
Indeed with My rebuke I dry up the sea,
I make the rivers a wilderness;
Their fish stink because *there is* no water,
And die of thirst.
3 I clothe the heavens with blackness,
And I make sackcloth their covering."

4 "The Lord God has given Me
The tongue of the learned,
That I should know how to speak
A word in season to *him who is* weary.
He awakens Me morning by morning,
He awakens My ear
To hear as the learned.
5 The Lord God has opened My ear;
And I was not rebellious,
Nor did I turn away.
6 I gave My back to those who struck *Me,*
And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard;
I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.

7 "For the Lord God will help Me;
Therefore I will not be disgraced;
Therefore I have set My face like a flint,
And I know that I will not be ashamed.
8 *He is* near who justifies Me;
Who will contend with Me?
Let us stand together.
Who *is* My adversary?
Let him come near Me.
9 Surely the Lord God will help Me;
Who *is* he *who* will condemn Me?
Indeed they will all grow old like a garment;
The moth will eat them up.

10 "Who among you fears the Lord?
Who obeys the voice of His Servant?
Who walks in darkness
And has no light?
Let him trust in the name of the Lord
And rely upon his God.
11 Look, all you who kindle a fire,
Who encircle *yourselves* with sparks:
Walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks you have kindled—
This you shall have from My hand:
You shall lie down in torment.

The Lord Comforts Zion

51 "Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness,
You who seek the Lord:
Look to the rock *from which* you were hewn,
And to the hole of the pit *from which* you were dug.
2 Look to Abraham your father,
And to Sarah *who* bore you;
For I called him alone,
And blessed him and increased him."

3 For the Lord will comfort Zion,
He will comfort all her waste places;
He will make her wilderness like Eden,
And her desert like the garden of the Lord;
Joy and gladness will be found in it,
Thanksgiving and the voice of melody.

4 "Listen to Me, My people;
And give ear to Me, O My nation:
For law will proceed from Me,
And I will make My justice rest
As a light of the peoples.
5 My righteousness *is* near,
My salvation has gone forth,
And My arms will judge the peoples;
The coastlands will wait upon Me,

And on My arm they will trust.
6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
And look on the earth beneath.
For the heavens will vanish away like smoke,
The earth will grow old like a garment,
And those who dwell in it will die in like manner;
But My salvation will be forever,
And My righteousness will not be abolished.

7 "Listen to Me, you who know righteousness,
You people in whose heart *is* My law:
Do not fear the reproach of men,
Nor be afraid of their insults.
8 For the moth will eat them up like a garment,
And the worm will eat them like wool;
But My righteousness will be forever,
And My salvation from generation to generation."

9 Awake, awake, put on strength,
O arm of the Lord!
Awake as in the ancient days,
In the generations of old.
Are You not *the arm* that cut Rahab apart,
And wounded the serpent?

10 *Are* You not *the One* who dried up the sea,
The waters of the great deep;
That made the depths of the sea a road
For the redeemed to cross over?
11 So the ransomed of the Lord shall return,
And come to Zion with singing,
With everlasting joy on their heads.
They shall obtain joy and gladness;
Sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

12 "I, *even* I, *am* He who comforts you.
Who *are* you that you should be afraid
Of a man *who* will die,
And of the son of a man *who* will be made like grass?
13 And you forget the Lord your Maker,
Who stretched out the heavens
And laid the foundations of the earth;
You have feared continually every day
Because of the fury of the oppressor,
When *he has* prepared to destroy.
And where *is* the fury of the oppressor?
14 The captive exile hastens, that he may be loosed,
That he should not die in the pit,
And that his bread should not fail.
15 But I *am* the Lord your God,
Who divided the sea whose waves roared—
The Lord of hosts *is* His name.
16 And I have put My words in your mouth;
I have covered you with the shadow of My hand,
That I may plant the heavens,
Lay the foundations of the earth,
And say to Zion, 'You *are* My people.'"

God's Fury Removed

17 Awake, awake!
Stand up, O Jerusalem,
You who have drunk at the hand of the Lord
The cup of His fury;
You have drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling,
And drained *it* out.
18 *There is* no one to guide her
Among all the sons she has brought forth;
Nor *is there any* who takes her by the hand
Among all the sons she has brought up.
19 These two *things* have come to you;
Who will be sorry for you?—
Desolation and destruction, famine and sword—
By whom will I comfort you?
20 Your sons have fainted,
They lie at the head of all the streets,
Like an antelope in a net;
They are full of the fury of the Lord,
The rebuke of your God.

21 Therefore please hear this, you afflicted,
And drunk but not with wine.
22 Thus says your Lord,
The Lord and your God,
Who pleads the cause of His people:
"See, I have taken out of your hand
The cup of trembling,
The dregs of the cup of My fury;
You shall no longer drink it.
23 But I will put it into the hand of those who afflict you,

Life LESSONS

Isaiah 52:13—53:12

SITUATION
Isaiah prophesied about the coming of the Messiah, the Suffering Servant—Jesus Christ. He referred to the Servant's lowly existence, agonizing death, and honorable purpose.

OBSERVATION
We needed Christ to die for our sins and provide forgiveness because we're not going to find it any other way.

INSPIRATION
We humans want to do things our way. Forget the easy way. Forget the common way. Forget the best way. Forget God's way. We want to do things our way.

And, according to the Bible, that's precisely our problem. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6).

You wouldn't think sheep would be obstinate. Of all God's animals, the sheep is the least able to take care of himself.

Sheep are dumb! Have you ever met a sheep trainer? Ever seen sheep tricks? Know anyone who has taught his sheep to roll over? Ever witnessed a circus sideshow featuring "Mazadon and his jumping sheep"? No. Sheep are just too dumb.

And defenseless. They have no fangs or claws. They can't bite you or outrun you. That's why you never see sheep as team mascots. We've heard of the St. Louis Rams and the Chicago Bulls and the Seattle Seahawks, but the New York Lambs?

Who have said to you,[a]
'Lie down, that we may walk over you.'
And you have laid your body like the ground,
And as the street, for those who walk over."

God Redeems Jerusalem

52 Awake, awake!
Put on your strength, O Zion;
Put on your beautiful garments,
O Jerusalem, the holy city!
For the uncircumcised and the unclean
Shall no longer come to you.
2 Shake yourself from the dust, arise;
Sit down, O Jerusalem!
Loose yourself from the bonds of your neck,
O captive daughter of Zion!

3 For thus says the Lord:

"You have sold yourselves for nothing,
And you shall be redeemed without money."

4 For thus says the Lord God:

"My people went down at first
Into Egypt to dwell there;
Then the Assyrian oppressed them without cause.
5 Now therefore, what have I here," says the Lord,
"That My people are taken away for nothing?
Those who rule over them
Make them wail,"[a] says the Lord,
"And My name *is* blasphemed continually every day.
6 Therefore My people shall know My name;
Therefore *they shall know* in that day
That I *am* He who speaks:
'Behold, *it is* I.'"

7 How beautiful upon the mountains
Are the feet of him who brings good news,
Who proclaims peace,
Who brings glad tidings of good *things,*
Who proclaims salvation,
Who says to Zion,
"Your God reigns!"
8 Your watchmen shall lift up *their* voices,
With their voices they shall sing together;
For they shall see eye to eye
When the Lord brings back Zion.
9 Break forth into joy, sing together,

51:23 [a]Literally *your soul* **52:5** [a]Dead Sea Scrolls read *Mock;* Septuagint reads *Marvel and wail;* Targum reads *Boast themselves;* Vulgate reads *Treat them unjustly.*

You waste places of Jerusalem!
For the Lord has comforted His people,
He has redeemed Jerusalem.
10 The Lord has made bare His holy arm
In the eyes of all the nations;
And all the ends of the earth shall see
The salvation of our God.

11 Depart! Depart! Go out from there,
Touch no unclean *thing;*
Go out from the midst of her,
Be clean,
You who bear the vessels of the Lord.
12 For you shall not go out with haste,
Nor go by flight;
For the Lord will go before you,
And the God of Israel *will* be your rear guard.

The Sin-Bearing Servant

13 Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently;
He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.
14 Just as many were astonished at you,
So His visage was marred more than any man,
And His form more than the sons of men;
15 So shall He sprinkle[a] many nations.
Kings shall shut their mouths at Him;
For what had not been told them they shall see,
And what they had not heard they shall consider.

53 Who has believed our report?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant,
And as a root out of dry ground.
He has no form or comeliness;
And when we see Him,
There is no beauty that we should desire Him.
3 He is despised and rejected by men,
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

4 Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.
5 But He *was* wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.
6 All we like sheep have gone astray;

52:15 [a]Or *startle*

Who wants to be a lamb? You couldn't even stir up a decent yell for the cheerleaders.

We are the sheep.
We don't make a peep.
Victory is yours to keep.
But count us if you want to sleep . . .

Still uncomfortable with being considered a sheep? Will you humor me and take a simple quiz? See if you succeed in self-reliance. Raise your hand if any of the following describe you.

You can control your moods. You're never grumpy or sullen. You can't relate to Jekyll and Hyde. You're always upbeat and upright. Does that describe you? No? Well, let's try another.

You are at peace with everyone. Every relationship as sweet as fudge. Even your old flames speak highly of you. Love all and are loved by all. Is that you? If not, how about this description?

You have no fears. Call you the Teflon toughie. Wall Street plummets—no problem. Heart condition discovered—yawn. World War III starts—what's for dinner? Does this describe you?

You need no forgiveness. Never made a mistake. As square as a game of checkers. As clean as grandma's kitchen. Never cheated, never lied, never lied about cheating. Is that you? No?

Let's evaluate this. You can't control your moods. A few of your relationships are shaky. You have fears and faults. Hmmm. Do you really want to hang on to your chest of self-reliance? Sounds to me as if you could use a shepherd. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you think you can make

it through life by yourself—even as a Christian? It may be time to check your self-sufficiency at the door. Confess your natural desire to do things your way and ask God to give you a spirit of dependence upon him.

EXPLORATION
Trusting in God—Psalm 20:7; Proverbs 3:5; 16:20; Romans 4:5; 10:11; 1 Peter 2:6.

If a society deletes God from the human equation, what sandbags will they stack against the swelling tide of barbarism and hedonism?

—Max Lucado (In the Grip of Grace)

We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: The Bread of Life

Can you see why Jesus called Himself the Bread of Life?

I can think of one other similarity. Consider how bread is made. Think about the process. Wheat grows in the field, then it is cut down, winnowed, and ground into flour. It passes through the fire of the oven and is then distributed around the world. Only by this process does bread become bread. Each step is essential. Eliminate the plant, and you have no wheat. Eliminate the winnowing, and you have no flour. Eliminate the fire, and you have no product. Eliminate the distribution, and you have no satisfaction. Each step is essential.

Now, consider Jesus. He grew up before the Lord "as a tender plant" (Isaiah 53:2). One of millions of boys on the planet. One of thousands in Israel. One of dozens in Nazareth. Indistinguishable from the person down the street or the child in the next chair. Had you seen Him as a youngster, you wouldn't have thought He was the Son of God. You might have thought Him polite or courteous or diligent, but God on earth? Not a chance. He was just a boy. One of hundreds. Like a staff of wheat in the wheat field.

But like wheat, He was cut down. Like chaff He was pounded and beaten. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5). And like bread He passed through the fire. On the Cross He passed though the fire of God's anger, not because of His sin, but because of ours. "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).

Jesus experienced each part of the process of making bread: the growing, the pounding, the firing. And just as each is necessary for bread, each was also necessary for Christ to become the Bread of Life. "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" (Luke 24:26). (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1002.

He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.
8 He was taken from prison and from judgment,
And who will declare His generation?
For He was cut off from the land of the living;
For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.

New Life In Christ

But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. — Isaiah 53:5

Peace with God Through Christ

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

Peace with God. What a happy consequence of faith! Not just peace between countries, peace between neighbors, or peace at home; salvation brings peace with God.

Once a monk and his apprentice traveled from the abbey to a nearby village. The two parted at the city gates, agreeing to meet the next morning after completing their tasks. According to plan, they met and began the long walk back to the abbey. The monk noticed that the younger man was unusually quiet. He asked him if anything was wrong. "What business is it of yours?" came the terse response.

Now the monk was sure his brother was troubled, but he said nothing. The distance between the two began to increase. The apprentice walked slowly, as if to separate himself from his teacher. When the abbey came in sight, the monk stopped at the gate and waited on the student. "Tell me, my son. What troubles your soul?"

The boy started to react again, but when he saw the warmth in his master's eyes, his heart began to melt. "I have sinned greatly," he sobbed. "Last night I slept with a woman and abandoned my vows. I am not worthy to enter the abbey at your side."

The teacher put his arm around the student and said, "We will enter the abbey together. And we will enter the cathedral together. And together we will confess your sin. No one but God will know which of the two of us fell."

Doesn't that describe what God has done for us? When we kept our sin silent, we withdrew from Him. We saw Him as an enemy. We took steps to avoid His presence. But our confession of faults alters our perception. God is no longer a foe but a friend. We are at peace with Him. He did more than the monk did, much more. More than share in our sin, Jesus was "bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). "He accepted the shame" (Hebrews 12:2 NCV). He leads us into the presence of God. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

Question: What sin do you need to bring into God's presence today and confess?

For more on "New Life in Christ," see page 1011.

Life Lessons

Isaiah 54:1—55:13

SITUATION
Isaiah comforted the Israelites by telling them of God's power.

OBSERVATION
God is compassionate on those who come to Him, but we cannot even begin to understand His ways and thoughts.

INSPIRATION
We ask for grace, only to find forgiveness already offered. (How did you know I would sin?)

We ask for food, only to find provision already made. (How did you know I would be hungry?)

We ask for guidance, only to find answers in God's ancient story. (How did you know what I would ask?)

God dwells in a different realm. "The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Corinthians 1:25). He occupies another dimension. "My thoughts are not like your thoughts. Your ways are not like my ways. Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8, 9 NCV).

Make special note of the word "like." God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are they even *like* ours. We aren't even in the same neighborhood. We're thinking, *Preserve the body;* He's thinking, *Save the soul.* We dream of a pay raise. He dreams of raising the dead. We avoid pain and seek peace. God uses pain to bring peace. "I'm going to live before I die," we

9 And they[a] made His grave with the wicked—
But with the rich at His death,
Because He had done no violence,
Nor *was any* deceit in His mouth.

10 Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him;
He has put *Him* to grief.
When You make His soul an offering for sin,
He shall see *His* seed, He shall prolong *His* days,
And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.
11 He shall see the labor of His soul,[a] *and* be satisfied.
By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,
For He shall bear their iniquities.
12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great,
And He shall divide the spoil with the strong,
Because He poured out His soul unto death,
And He was numbered with the transgressors,
And He bore the sin of many,
And made intercession for the transgressors.

A Perpetual Covenant of Peace

54 "Sing, O barren,
You *who* have not borne!
Break forth into singing, and cry aloud,
You *who* have not labored with child!
For more *are* the children of the desolate
Than the children of the married woman," says the Lord.
2 "Enlarge the place of your tent,
And let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings;
Do not spare;
Lengthen your cords,
And strengthen your stakes.
3 For you shall expand to the right and to the left,
And your descendants will inherit the nations,
And make the desolate cities inhabited.

4 "Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed;
Neither be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame;
For you will forget the shame of your youth,
And will not remember the reproach of your widowhood
anymore.
5 For your Maker *is* your husband,
The Lord of hosts *is* His name;
And your Redeemer *is* the Holy One of Israel;
He is called the God of the whole earth.
6 For the Lord has called you
Like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit,
Like a youthful wife when you were refused,"
Says your God.

53:9 [a]Literally *he* or *He* **53:11** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Dead Sea Scrolls and Septuagint read *From the labor of His soul He shall see light.*

7 "For a mere moment I have forsaken you,
But with great mercies I will gather you.
8 With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment;
But with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you,"
Says the Lord, your Redeemer.

9 "For this *is* like the waters of Noah to Me;
For as I have sworn
That the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth,
So have I sworn
That I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you.
10 For the mountains shall depart
And the hills be removed,
But My kindness shall not depart from you,
Nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,"
Says the Lord, who has mercy on you.

11 "O you afflicted one,
Tossed with tempest, *and* not comforted,
Behold, I will lay your stones with colorful gems,
And lay your foundations with sapphires.
12 I will make your pinnacles of rubies,
Your gates of crystal,
And all your walls of precious stones.
13 All your children *shall be* taught by the Lord,
And great *shall be* the peace of your children.
14 In righteousness you shall be established;
You shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear;
And from terror, for it shall not come near you.
15 Indeed they shall surely assemble, *but* not because of Me.
Whoever assembles against you shall fall for your sake.

16 "Behold, I have created the blacksmith
Who blows the coals in the fire,
Who brings forth an instrument for his work;
And I have created the spoiler to destroy.
17 No weapon formed against you shall prosper,
And every tongue *which* rises against you in judgment
You shall condemn.
This *is* the heritage of the servants of the Lord,
And their righteousness *is* from Me,"
Says the Lord.

An Invitation to Abundant Life

55 "Ho! Everyone who thirsts,
Come to the waters;
And you who have no money,
Come, buy and eat.
Yes, come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without price.
2 Why do you spend money for *what is* not bread,
And your wages for *what* does not satisfy?

resolve. "Die, so you can live," He instructs. We love what rusts. He loves what endures. We rejoice at our successes. He rejoices at our confessions. We show our children the Nike star with the million-dollar smile and say, "Be like Mike." God points to the crucified carpenter with bloody lips and a torn side and says, "Be like Christ."

Our thoughts are not like God's thoughts. Our ways are not like His ways. He has a different agenda. He dwells in a different dimension. He lives on another plane. And that plane is named in the first phrase of the Lord's prayer, *"Our Father in heaven."*

(From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Make a list of several questions you have about God and about your life. Acknowledge that you can't even begin to comprehend His actions. Thank Him that He is in absolute control over the universe.

EXPLORATION

God's Superiority—Psalm 36:5, 6; 57:10; 103:11; Romans 11:33–36.

Listen carefully to Me, and eat *what is*
good,
And let your soul delight itself in
abundance.
3 Incline your ear, and come to Me.
Hear, and your soul shall live;
And I will make an everlasting covenant
with you—
The sure mercies of David.
4 Indeed I have given him *as* a witness to
the people,
A leader and commander for the people.
5 Surely you shall call a nation you do not
know,
And nations *who* do not know you shall
run to you,
Because of the Lord your God,
And the Holy One of Israel;
For He has glorified you."

6 Seek the Lord while He may be found,
Call upon Him while He is near.
7 Let the wicked forsake his way,
And the unrighteous man his thoughts;
Let him return to the Lord,
And He will have mercy on him;
And to our God,
For He will abundantly pardon.

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: The Invitation

You are tired.

You are weary.

Weary of being slapped by the waves of broken dreams.

Weary of being stepped on and run over in the endless marathon to the top.

Weary of trusting in someone only to have that trust returned in an envelope with no return address.

Weary of staring into the future and seeing only futility.

What steals our childhood zeal? . . .

It is this weariness that makes the words of the carpenter so compelling. Listen to them. "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Come to Me. . . . The invitation is to come to Him. Why Him?

He offers the invitation as a penniless rabbi in an oppressed nation. He has no connections with the authorities in Rome. He hasn't written a best-seller or earned a diploma.

Yet, He dares to look into the leathery faces of farmers and tired faces of housewives and offer rest. He looks into the disillusioned eyes of a bartender and makes this paradoxical promise: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

The people came. They came out of the cul-de-sacs and office complexes of their existence and He gave them, not religion, not doctrine, not systems, but rest.

As a result, they called Him Lord.

As a result, they called Him Savior.

Not so much because of what He said, but because of what He did.

What He did on the Cross during six hours, one Friday. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1277.

8 "For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts,
Nor *are* your ways My ways," says the Lord.
9 "For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.

10 "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,
And do not return there,
But water the earth,
And make it bring forth and bud,
That it may give seed to the sower
And bread to the eater,
11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please,
And it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.

12 "For you shall go out with joy,
And be led out with peace;
The mountains and the hills
Shall break forth into singing before you,
And all the trees of the field shall clap *their* hands.
13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree,
And instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree;
And it shall be to the Lord for a name,
For an everlasting sign *that* shall not be cut off."

Salvation for the Gentiles

56 Thus says the Lord:
"Keep justice, and do righteousness,
For My salvation *is* about to come,
And My righteousness to be revealed.
2 Blessed *is* the man *who* does this,
And the son of man *who* lays hold on it;
Who keeps from defiling the Sabbath,
And keeps his hand from doing any evil."

3 Do not let the son of the foreigner
Who has joined himself to the Lord
Speak, saying,
"The Lord has utterly separated me from His people";
Nor let the eunuch say,
"Here I am, a dry tree."
4 For thus says the Lord:
"To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths,
And choose what pleases Me,
And hold fast My covenant,
5 Even to them I will give in My house
And within My walls a place and a name
Better than that of sons and daughters;

Life LESSONS

Isaiah 56:1—57:21

SITUATION
Isaiah reported God's message to Israel. He exhorted the people to observe God's laws concerning the Sabbath.

OBSERVATION
God gives peace and satisfaction to those who love Him, but He punishes the wicked for their sins.

INSPIRATION
Read what Jesus did during the last Sabbath of His life. . . . Looks like Jesus was quiet that day.

"Wait a minute. That's it?" That's it.

"You mean with one week left to live, Jesus observed the Sabbath?" As far as we can tell.

"You mean with all those apostles to train and people to teach, He took a day to rest and worship?" Apparently so.

"You're telling me that Jesus thought worship was more important than work?" That's exactly what I'm telling you.

For such is the purpose of the Sabbath. And such was the practice of Jesus. "On the Sabbath day He went to the synagogue, *as He always did,* and stood up to read." Should we do any less?

If Jesus found time in the midst of a racing agenda to stop the rush and sit in the silence, do you think we could, too?

Ahh, I know what you're thinking. I can see it in your face. There you are. Looking at me from my monitor with dubious eyes and furrowed brows. "But, Max, Sunday is the only day I have to get caught up at the office." Or,

"Good idea, Max, but have you heard our preacher? He provides the rest all right—I fall asleep! But the worship?" Or, "That's easy for you to say, Max. You're a preacher. If you were a housewife like me and had four kids like mine. . . . " It's not easy to slow down.

It's almost as if activity is a sign of maturity. After all, isn't there a beatitude which reads, "Blessed are the busy"? No, there isn't. But there is a verse which summarizes many lives: "Surely every man walks about like a shadow; surely they busy themselves in vain; he heaps up riches, and does not know who will gather them" [Psalm 39:6].

Does that sound like your life? Are you so seldom in one place that your friends regard you as a phantom? Are you so constantly on the move that your family is beginning to question your existence? Do you take pride in your frenzy at the expense of your faith?

Are [these] words yours? "I don't remember how to stop." If so, you are headed for a crash.

Slow down. If God commanded it, you need it. If Jesus modeled it, you need it. God still provides the manna. Trust Him. Take a day to say no to work and yes to worship. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you need to slow down? Why not leave Sunday agenda-free? Do something you find relaxing. Take the day off. Take a nap. Read a book. Spend it doing . . . nothing.

EXPLORATION

Peace/Comfort—Psalm 29:11; Isaiah 26:3, 4; 32:17; Habakkuk 3:17–19; John 14:27; Romans 2:10; 5:1.

I will give them[a] an everlasting name
That shall not be cut off.

6 "Also the sons of the foreigner
Who join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him,
And to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants—
Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath,
And holds fast My covenant—
7 Even them I will bring to My holy mountain,
And make them joyful in My house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
Will be accepted on My altar;
For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations."
8 The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says,
"Yet I will gather to him
Others besides those who are gathered to him."

Israel's Irresponsible Leaders

9 All you beasts of the field, come to devour,
All you beasts in the forest.
10 His watchmen *are* blind,
They are all ignorant;
They *are* all dumb dogs,
They cannot bark;
Sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.
11 Yes, *they are* greedy dogs
Which never have enough.
And they *are* shepherds
Who cannot understand;
They all look to their own way,
Every one for his own gain,
From his *own* territory.
12 "Come," *one says,* "I will bring wine,
And we will fill ourselves with intoxicating drink;
Tomorrow will be as today,
And much more abundant."

Israel's Futile Idolatry

57 The righteous perishes,
And no man takes *it* to heart;
Merciful men *are* taken away,
While no one considers
That the righteous is taken away from evil.
2 He shall enter into peace;
They shall rest in their beds,
Each one walking *in* his uprightness.

3 "But come here,
You sons of the sorceress,
You offspring of the adulterer and the harlot!

56:5 [a]Literally *him*

4 Whom do you ridicule?
Against whom do you make a wide mouth
And stick out the tongue?
Are you not children of transgression,
Offspring of falsehood,
5 Inflaming yourselves with gods under every green tree,
Slaying the children in the valleys,
Under the clefts of the rocks?
6 Among the smooth *stones* of the stream
Is your portion;
They, they, *are* your lot!
Even to them you have poured a drink offering,
You have offered a grain offering.
Should I receive comfort in these?

7 "On a lofty and high mountain
You have set your bed;
Even there you went up
To offer sacrifice.
8 Also behind the doors and their posts
You have set up your remembrance;
For you have uncovered yourself *to those other* than Me,
And have gone up to them;
You have enlarged your bed
And made *a covenant* with them;
You have loved their bed,
Where you saw *their* nudity.[a]
9 You went to the king with ointment,
And increased your perfumes;
You sent your messengers far off,
And *even* descended to Sheol.
10 You are wearied in the length of your way;
Yet you did not say, 'There is no hope.'
You have found the life of your hand;
Therefore you were not grieved.

11 "And of whom have you been afraid, or feared,
That you have lied
And not remembered Me,
Nor taken *it* to your heart?
Is it not because I have held My peace from of old
That you do not fear Me?
12 I will declare your righteousness
And your works,
For they will not profit you.
13 When you cry out,
Let your collection *of idols* deliver you.
But the wind will carry them all away,
A breath will take *them.*
But he who puts his trust in Me shall possess the land,
And shall inherit My holy mountain."

Healing for the Backslider

14 And one shall say,
"Heap it up! Heap it up!
Prepare the way,
Take the stumbling block out of the way of My people."

15 For thus says the High and Lofty One
Who inhabits eternity, whose name *is* Holy:
"I dwell in the high and holy *place,*
With him *who* has a contrite and humble spirit,
To revive the spirit of the humble,
And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.
16 For I will not contend forever,
Nor will I always be angry;
For the spirit would fail before Me,
And the souls *which* I have made.
17 For the iniquity of his covetousness
I was angry and struck him;
I hid and was angry,
And he went on backsliding in the way of his heart.
18 I have seen his ways, and will heal him;
I will also lead him,
And restore comforts to him
And to his mourners.

19 "I create the fruit of the lips:
Peace, peace to *him who is* far off and to *him who is* near,"
Says the Lord,
"And I will heal him."
20 But the wicked *are* like the troubled sea,
When it cannot rest,
Whose waters cast up mire and dirt.

21 "*There* is no peace,"
Says my God, "for the wicked."

57:8 [a]Literally *hand,* a euphemism

Life LESSONS

Isaiah 58:1—59:21

SITUATION
God ordered Isaiah to remind the people of their rebellion. Even their efforts to be religious had selfish motivations. He wanted them to honor Him and remember His love for them—for He promised to never leave them (59:21).

OBSERVATION
Seek God with pure motives. Do good works because you love God, not because others expect them.

INSPIRATION
I have a feeling that most people who defy and deny God do so more out of fear than conviction. For all our chest pumping and braggadocio, we are anxious folk—can't see a step into the future, can't hear the one who owns us. No wonder we try to gum the hand that feeds us.

But God reaches and touches. He speaks through the immensity of the Russian plain and the density of the Amazon rain forest. Through a physician's touch in Africa, a bowl of rice in India. Through a Japanese bow or a South American *abraço.* He's even been known to touch people through paragraphs like the ones you are reading. If He is touching you, let Him.

Mark it down: God loves you with an unearthly love. You can't win it by being winsome. You can't lose it by being a loser.

But you can be blind enough to resist it.

Don't. For heaven's sake, don't. For your sake, don't.

"Take in with all

Fasting that Pleases God

58 "Cry aloud, spare not;
Lift up your voice like a trumpet;
Tell My people their transgression,
And the house of Jacob their sins.
2 Yet they seek Me daily,
And delight to know My ways,
As a nation that did righteousness,
And did not forsake the ordinance of their God.
They ask of Me the ordinances of justice;
They take delight in approaching God.
3 'Why have we fasted,' *they say,* 'and You have not seen?
Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?'

"In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure,
And exploit all your laborers.
4 Indeed you fast for strife and debate,
And to strike with the fist of wickedness.
You will not fast as *you do* this day,
To make your voice heard on high.
5 Is it a fast that I have chosen,
A day for a man to afflict his soul?
Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush,
And to spread out sackcloth and ashes?
Would you call this a fast,
And an acceptable day to the Lord?

6 "*Is* this not the fast that I have chosen:
To loose the bonds of wickedness,
To undo the heavy burdens,
To let the oppressed go free,
And that you break every yoke?
7 *Is it* not to share your bread with the hungry,
And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out;
When you see the naked, that you cover him,
And not hide yourself from your own flesh?
8 Then your light shall break forth like the morning,
Your healing shall spring forth speedily,
And your righteousness shall go before you;
The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.
9 Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
You shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I *am.*'

"If you take away the yoke from your midst,
The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,
10 *If* you extend your soul to the hungry
And satisfy the afflicted soul,
Then your light shall dawn in the darkness,
And your darkness shall *be* as the noonday.
11 The Lord will guide you continually,
And satisfy your soul in drought,
And strengthen your bones;

You shall be like a watered garden,
And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.
12 Those from among you
Shall build the old waste places;
You shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach,
The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.

13 "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath,
From doing your pleasure on My holy day,
And call the Sabbath a delight,
The holy *day* of the Lord honorable,
And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways,
Nor finding your own pleasure,
Nor speaking *your own* words,
14 Then you shall delight yourself in the Lord;
And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth,
And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father.
The mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Separated from God

59 Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened,
That it cannot save;
Nor His ear heavy,
That it cannot hear.
2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God;
And your sins have hidden *His* face from you,
So that He will not hear.
3 For your hands are defiled with blood,
And your fingers with iniquity;
Your lips have spoken lies,
Your tongue has muttered perversity.

4 No one calls for justice,
Nor does *any* plead for truth.
They trust in empty words and speak lies;
They conceive evil and bring forth iniquity.
5 They hatch vipers' eggs and weave the spider's web;
He who eats of their eggs dies,
And *from* that which is crushed a viper breaks out.

6 Their webs will not become garments,
Nor will they cover themselves with their works;
Their works *are* works of iniquity,
And the act of violence *is* in their hands.
7 Their feet run to evil,
And they make haste to shed innocent blood;
Their thoughts *are* thoughts of iniquity;
Wasting and destruction *are* in their paths.
8 The way of peace they have not known,
And *there is* no justice in their ways;
They have made themselves crooked paths;
Whoever takes that way shall not know peace.

Christians the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:18, 19 MSG). Others demote you. God claims you. Let the definitive voice of the universe say, "You're still a part of My plan." (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

The next time you sing at church, during the second stanza ask yourself, "Why am I doing this? Why am I here? Why am I singing? Why did I bring my Bible?" Examine your motives! Be sure that you are doing those acts to thank God for His great love for you!

EXPLORATION

Obey from Your Heart—Isaiah 1:11–20; Hosea 6:6; Joel 2:12, 13; Amos 5:23, 24; Matthew 15:6–9.

When asked to describe the width of His love, He stretched one hand to the right and the other to the left and had them nailed in that position so you would know He died loving you.

—Max Lucado (He Chose the Nails)

Sin Confessed

9 Therefore justice is far from us,
Nor does righteousness overtake us;
We look for light, but there is darkness!
For brightness, *but* we walk in blackness!
10 We grope for the wall like the blind,
And we grope as if *we had* no eyes;
We stumble at noonday as at twilight;
We are as dead *men* in desolate places.
11 We all growl like bears,
And moan sadly like doves;
We look for justice, but *there is* none;
For salvation, *but* it is far from us.
12 For our transgressions are multiplied
before You,
And our sins testify against us;
For our transgressions *are* with us,
And *as for* our iniquities, we know them:
13 In transgressing and lying against the
Lord,
And departing from our God,
Speaking oppression and revolt,
Conceiving and uttering from the heart
words of falsehood.
14 Justice is turned back,
And righteousness stands afar off;
For truth is fallen in the street,
And equity cannot enter.
15 So truth fails,
And he *who* departs from evil makes
himself a prey.

The Redeemer of Zion

Then the Lord saw *it,* and it displeased
Him
That *there was* no justice.
16 He saw that *there was* no man,
And wondered that *there was* no
intercessor;
Therefore His own arm brought salvation
for Him;
And His own righteousness, it sustained
Him.
17 For He put on righteousness as a
breastplate,
And a helmet of salvation on His head;
He put on the garments of vengeance for
clothing,
And was clad with zeal as a cloak.
18 According to *their* deeds, accordingly He
will repay,
Fury to His adversaries,
Recompense to His enemies;
The coastlands He will fully repay.
19 So shall they fear
The name of the Lord from the west,
And His glory from the rising of the sun;
When the enemy comes in like a flood,
The Spirit of the Lord will lift up a
standard against him.

20 "The Redeemer will come to Zion,
And to those who turn from transgression
in Jacob,"
Says the Lord.

21 "As for Me," says the Lord, "this *is* My covenant with them: My Spirit who *is* upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the Lord, "from this time and forevermore."

The Gentiles Bless Zion

60 Arise, shine;
For your light has come!
And the glory of the Lord is risen upon
you.
2 For behold, the darkness shall cover the
earth,
And deep darkness the people;
But the Lord will arise over you,
And His glory will be seen upon you.
3 The Gentiles shall come to your light,
And kings to the brightness of your
rising.

4 "Lift up your eyes all around, and see:
They all gather together, they come to
you;
Your sons shall come from afar,
And your daughters shall be nursed at
your side.
5 Then you shall see and become radiant,
And your heart shall swell with joy;
Because the abundance of the sea shall
be turned to you,
The wealth of the Gentiles shall come to
you.
6 The multitude of camels shall cover your
land,
The dromedaries of Midian and Ephah;

All those from Sheba shall come;
They shall bring gold and incense,
And they shall proclaim the praises of the Lord.
7 All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together to you,
The rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you;
They shall ascend with acceptance on My altar,
And I will glorify the house of My glory.

8 "Who *are* these *who* fly like a cloud,
And like doves to their roosts?
9 Surely the coastlands shall wait for Me;
And the ships of Tarshish *will come* first,
To bring your sons from afar,
Their silver and their gold with them,
To the name of the Lord your God,
And to the Holy One of Israel,
Because He has glorified you.

10 "The sons of foreigners shall build up your walls,
And their kings shall minister to you;
For in My wrath I struck you,
But in My favor I have had mercy on you.
11 Therefore your gates shall be open continually;
They shall not be shut day or night,
That *men* may bring to you the wealth of the Gentiles,
And their kings in procession.
12 For the nation and kingdom which will not serve you shall perish,
And *those* nations shall be utterly ruined.

13 "The glory of Lebanon shall come to you,
The cypress, the pine, and the box tree together,
To beautify the place of My sanctuary;
And I will make the place of My feet glorious.
14 Also the sons of those who afflicted you
Shall come bowing to you,
And all those who despised you shall fall prostrate at the soles of your feet;
And they shall call you The City of the Lord,
Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

15 "Whereas you have been forsaken and hated,
So that no one went through *you,*
I will make you an eternal excellence,
A joy of many generations.
16 You shall drink the milk of the Gentiles,
And milk the breast of kings;
You shall know that I, the Lord, *am* your Savior
And your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

17 "Instead of bronze I will bring gold,
Instead of iron I will bring silver,

Life LESSONS

Isaiah 60:1—61:11

SITUATION
Isaiah continued to prophesy. He reported the deliverance that the Messiah would bring to Israel.

OBSERVATION
Because of God's great love for His people, He would send a Savior to comfort, heal, and set His people free. He would clothe His people with goodness and salvation (61:10).

INSPIRATION
We eat our share of forbidden fruit. We say what we shouldn't say. Go where we shouldn't go. Pluck fruit from trees we shouldn't touch.

And when we do, the door opens, and the shame tumbles in. And we hide. We sew fig leaves. Flimsy excuses. See-through justifications. We cover ourselves in good works and good deeds, but one gust of the wind of truth, and we are naked again—stark naked in our own failure.

So what does God do? Exactly what He did for our parents in the garden. He sheds innocent blood. He offers the life of His Son. And from the scene of the sacrifice the Father takes a robe—not the skin of an animal—but the robe of righteousness. And does He throw it in our direction and tell us to shape up? No, He dresses us Himself. He dresses us *with* Himself. "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:26, 27).

The robing is His work, not ours. Did you note

Instead of wood, bronze,
And instead of stones, iron.
I will also make your officers peace,
And your magistrates righteousness.
18 Violence shall no longer be heard in your land,
Neither wasting nor destruction within your borders;
But you shall call your walls Salvation,
And your gates Praise.

God the Glory of His People

19 "The sun shall no longer be your light by day,
Nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you;
But the Lord will be to you an everlasting light,
And your God your glory.
20 Your sun shall no longer go down,
Nor shall your moon withdraw itself;
For the Lord will be your everlasting light,
And the days of your mourning shall be ended.
21 Also your people *shall* all *be* righteous;
They shall inherit the land forever,
The branch of My planting,
The work of My hands,
That I may be glorified.
22 A little one shall become a thousand,
And a small one a strong nation.
I, the Lord, will hasten it in its time."

The Good News of Salvation

61 "The Spirit of the Lord God *is* upon Me,
Because the Lord has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound;
2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,
3 To console those who mourn in Zion,
To give them beauty for ashes,
The oil of joy for mourning,
The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
That they may be called trees of righteousness,
The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified."

4 And they shall rebuild the old ruins,
They shall raise up the former desolations,
And they shall repair the ruined cities,
The desolations of many generations.
5 Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks,
And the sons of the foreigner
Shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers.
6 But you shall be named the priests of the Lord,

the inactivity of Adam and Eve? They did nothing. Absolutely nothing. They didn't request the sacrifice; they didn't think of the sacrifice; they didn't even dress themselves. They were passive in the process. So are we. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8–10).

We hide. He seeks. We bring sin. He brings a sacrifice. We try fig leaves. He brings the robe of righteousness. And we are left to sing the song of the prophet: "He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels" (Isaiah 61:10).

God has clothed us. He protects us with a cloak of love. Can you look back over your life and see instances of God's protection? I can too. (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Salvation is a free gift from God. Only He can clothe us with righteousness. Whom can you talk to this week who needs to hear of God's salvation?

EXPLORATION

God's Free Gift—John 4:10; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:23.

They shall call you the servants of our God.
You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles,
And in their glory you shall boast.
7 Instead of your shame *you shall have* double *honor,*
And *instead of* confusion they shall rejoice in their portion.
Therefore in their land they shall possess double;
Everlasting joy shall be theirs.

8 "For I, the Lord, love justice;
I hate robbery for burnt offering;
I will direct their work in truth,
And will make with them an everlasting covenant.
9 Their descendants shall be known among the Gentiles,
And their offspring among the people.
All who see them shall acknowledge them,
That they *are* the posterity *whom* the Lord has blessed."

10 I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
My soul shall be joyful in my God;
For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation,

New Life In Christ

The Lord . . . has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness. —Isaiah 61:10

Seeing Ourselves as God Sees Us

Look long enough into the eyes of our Savior and, there, too, you will see a bride. Dressed in fine linen. Clothed in pure grace. From the wreath in her hair to the clouds at her feet, she is royal; she is the princess. She is the bride. His bride. Walking toward him, she is not yet with Him. But He sees her, He awaits her, He longs for her.

"Who could bear to live without her?" you hear Him whisper.

And who is that bride? Who is this beauty who occupies the heart of Jesus?

It is not nature. He loves His creation and creation groans to be with Him, but He never called creation His bride.

It is not His angels. His angels are ever present to worship and serve Him, but He never called the heavenly beings His bride.

Then who? Who is this bride about whom Jesus speaks and for whom Jesus longs? Who is this maiden who has captured the heart of God's Son?

You are. You have captured the heart of God. "As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62:5).

The challenge is to remember that. To meditate on it. To focus on it. To allow His love to change the way you look at you.

Do you ever feel unnoticed? New clothes and styles may help for a while. But if you want permanent change, learn to see yourself as God sees you: "He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels" (Isaiah 61:10). (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

Question: What does it mean to you that God rejoices over you?

For more on "New Life in Christ," see page 1316.

He has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
As a bridegroom decks *himself* with ornaments,
And as a bride adorns *herself* with her jewels.
11 For as the earth brings forth its bud,
As the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth,
So the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

Assurance of Zion's Salvation

62 For Zion's sake I will not hold My peace,
And for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
Until her righteousness goes forth as brightness,
And her salvation as a lamp *that* burns.
2 The Gentiles shall see your righteousness,
And all kings your glory.
You shall be called by a new name,
Which the mouth of the Lord will name.
3 You shall also be a crown of glory
In the hand of the Lord,
And a royal diadem
In the hand of your God.
4 You shall no longer be termed Forsaken,
Nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate;
But you shall be called Hephzibah,[a] and your land Beulah;[b]
For the Lord delights in you,
And your land shall be married.
5 For *as* a young man marries a virgin,
So shall your sons marry you;
And *as* the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
So shall your God rejoice over you.

6 I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem;
They shall never hold their peace day or night.
You who make mention of the Lord, do not keep silent,
7 And give Him no rest till He establishes
And till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

8 The Lord has sworn by His right hand
And by the arm of His strength:
"Surely I will no longer give your grain
As food for your enemies;
And the sons of the foreigner shall not drink your new wine,
For which you have labored.
9 But those who have gathered it shall eat it,
And praise the Lord;
Those who have brought it together shall drink it in My holy courts."

10 Go through,
Go through the gates!

62:4 [a]Literally *My Delight Is in Her* [b]Literally *Married*

Life Lessons

Isaiah 62:1—64:12

SITUATION
Isaiah prophesied that God would one day be proud of His people—a day to long for, prepare for, and pray for. Recollecting God's past favors and faithfulness, Isaiah passionately pleaded for God's compassion and mercy. He asked that Israel's enemies be punished.

OBSERVATION
When Jesus Christ came and provided a way for salvation, God would exalt His people. God would see His children as people without sin because Jesus paid their penalty.

INSPIRATION
A hard heart ruins, not only your life, but the lives of your family members. . . .

My executive assistant, Karen Hill, saw the result of such stubbornness in a pasture. A cow stuck her nose into a paint can and couldn't shake it off. Can-nosed cows can't breathe well, and they can't drink or eat at all. Both the cow and her calf were in danger. A serious bovine bind.

Karen's family set out to help. But when the cow saw the rescuers coming, she set out for pasture. They pursued, but the cow escaped. They chased that cow for three days! Each time the posse drew near, the cow ran. Finally, using pickup trucks and ropes, they cornered and decanned the cow.

Seen any can-nosed people lately? Malnourished souls? Dehydrated hearts? People who can't take a deep breath? All because they stuck their noses where they shouldn't, and when

Prepare the way for the people;
Build up,
Build up the highway!
Take out the stones,
Lift up a banner for the peoples!

11 Indeed the Lord has proclaimed
To the end of the world:
"Say to the daughter of Zion,
'Surely your salvation is coming;
Behold, His reward *is* with Him,
And His work before Him.'"
12 And they shall call them The Holy People,
The Redeemed of the Lord;
And you shall be called Sought Out,
A City Not Forsaken.

The Lord in Judgment and Salvation

63 Who *is* this who comes from Edom,
With dyed garments from Bozrah,
This *One who is* glorious in His apparel,
Traveling in the greatness of His strength?—

"I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save."

2 Why *is* Your apparel red,
And Your garments like one who treads in the winepress?

3 "I have trodden the winepress alone,
And from the peoples no one *was* with Me.
For I have trodden them in My anger,
And trampled them in My fury;
Their blood is sprinkled upon My garments,
And I have stained all My robes.
4 For the day of vengeance *is* in My heart,
And the year of My redeemed has come.
5 I looked, but *there was* no one to help,
And I wondered
That *there was* no one to uphold;
Therefore My own arm brought salvation for Me;
And My own fury, it sustained Me.
6 I have trodden down the peoples in My anger,
Made them drunk in My fury,
And brought down their strength to the earth."

God's Mercy Remembered

7 I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord
And the praises of the Lord,
According to all that the Lord has bestowed on us,
And the great goodness toward the house of Israel,
Which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies,
According to the multitude of His lovingkindnesses.

God came to help, they ran away.

When billions of us imitate the cow, chaos erupts. Nations of bull-headed people ducking God and bumping into each other. We scamper, starve, and struggle.

Can-nosed craziness. Isn't this the world we see? This is the world God sees.

Yet, this is the world God loves. "For God so loved the world . . ." This hard-hearted, stiff-necked world. We bow before gold-plated cows; still, He loves us. We stick our noses where we shouldn't; still, He pursues us. We run from the very one who can help, but He doesn't give up. He loves. He pursues. He persists. And, every so often, a heart starts to soften. Let yours be one of them. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you working for God's kingdom? Are you active in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to a very needy world? Do you tell others what God has done for you? All these things are done by those who desire to see God's kingdom come. Be an active member of God's kingdom.

EXPLORATION

Holiness—Exodus 20:8–11; Leviticus 11:44, 45; Psalm 93:5; Isaiah 4:2–4; Hebrews 10:14; 1 Peter 1:14–16.

8 For He said, "Surely they *are* My people,
Children *who* will not lie."
So He became their Savior.
9 In all their affliction He was afflicted,
And the Angel of His Presence saved them;
In His love and in His pity He redeemed them;
And He bore them and carried them
All the days of old.
10 But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit;
So He turned Himself against them as an enemy,
And He fought against them.

11 Then he remembered the days of old,
Moses *and* his people, *saying:*
"Where *is* He who brought them up out of the sea
With the shepherd of His flock?
Where *is* He who put His Holy Spirit within them,
12 Who led *them* by the right hand of Moses,
With His glorious arm,
Dividing the water before them
To make for Himself an everlasting name,
13 Who led them through the deep,
As a horse in the wilderness,
That they might not stumble?"

14 As a beast goes down into the valley,
And the Spirit of the Lord causes him to rest,
So You lead Your people,
To make Yourself a glorious name.

A Prayer of Penitence

15 Look down from heaven,
And see from Your habitation, holy and glorious.
Where *are* Your zeal and Your strength,
The yearning of Your heart and Your mercies toward me?
Are they restrained?
16 Doubtless You *are* our Father,
Though Abraham was ignorant of us,
And Israel does not acknowledge us.
You, O Lord, *are* our Father;
Our Redeemer from Everlasting *is* Your name.
17 O Lord, why have You made us stray from Your ways,
And hardened our heart from Your fear?
Return for Your servants' sake,
The tribes of Your inheritance.
18 Your holy people have possessed *it* but a little while;
Our adversaries have trodden down Your sanctuary.
19 We have become *like* those of old, over whom You never ruled,
Those who were never called by Your name.

64 Oh, that You would rend the heavens!
That You would come down!
That the mountains might shake at Your presence—
2 As fire burns brushwood,
As fire causes water to boil—
To make Your name known to Your adversaries,
That the nations may tremble at Your presence!
3 When You did awesome things *for which* we did not look,
You came down,
The mountains shook at Your presence.
4 For since the beginning of the world
Men have not heard nor perceived by the ear,
Nor has the eye seen any God besides You,
Who acts for the one who waits for Him.
5 You meet him who rejoices and does righteousness,
Who remembers You in Your ways.
You are indeed angry, for we have sinned—
In these ways we continue;
And we need to be saved.

6 But we are all like an unclean *thing,*
And all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags;
We all fade as a leaf,
And our iniquities, like the wind,
Have taken us away.
7 And *there is* no one who calls on Your name,
Who stirs himself up to take hold of You;

For You have hidden Your face from us,
And have consumed us because of our iniquities.

8 But now, O Lord,
You *are* our Father;
We *are* the clay, and You our potter;
And all we *are* the work of Your hand.
9 Do not be furious, O Lord,
Nor remember iniquity forever;
Indeed, please look—we all *are* Your people!
10 Your holy cities are a wilderness,
Zion is a wilderness,
Jerusalem a desolation.
11 Our holy and beautiful temple,
Where our fathers praised You,
Is burned up with fire;
And all our pleasant things are laid waste.
12 Will You restrain Yourself because of these *things*, O Lord?
Will You hold Your peace, and afflict us very severely?

The Righteousness of God's Judgment

65 "I was sought by *those who* did not ask *for Me;*
I was found by *those who* did not seek Me.
I said, 'Here I am, here I am,'
To a nation *that* was not called by My name.
2 I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people,
Who walk in a way *that is* not good,
According to their own thoughts;
3 A people who provoke Me to anger continually to My face;
Who sacrifice in gardens,
And burn incense on altars of brick;
4 Who sit among the graves,
And spend the night in the tombs;
Who eat swine's flesh,
And the broth of abominable things is *in* their vessels;
5 Who say, 'Keep to yourself,
Do not come near me,
For I am holier than you!'
These *are* smoke in My nostrils,
A fire that burns all the day.

6 "Behold, *it is* written before Me:
I will not keep silence, but will repay—
Even repay into their bosom—
7 Your iniquities and the iniquities of your fathers together,"
Says the Lord,
"Who have burned incense on the mountains
And blasphemed Me on the hills;
Therefore I will measure their former work into their bosom."

8 Thus says the Lord:

Life Lessons

Isaiah 65:1—66:24

SITUATION
God answered the prayers of His people. Those who remained faithful would receive life, joy, and peace beyond imagination. The disobedient would receive judgment and death.

OBSERVATION
God cannot overlook sin, and He will punish it; but the faithful will know the eternal blessings of God's new kingdom.

INSPIRATION
Deep within you, God's Spirit confirms with your spirit that you belong to Him. Beneath the vitals of the heart, God's Spirit whispers, "You are mine. I bought you and sealed you, and no one can take you." The Spirit offers an inward, comforting witness.

He is like a father who walks hand in hand with his little child. The child knows he belongs to his daddy, his small hand happily lost in the large one. He feels no uncertainty about his papa's love. But suddenly the father, moved by some impulse, swings his boy up into the air and into his arms and says, "I love you, son." He puts a big kiss on the bubbly cheek, lowers the boy to the ground, and the two go on walking together.

Has the relationship between the two changed? On one level, no. The father is no more the father than he was before the expression of love. But on a deeper level, yes. The dad drenched, showered, and saturated the boy in love. God's Spirit does the same with us. "The love

of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5). Note the preposition *of*. The Holy Spirit pours the love *of* God in our hearts, not love *for* God. God hands a bucket of love to the Spirit and instructs, "Douse their hearts."

There are moments when the Spirit enchants us with sweet rhapsody. *You belong to the Father. Signed, sealed, and soon-to-be delivered.* Been a while since you heard Him whisper words of assurance? Then tell Him. He's listening to you. And—get this!— He's speaking for you. (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Become a citizen in God's kingdom today by trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Reserve your place in His new creation. You can have permanent hope and eternal life! There is no better way to live than by following Him.

EXPLORATION

God's Kingdom—Matthew 5:3–12; 6:10; Luke 4:43; 9:2; John 3:3; Acts 1:3.

"As the new wine is found in the cluster,
And *one* says, 'Do not destroy it,
For a blessing *is* in it,'
So will I do for My servants' sake,
That I may not destroy them all.
9 I will bring forth descendants from Jacob,
And from Judah an heir of My mountains;
My elect shall inherit it,
And My servants shall dwell there.
10 Sharon shall be a fold of flocks,
And the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down,
For My people who have sought Me.

11 "But you *are* those who forsake the Lord,
Who forget My holy mountain,
Who prepare a table for Gad,[a]
And who furnish a drink offering for Meni.[b]
12 Therefore I will number you for the sword,
And you shall all bow down to the slaughter;
Because, when I called, you did not answer;
When I spoke, you did not hear,
But did evil before My eyes,
And chose *that* in which I do not delight."

13 Therefore thus says the Lord God:

"Behold, My servants shall eat,
But you shall be hungry;
Behold, My servants shall drink,
But you shall be thirsty;
Behold, My servants shall rejoice,
But you shall be ashamed;
14 Behold, My servants shall sing for joy of heart,
But you shall cry for sorrow of heart,
And wail for grief of spirit.
15 You shall leave your name as a curse to My chosen;
For the Lord God will slay you,
And call His servants by another name;
16 So that he who blesses himself in the earth
Shall bless himself in the God of truth;
And he who swears in the earth
Shall swear by the God of truth;
Because the former troubles are forgotten,
And because they are hidden from My eyes.

The Glorious New Creation

17 "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;
And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.
18 But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create;

65:11 [a]Literally *Troop* or *Fortune*, a pagan deity [b]Literally *Number* or *Destiny*, a pagan deity

For behold, I create Jerusalem *as* a
rejoicing,
And her people a joy.
19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
And joy in My people;
The voice of weeping shall no longer be
heard in her,
Nor the voice of crying.

20 "No more shall an infant from there *live*
but a few days,
Nor an old man who has not fulfilled his
days;
For the child shall die one hundred years
old,
But the sinner *being* one hundred years
old shall be accursed.
21 They shall build houses and inhabit *them;*
They shall plant vineyards and eat their
fruit.
22 They shall not build and another inhabit;
They shall not plant and another eat;
For as the days of a tree, *so shall be* the
days of My people,
And My elect shall long enjoy the work of
their hands.
23 They shall not labor in vain,
Nor bring forth children for trouble;
For they *shall be* the descendants of the
blessed of the Lord,
And their offspring with them.

24 "It shall come to pass
That before they call, I will answer;
And while they are still speaking, I will
hear.
25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed
together,
The lion shall eat straw like the ox,
And dust *shall be* the serpent's food.
They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My
holy mountain,"
Says the Lord.

True Worship and False

66 Thus says the Lord:
"Heaven *is* My throne,
And earth *is* My footstool.
Where *is* the house that you will
build Me?
And where *is* the place of My rest?
2 For all those *things* My hand has made,
And all those *things* exist,"
Says the Lord.
"But on this *one* will I look:
On *him who is* poor and of a contrite
spirit,
And who trembles at My word.

3 "He who kills a bull *is as if* he slays a man;
He who sacrifices a lamb, *as if* he breaks a
dog's neck;
He who offers a grain offering, *as if he*
offers swine's blood;
He who burns incense, *as if* he blesses an
idol.
Just as they have chosen their own ways,
And their soul delights in their
abominations,
4 So will I choose their delusions,
And bring their fears on them;
Because, when I called, no one answered,
When I spoke they did not hear;
But they did evil before My eyes,
And chose *that* in which I do not delight."

The Lord Vindicates Zion

5 Hear the word of the Lord,
You who tremble at His word:
"Your brethren who hated you,
Who cast you out for My name's sake,
said,
'Let the Lord be glorified,
That we may see your joy.'
But they shall be ashamed."

6 The sound of noise from the city!
A voice from the temple!
The voice of the Lord,
Who fully repays His enemies!

7 "Before she was in labor, she gave birth;
Before her pain came,
She delivered a male child.
8 Who has heard such a thing?
Who has seen such things?
Shall the earth be made to give birth in
one day?
Or shall a nation be born at once?
For as soon as Zion was in labor,
She gave birth to her children.
9 Shall I bring to the time of birth, and not
cause delivery?" says the Lord.

"Shall I who cause delivery shut up *the womb?*" says your God.
10 "Rejoice with Jerusalem,
And be glad with her, all you who love her;
Rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn for her;
11 That you may feed and be satisfied
With the consolation of her bosom,
That you may drink deeply and be delighted
With the abundance of her glory."

12 For thus says the Lord:

"Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river,
And the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream.
Then you shall feed;
On *her* sides shall you be carried,
And be dandled on *her* knees.
13 As one whom his mother comforts,
So I will comfort you;
And you shall be comforted in Jerusalem."

The Reign and Indignation of God

14 When you see *this,* your heart shall rejoice,
And your bones shall flourish like grass;
The hand of the Lord shall be known to His servants,
And *His* indignation to His enemies.
15 For behold, the Lord will come with fire
And with His chariots, like a whirlwind,
To render His anger with fury,
And His rebuke with flames of fire.
16 For by fire and by His sword
The Lord will judge all flesh;
And the slain of the Lord shall be many.

17 "Those who sanctify themselves and purify themselves,
To go to the gardens
After an *idol* in the midst,
Eating swine's flesh and the abomination and the mouse,
Shall be consumed together," says the Lord.

18 "For I *know* their works and their thoughts. It shall be that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see My glory. 19 I will set a sign among them; and those among them who escape I will send to the nations: *to* Tarshish and Pul[a] and Lud, who draw the bow, and Tubal and Javan, *to* the coastlands afar off who have not heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they shall declare My glory among the Gentiles. 20 Then they shall bring all your brethren for an offering to the Lord out of all nations, on horses and in chariots and in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem," says the Lord, "as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord. 21 And I will also take some of them for priests *and* Levites," says the Lord.

22 "For as the new heavens and the new earth
Which I will make shall remain before Me," says the Lord,
"So shall your descendants and your name remain.
23 And it shall come to pass
That from one New Moon to another,
And from one Sabbath to another,
All flesh shall come to worship before Me," says the Lord.

24 "And they shall go forth and look
Upon the corpses of the men
Who have transgressed against Me.
For their worm does not die,
And their fire is not quenched.
They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."

66:19 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Septuagint reads *Put* (compare Jeremiah 46:9).

THE BOOK OF

JEREMIAH

INTRODUCTION

No church would hire Jeremiah. He wouldn't make it past the first interview. Better still, he wouldn't even make it to the interview.

He had little stomach for organized religion. One can hardly blame him. What he saw would nauseate the worst of us.

He saw raging immorality. He saw blatant idolatry. He saw unbridled hypocrisy. He saw priests who sold out to the highest bidder. He saw kings who lived out his worst nightmare.

Were his head a Niagara, it wouldn't generate enough tears for him to weep. Like Job, he cursed the day he was born, and again, you can hardly blame him. It was a rotten day in which to live.

He could see the writing on the Babylonian wall, but you'd think he was the only one who knew how to read.

In the end, the walls fell, just like he said. The temple was raided, just like he prophesied. And the people were bound like slaves and led into Babylon.

To his credit, he never said, "I told you so."

He remained behind and walked among the ruins and did what he did most of his life. He wept.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: The prophet Jeremiah

Date Written: 630–580 B.C.

Key Themes:

- Only God understands the hearts of people.
- God wants to reward righteousness and punish evil.
- Within His timing, God is willing to forgive and restore.
- There is a cost as well as a reward to obedience.

Key Verse:

"Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you" (Jeremiah 7:23).

Contents:

I. Jeremiah's Call and Judah's Prophecy 1:1—33:26

II. Jeremiah's Ministry 34:1—45:5

III. Fate of the Nations 46:1—51:64

IV. Destruction of Jerusalem 52:1–34

Life LESSONS

Jeremiah 1:1–19

SITUATION
Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, was called to minister to Judah during the reigns of its last five kings: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah (627–586 B.C.). Other prophets, such as Habakkuk and Zephaniah, ministered during Jeremiah's time.

OBSERVATION
Before Jeremiah was conceived God had singled him out for His special work. The prophet had been set apart (or sanctified) for God to use in a particular way.

INSPIRATION
Remember, God planned and packed you on purpose for His purpose. "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago" (Ephesians 2:10 NLT).

You are heaven's custom design. God "formed you from the womb" (Isaiah 44:2). He determined your every detail. "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord?" (Exodus 4:11).

At a moment before moments existed, the sovereign Star Maker resolved, "I will make _____." Your name goes in the blank. Then He continued with, "And I will make him/her _____ and _____ and _____ and _____." Fill those blanks with your characteristics. Insightful. Clever. Detail oriented. Restless. And since you are God's idea, you are a good

The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who *were* in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, 2 to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. 3 It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month.

The Prophet Is Called

4 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying:

5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you;
Before you were born I sanctified you;
I ordained you a prophet to the nations."

6 Then said I:

"Ah, Lord God!
Behold, I cannot speak, for I *am* a youth."

7 But the Lord said to me:

"Do not say, 'I *am* a youth,'
For you shall go to all to whom I send you,
And whatever I command you, you shall speak.
8 Do not be afraid of their faces,
For I *am* with you to deliver you," says the Lord.

9 Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me:

"Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.
10 See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms,
To root out and to pull down,
To destroy and to throw down,
To build and to plant."

11 Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Jeremiah, what do you see?"

And I said, "I see a branch of an almond tree."

12 Then the Lord said to me, "You have seen well, for I am ready to perform My word."

13 And the word of the Lord came to me the second time, saying, "What do you see?"

And I said, "I see a boiling pot, and it is facing away from the north."

14 Then the Lord said to me:

"Out of the north calamity shall break forth
On all the inhabitants of the land.
15 For behold, I am calling

All the families of the kingdoms of the north," says the Lord;
"They shall come and each one set his throne
At the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem,
Against all its walls all around,
And against all the cities of Judah.
16 I will utter My judgments
Against them concerning all their wickedness,
Because they have forsaken Me,
Burned incense to other gods,
And worshiped the works of their own hands.

17 "Therefore prepare yourself and arise,
And speak to them all that I command you.
Do not be dismayed before their faces,
Lest I dismay you before them.
18 For behold, I have made you this day
A fortified city and an iron pillar,
And bronze walls against the whole land—
Against the kings of Judah,
Against its princes,
Against its priests,
And against the people of the land.
19 They will fight against you,
But they shall not prevail against you.
For I *am* with you," says the Lord, "to deliver you."

God's Case Against Israel

2 Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the Lord:

"I remember you,
The kindness of your youth,
The love of your betrothal,
When you went after Me in the wilderness,
In a land not sown.
3 Israel *was* holiness to the Lord,
The firstfruits of His increase.
All that devour him will offend;
Disaster will come upon them," says the Lord.' "

4 Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob and all the families of the house of Israel. 5 Thus says the Lord:

"What injustice have your fathers found in Me,
That they have gone far from Me,
Have followed idols,
And have become idolaters?
6 Neither did they say, 'Where *is* the Lord,
Who brought us up out of the land of Egypt,
Who led us through the wilderness,
Through a land of deserts and pits,
Through a land of drought and the shadow of death,

idea. What God said about Jeremiah, He said about you: "Before I made you in your mother's womb, I chose you. Before you were born, I set you apart for a special work" (Jeremiah 1:5 NCV).

Set apart for a special work.

During a college break I made extra money by sweeping metal shavings. Several dozen machinists spent ten hours a day shaping steel at their lathes. Need a six-inch square of quarter-inch sheet metal? They could cut it. Need screw holes in the hinge? They could bore them. Need a thin-stripped tin? Just tell the machinist. The workers shaped the steel according to its purpose. God does the same.

He shaped you according to yours. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Though you can't live a completely sinless life, are there parts of your lifestyle that do not conform to God's standards of holiness and separation? Ask God to show you His desire for your life. Confess and turn from any thoughts or behaviors that would keep you from living a life set apart for God.

EXPLORATION

Holiness—Ephesians 1:4; Colossians 1:22, 23; 3:2; 1 Peter 1:15, 16.

Through a land that no one crossed
And where no one dwelt?'
7 I brought you into a bountiful country,
To eat its fruit and its goodness.
But when you entered, you defiled My land
And made My heritage an abomination.
8 The priests did not say, 'Where *is* the Lord?'
And those who handle the law did not know Me;
The rulers also transgressed against Me;
The prophets prophesied by Baal,
And walked after *things that* do not profit.

9 "Therefore I will yet bring charges against you," says the Lord,
"And against your children's children I will bring charges.
10 For pass beyond the coasts of Cyprus[a] and see,
Send to Kedar[b] and consider diligently,
And see if there has been such *a thing.*
11 Has a nation changed *its* gods,
Which *are* not gods?
But My people have changed their Glory
For *what* does not profit.
12 Be astonished, O heavens, at this,
And be horribly afraid;
Be very desolate," says the Lord.
13 "For My people have committed two evils:
They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters,
And hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.

14 "*Is* Israel a servant?
Is he a homeborn *slave?*
Why is he plundered?
15 The young lions roared at him, *and* growled;
They made his land waste;
His cities are burned, without inhabitant.
16 Also the people of Noph[a] and Tahpanhes
Have broken the crown of your head.
17 Have you not brought this on yourself,
In that you have forsaken the Lord your God
When He led you in the way?
18 And now why take the road to Egypt,
To drink the waters of Sihor?
Or why take the road to Assyria,
To drink the waters of the River?[a]
19 Your own wickedness will correct you,
And your backslidings will rebuke you.
Know therefore and see that *it is* an evil and bitter *thing*
That you have forsaken the Lord your God,

2:10 [a]Hebrew *Kittim,* western lands, especially Cyprus [b]In the northern Arabian desert, representative of the eastern cultures **2:16** [a]That is, Memphis in ancient Egypt **2:18** [a]That is, the Euphrates

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 2:1—6:30

SITUATION
Many sinful kings led the people astray in both Judah and the Northern Kingdom. Eventually, the Assyrians captured the Northern Kingdom (722 B.C.). Judah was on the verge of similar punishment from Babylon. Jeremiah began his prophecy against Judah by outlining the people's unfaithfulness to God and urging them to repent or face strong punishment.

OBSERVATION
Any severe and prolonged pattern of sin, practiced by people who claim to be devoted to God, invites punishment from God.

INSPIRATION
Sin is a fatal disease.

Sin has sentenced us to a slow, painful death.

Sin does to a life what shears do to a flower. A cut at the stem separates a flower from the source of life. Initially the flower is attractive, still colorful and strong. But watch that flower over a period of time, and the leaves will wilt and the petals will drop. No matter what you do, the flower will never live again. Surround it with water. Stick the stem in soil. Baptize it with fertilizer. Glue the flower back on the stem. Do what you wish. The flower is dead. . . .

A dead flower has no life.
A dead body has no life.
A dead soul has no life.

Cut off from God, the soul withers and dies. The consequence of sin is not a bady day or a bad mood but a dead soul. The sign of a dead soul is clear: poisoned lips and cursing mouths,

And the fear of Me *is* not in you,"
Says the Lord God of hosts.

20 "For of old I have broken your yoke *and* burst your bonds;
And you said, 'I will not transgress,'
When on every high hill and under every green tree
You lay down, playing the harlot.
21 Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality.
How then have you turned before Me
Into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?
22 For though you wash yourself with lye, and use much soap,
Yet your iniquity is marked before Me," says the Lord God.

23 "How can you say, 'I am not polluted,
I have not gone after the Baals'?
See your way in the valley;
Know what you have done:
You are a swift dromedary breaking loose in her ways,
24 A wild donkey used to the wilderness,
That sniffs at the wind in her desire;
In her time of mating, who can turn her away?
All those who seek her will not weary themselves;
In her month they will find her.
25 Withhold your foot from being unshod, and your throat from thirst.
But you said, 'There is no hope.
No! For I have loved aliens, and after them I will go.'

26 "As the thief is ashamed when he is found out,
So is the house of Israel ashamed;
They and their kings and their princes, and their priests and their prophets,
27 Saying to a tree, 'You *are* my father,'
And to a stone, 'You gave birth to me.'
For they have turned *their* back to Me, and not *their* face.
But in the time of their trouble
They will say, 'Arise and save us.'
28 But where *are* your gods that you have made for yourselves?
Let them arise,
If they can save you in the time of your trouble;
For *according to* the number of your cities
Are your gods, O Judah.

29 "Why will you plead with Me?
You all have transgressed against Me," says the Lord.
30 "In vain I have chastened your children;
They received no correction.
Your sword has devoured your prophets
Like a destroying lion.

31 "O generation, see the word of the Lord!
Have I been a wilderness to Israel,

feet that lead to violence and eyes that don't see God. . . .

The finished work of sin is to kill the soul. . . .

Our task is not to get up but to admit we are dead. The only ones who remain in the grave are the ones who don't think they are there. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you gossip about others? Do you criticize others? Do you lustfully think about someone? Last April, did you cheat the government? Do you work hard on your job, or do you waste time? If you repeat sin again and again, you will experience God's discipline! Consider your life and ask the Holy Spirit to help you get rid of sin.

EXPLORATION

Backsliding—Psalm 78:56–58; Jeremiah 17:5; Ezekiel 18:24–26; Matthew 5:13; Galatians 5:7–9; Hebrews 5:11—6:12.

Or a land of darkness?
Why do My people say, 'We are lords;
We will come no more to You'?
32 Can a virgin forget her ornaments,
Or a bride her attire?
Yet My people have forgotten Me days
without number.

33 "Why do you beautify your way to seek
love?
Therefore you have also taught
The wicked women your ways.
34 Also on your skirts is found
The blood of the lives of the poor
innocents.
I have not found it by secret search,
But plainly on all these things.
35 Yet you say, 'Because I am innocent,
Surely His anger shall turn from me.'
Behold, I will plead My case against you,
Because you say, 'I have not sinned.'
36 Why do you gad about so much to
change your way?
Also you shall be ashamed of Egypt as
you were ashamed of Assyria.
37 Indeed you will go forth from him
With your hands on your head;
For the Lord has rejected your trusted
allies,
And you will not prosper by them.

Israel Is Shameless

3 "They say, 'If a man divorces his wife,
And she goes from him
And becomes another man's,
May he return to her again?'
Would not that land be greatly polluted?
But you have played the harlot with many
lovers;
Yet return to Me," says the Lord.

2 "Lift up your eyes to the desolate heights
and see:
Where have you not lain *with men?*
By the road you have sat for them
Like an Arabian in the wilderness;
And you have polluted the land
With your harlotries and your
wickedness.
3 Therefore the showers have been
withheld,
And there has been no latter rain.
You have had a harlot's forehead;
You refuse to be ashamed.
4 Will you not from this time cry to Me,
'My Father, You *are* the guide of my youth?
5 Will He remain angry forever?
Will He keep it to the end?'
Behold, you have spoken and done evil
things,
As you were able."

A Call to Repentance

6 The Lord said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: "Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot. 7 And I said, after she had done all these *things,* 'Return to Me.' But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. 8 Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also. 9 So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. 10 And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense," says the Lord.

11 Then the Lord said to me, "Backsliding Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah. 12 Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say:

'Return, backsliding Israel,' says the Lord;
'I will not cause My anger to fall on you.
For I *am* merciful,' says the Lord;
'I will not remain angry forever.
13 Only acknowledge your iniquity,
That you have transgressed against the
Lord your God,
And have scattered your charms
To alien deities under every green tree,
And you have not obeyed My voice,' says
the Lord.

14 "Return, O backsliding children," says the Lord; "for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. 15 And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.

16 "Then it shall come to pass, when you
are multiplied and increased in the land in
those days," says the Lord, "that they will
say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of the
Lord.' It shall not come to mind, nor shall they
remember it, nor shall they visit *it,* nor shall it
be made anymore.
17 "At that time Jerusalem shall be called
The Throne of the Lord, and all the nations
shall be gathered to it, to the name of the Lord,
to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the
dictates of their evil hearts.
18 "In those days the house of Judah shall
walk with the house of Israel, and they shall
come together out of the land of the north to
the land that I have given as an inheritance to
your fathers.
19 "But I said:

'How can I put you among the children
And give you a pleasant land,
A beautiful heritage of the hosts of
nations?'

"And I said:

'You shall call Me, "My Father,"
And not turn away from Me.'
20 Surely, *as* a wife treacherously departs
from her husband,
So have you dealt treacherously with Me,
O house of Israel," says the Lord.

21 A voice was heard on the desolate heights,
Weeping *and* supplications of the
children of Israel.
For they have perverted their way;
They have forgotten the Lord their God.

22 "Return, you backsliding children,
And I will heal your backslidings."

"Indeed we do come to You,
For You are the Lord our God.
23 Truly, in vain *is salvation hoped for* from
the hills,
And from the multitude of mountains;
Truly, in the Lord our God
Is the salvation of Israel.
24 For shame has devoured
The labor of our fathers from our youth—
Their flocks and their herds,
Their sons and their daughters.
25 We lie down in our shame,
And our reproach covers us.
For we have sinned against the Lord our
God,
We and our fathers,
From our youth even to this day,
And have not obeyed the voice of the
Lord our God."

4 "If you will return, O Israel," says the
Lord,
"Return to Me;
And if you will put away your
abominations out of My sight,
Then you shall not be moved.
2 And you shall swear, 'The Lord lives,'
In truth, in judgment, and in
righteousness;
The nations shall bless themselves in Him,
And in Him they shall glory."

3 For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah
and Jerusalem:

"Break up your fallow ground,
And do not sow among thorns.
4 Circumcise yourselves to the Lord,
And take away the foreskins of your
hearts,
You men of Judah and inhabitants of
Jerusalem,
Lest My fury come forth like fire,
And burn so that no one can quench *it,*
Because of the evil of your doings."

An Imminent Invasion

5 Declare in Judah and proclaim in Jerusa-
lem, and say:

"Blow the trumpet in the land;
Cry, 'Gather together,'
And say, 'Assemble yourselves,
And let us go into the fortified cities.'
6 Set up the standard toward Zion.
Take refuge! Do not delay!
For I will bring disaster from the north,
And great destruction."

7 The lion has come up from his thicket,
And the destroyer of nations is on his
way.

He has gone forth from his place
To make your land desolate.
Your cities will be laid waste,
Without inhabitant.
8 For this, clothe yourself with sackcloth,
Lament and wail.
For the fierce anger of the Lord
Has not turned back from us.

9 "And it shall come to pass in that day," says the Lord,
"*That* the heart of the king shall perish,
And the heart of the princes;
The priests shall be astonished,
And the prophets shall wonder."

10 Then I said, "Ah, Lord God!
Surely You have greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem,
Saying, 'You shall have peace,'
Whereas the sword reaches to the heart."

11 At that time it will be said
To this people and to Jerusalem,
"A dry wind of the desolate heights *blows* in the wilderness
Toward the daughter of My people—
Not to fan or to cleanse—
12 A wind too strong for these will come for Me;
Now I will also speak judgment against them."

13 "Behold, he shall come up like clouds,
And his chariots like a whirlwind.
His horses are swifter than eagles.
Woe to us, for we are plundered!"

14 O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness,
That you may be saved.
How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?
15 For a voice declares from Dan
And proclaims affliction from Mount Ephraim:
16 "Make mention to the nations,
Yes, proclaim against Jerusalem,
That watchers come from a far country
And raise their voice against the cities of Judah.
17 Like keepers of a field they are against her all around,
Because she has been rebellious against Me," says the Lord.
18 "Your ways and your doings
Have procured these *things* for you.
This *is* your wickedness,
Because it is bitter,
Because it reaches to your heart."

Sorrow for the Doomed Nation

19 O my soul, my soul!
I am pained in my very heart!
My heart makes a noise in me;
I cannot hold my peace,
Because you have heard, O my soul,
The sound of the trumpet,
The alarm of war.
20 Destruction upon destruction is cried,
For the whole land is plundered.
Suddenly my tents are plundered,
And my curtains in a moment.
21 How long will I see the standard,
And hear the sound of the trumpet?

22 "For My people *are* foolish,
They have not known Me.
They *are* silly children,
And they have no understanding.
They *are* wise to do evil,
But to do good they have no knowledge."

23 I beheld the earth, and indeed *it was* without form, and void;
And the heavens, they *had* no light.
24 I beheld the mountains, and indeed they trembled,
And all the hills moved back and forth.
25 I beheld, and indeed *there was* no man,
And all the birds of the heavens had fled.
26 I beheld, and indeed the fruitful land *was* a wilderness,
And all its cities were broken down
At the presence of the Lord,
By His fierce anger.

27 For thus says the Lord:

"The whole land shall be desolate;
Yet I will not make a full end.
28 For this shall the earth mourn,
And the heavens above be black,

Because I have spoken.
I have purposed and will not relent,
Nor will I turn back from it.
29 The whole city shall flee from the noise of
the horsemen and bowmen.
They shall go into thickets and climb up
on the rocks.
Every city *shall be* forsaken,
And not a man shall dwell in it.

30 "And *when* you *are* plundered,
What will you do?
Though you clothe yourself with crimson,
Though you adorn *yourself* with
ornaments of gold,
Though you enlarge your eyes with paint,
In vain you will make yourself fair;
Your lovers will despise you;
They will seek your life.

31 "For I have heard a voice as of a woman in
labor,
The anguish as of her who brings forth
her first child,
The voice of the daughter of Zion
bewailing herself;
She spreads her hands, *saying,*
'Woe *is* me now, for my soul is weary
Because of murderers!'

The Justice of God's Judgment

5 "Run to and fro through the streets of
Jerusalem;
See now and know;
And seek in her open places
If you can find a man,
If there is *anyone* who executes judgment,
Who seeks the truth,
And I will pardon her.
2 Though they say, '*As* the Lord lives,'
Surely they swear falsely."

3 O Lord, *are* not Your eyes on the truth?
You have stricken them,
But they have not grieved;
You have consumed them,
But they have refused to receive
correction.
They have made their faces harder than
rock;
They have refused to return.

4 Therefore I said, "Surely these *are* poor.
They are foolish;
For they do not know the way of the Lord,
The judgment of their God.
5 I will go to the great men and speak to
them,
For they have known the way of the Lord,
The judgment of their God."

But these have altogether broken the
yoke
And burst the bonds.
6 Therefore a lion from the forest shall slay
them,
A wolf of the deserts shall destroy them;
A leopard will watch over their cities.
Everyone who goes out from there shall
be torn in pieces,
Because their transgressions are many;
Their backslidings have increased.

7 "How shall I pardon you for this?
Your children have forsaken Me
And sworn by *those that are* not gods.
When I had fed them to the full,
Then they committed adultery
And assembled themselves by troops in
the harlots' houses.
8 They were *like* well-fed lusty stallions;
Every one neighed after his neighbor's
wife.
9 Shall I not punish *them* for these *things?*"
says the Lord.
"And shall I not avenge Myself on such a
nation as this?

10 "Go up on her walls and destroy,
But do not make a complete end.
Take away her branches,
For they *are* not the Lord's.
11 For the house of Israel and the house of
Judah
Have dealt very treacherously with Me,"
says the Lord.

12 They have lied about the Lord,
And said, "*It is* not He.
Neither will evil come upon us,
Nor shall we see sword or famine.
13 And the prophets become wind,
For the word *is* not in them.
Thus shall it be done to them."

14 Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts:

"Because you speak this word,
Behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire,
And this people wood,
And it shall devour them.
15 Behold, I will bring a nation against you from afar,
O house of Israel," says the Lord.
"It *is* a mighty nation,
It *is* an ancient nation,
A nation whose language you do not know,
Nor can you understand what they say.
16 Their quiver *is* like an open tomb;
They *are* all mighty men.
17 And they shall eat up your harvest and your bread,
Which your sons and daughters should eat.
They shall eat up your flocks and your herds;
They shall eat up your vines and your fig trees;
They shall destroy your fortified cities,
In which you trust, with the sword.

18 "Nevertheless in those days," says the Lord, "I will not make a complete end of you. 19 And it will be when you say, 'Why does the Lord our God do all these *things* to us?' then you shall answer them, 'Just as you have forsaken Me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve aliens in a land *that is* not yours.'

20 "Declare this in the house of Jacob
And proclaim it in Judah, saying,
21 'Hear this now, O foolish people,
Without understanding,
Who have eyes and see not,
And who have ears and hear not:
22 Do you not fear Me?' says the Lord.
'Will you not tremble at My presence,
Who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea,
By a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass beyond it?
And though its waves toss to and fro,
Yet they cannot prevail;
Though they roar, yet they cannot pass over it.
23 But this people has a defiant and rebellious heart;
They have revolted and departed.
24 They do not say in their heart,
"Let us now fear the Lord our God,
Who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season.
He reserves for us the appointed weeks of the harvest."
25 Your iniquities have turned these *things* away,
And your sins have withheld good from you.

26 'For among My people are found wicked *men;*
They lie in wait as one who sets snares;
They set a trap;
They catch men.
27 As a cage is full of birds,
So their houses *are* full of deceit.
Therefore they have become great and grown rich.
28 They have grown fat, they are sleek;
Yes, they surpass the deeds of the wicked;
They do not plead the cause,
The cause of the fatherless;
Yet they prosper,
And the right of the needy they do not defend.
29 Shall I not punish *them* for these *things?*' says the Lord.
'Shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?'

30 "An astonishing and horrible thing
Has been committed in the land:
31 The prophets prophesy falsely,
And the priests rule by their *own* power;
And My people love *to have it* so.
But what will you do in the end?

Impending Destruction from the North

6 "O you children of Benjamin,
Gather yourselves to flee from the midst of Jerusalem!
Blow the trumpet in Tekoa,
And set up a signal-fire in Beth Haccerem;
For disaster appears out of the north,

And great destruction.
2 I have likened the daughter of Zion
To a lovely and delicate woman.
3 The shepherds with their flocks shall
come to her.
They shall pitch *their* tents against her all
around.
Each one shall pasture in his own place."

4 "Prepare war against her;
Arise, and let us go up at noon.
Woe to us, for the day goes away,
For the shadows of the evening are
lengthening.
5 Arise, and let us go by night,
And let us destroy her palaces."

6 For thus has the LORD of hosts said:

"Cut down trees,
And build a mound against Jerusalem.
This *is* the city to be punished.
She *is* full of oppression in her midst.
7 As a fountain wells up with water,
So she wells up with her wickedness.
Violence and plundering are heard in her.
Before Me continually *are* grief and
wounds.
8 Be instructed, O Jerusalem,
Lest My soul depart from you;
Lest I make you desolate,
A land not inhabited."

9 Thus says the LORD of hosts:

"They shall thoroughly glean as a vine the
remnant of Israel;
As a grape-gatherer, put your hand back
into the branches."

10 To whom shall I speak and give warning,
That they may hear?
Indeed their ear *is* uncircumcised,
And they cannot give heed.
Behold, the word of the LORD is a
reproach to them;
They have no delight in it.
11 Therefore I am full of the fury of the LORD.
I am weary of holding *it* in.
"I will pour it out on the children outside,
And on the assembly of young men
together;
For even the husband shall be taken with
the wife,
The aged with *him who is* full of days.
12 And their houses shall be turned over to
others,
Fields and wives together;
For I will stretch out My hand
Against the inhabitants of the land," says
the LORD.
13 "Because from the least of them even to
the greatest of them,
Everyone *is* given to covetousness;
And from the prophet even to the priest,
Everyone deals falsely.
14 They have also healed the hurt of My
people slightly,
Saying, 'Peace, peace!'
When *there is* no peace.
15 Were they ashamed when they had
committed abomination?
No! They were not at all ashamed;
Nor did they know how to blush.
Therefore they shall fall among those who
fall;
At the time I punish them,
They shall be cast down," says the LORD.

16 Thus says the LORD:

"Stand in the ways and see,
And ask for the old paths, where the good
way *is,*
And walk in it;
Then you will find rest for your souls.
But they said, 'We will not walk *in it.*'
17 Also, I set watchmen over you, *saying,*
'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!'
But they said, 'We will not listen.'
18 Therefore hear, you nations,
And know, O congregation, what *is*
among them.
19 Hear, O earth!
Behold, I will certainly bring calamity on
this people—
The fruit of their thoughts,
Because they have not heeded My words
Nor My law, but rejected it.
20 For what purpose to Me
Comes frankincense from Sheba,
And sweet cane from a far country?
Your burnt offerings *are* not acceptable,
Nor your sacrifices sweet to Me."

21 Therefore thus says the Lord:

"Behold, I will lay stumbling blocks before this people,
And the fathers and the sons together shall fall on them.
The neighbor and his friend shall perish."

22 Thus says the Lord:

"Behold, a people comes from the north country,
And a great nation will be raised from the farthest parts of the earth.
23 They will lay hold on bow and spear;
They *are* cruel and have no mercy;
Their voice roars like the sea;
And they ride on horses,
As men of war set in array against you,
O daughter of Zion."

24 We have heard the report of it;
Our hands grow feeble.
Anguish has taken hold of us,
Pain as of a woman in labor.
25 Do not go out into the field,
Nor walk by the way.
Because of the sword of the enemy,
Fear *is* on every side.
26 O daughter of my people,
Dress in sackcloth
And roll about in ashes!
Make mourning *as for* an only son, most bitter lamentation;
For the plunderer will suddenly come upon us.

27 "I have set you *as* an assayer *and* a fortress among My people,
That you may know and test their way.
28 They *are* all stubborn rebels, walking as slanderers.
They are bronze and iron,
They *are* all corrupters;
29 The bellows blow fiercely,
The lead is consumed by the fire;
The smelter refines in vain,
For the wicked are not drawn off.
30 *People* will call them rejected silver,
Because the Lord has rejected them."

Trusting in Lying Words

7 The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, 2 "Stand in the gate of the Lord's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, 'Hear the word of the Lord, all *you of* Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the Lord!' " 3 Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: "Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. 4 Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord *are* these.'

5 "For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, 6 *if* you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt, 7 then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.

8 "Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. 9 Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, 10 and *then* come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations'? 11 Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen *it,*" says the Lord.

12 "But go now to My place which *was* in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel. 13 And now, because you have done all these works," says the Lord, "and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you, but you did not answer, 14 therefore I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to this place which I gave to you and your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. 15 And I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brethren—the whole posterity of Ephraim.

16 "Therefore do not pray for this people, nor lift up a cry or prayer for them, nor make intercession to Me; for I will not hear you. 17 Do you not see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? 18 The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough, to make

cakes for the queen of heaven; and *they* pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger. 19 Do they provoke Me to anger?" says the Lord. "*Do they* not *provoke* themselves, to the shame of their own faces?"

20 Therefore thus says the Lord God: "Behold, My anger and My fury will be poured out on this place—on man and on beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground. And it will burn and not be quenched."

21 Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: "Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat meat. 22 For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices. 23 But this is what I commanded them, saying, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.' 24 Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but followed the counsels *and* the dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward. 25 Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have even sent to you all My servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending *them.* 26 Yet they did not obey Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers.

27 "Therefore you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not obey you. You shall also call to them, but they will not answer you.

Judgment on Obscene Religion

28 "So you shall say to them, 'This *is* a nation that does not obey the voice of the Lord their God nor receive correction. Truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth. 29 Cut off your hair and cast *it* away, and take up a lamentation on the desolate heights; for the Lord has rejected and forsaken the generation of His wrath.' 30 For the children of Judah have done evil in My sight," says the Lord. "They have set their abominations in the house which is called by My name, to pollute it. 31 And they have built the high places of Tophet, which *is* in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into My heart.

32 "Therefore behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "when it will no more be called Tophet, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter; for they will bury in Tophet until there is no room. 33 The corpses of this people will be food for the birds of the heaven and for the beasts of the earth. And no one will frighten *them away.* 34 Then I will cause to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride. For the land shall be desolate.

8 "At that time," says the Lord, "they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of its princes, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, out of their graves. 2 They shall spread them before the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven, which they have loved and which they have served and after which they have walked, which they have sought and which they have worshiped. They shall

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 7:1—10:25

SITUATION

Jeremiah prophesied from the temple gates and challenged the people. He told them that even if it meant destroying the temple, God would bring discipline on Jerusalem. The nation had forgotten God after the death of good King Josiah.

OBSERVATION

True religion must have substance, integrity, and purity. God will uncover and rebuke sin, especially when people minimize it or let it go unacknowledged. He alone is the one true God, the everlasting King.

INSPIRATION

Your pocket may be full of decades, my pocket may be down to a few years, but everyone has a certain number of moments.

Everyone, that is, except God. As we list the mind-stretching claims of Christ, let's include this one near the top. "Before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58). If the mob didn't want to kill Jesus before that sentence, they did afterward. Jesus claimed to be God, the Eternal Being. He identified Himself as "the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity" (Isaiah 57:15).

Scripture broadcasts this attribute in surround-sound. God is "from everlasting" (Psalm 93:2) and the "everlasting King" (Jeremiah 10:10), "incorruptible" (Romans 1:23), "who alone has immortality" (1 Timothy 6:16). The heavens and the earth will perish, "but You [O God] are the same, and Your years will have no end" (Psalm 102:27).

not be gathered nor buried; they shall be like refuse on the face of the earth. 3 Then death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue of those who remain of this evil family, who remain in all the places where I have driven them," says the Lord of hosts.

The Peril of False Teaching

4 "Moreover you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord:

"Will they fall and not rise?
Will one turn away and not return?
5 Why has this people slidden back,
Jerusalem, in a perpetual backsliding?
They hold fast to deceit,
They refuse to return.
6 I listened and heard,
But they do not speak aright.
No man repented of his wickedness,
Saying, 'What have I done?'
Everyone turned to his own course,
As the horse rushes into the battle.

7 "Even the stork in the heavens
Knows her appointed times;
And the turtledove, the swift, and the swallow
Observe the time of their coming.
But My people do not know the judgment of the Lord.

8 "How can you say, 'We *are* wise,
And the law of the Lord *is* with us'?
Look, the false pen of the scribe certainly works falsehood.
9 The wise men are ashamed,
They are dismayed and taken.
Behold, they have rejected the word of the Lord;
So what wisdom do they have?
10 Therefore I will give their wives to others,
And their fields to those who will inherit *them;*
Because from the least even to the greatest
Everyone is given to covetousness;
From the prophet even to the priest
Everyone deals falsely.
11 For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people
slightly,
Saying, 'Peace, peace!'
When *there is* no peace.
12 Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination?
No! They were not at all ashamed,
Nor did they know how to blush.
Therefore they shall fall among those who fall;
In the time of their punishment
They shall be cast down," says the Lord.

13 "I will surely consume them," says the Lord.
"No grapes *shall be* on the vine,

You'll more quickly measure the salt of the ocean than measure the existence of God because "his years cannot be counted" (Job 36:26 NLT).

Trace the tree back to a seed. Trace the dress back to a factory. Trace the baby back to a mommy. Trace God back to . . . to . . . to . . .

No one. Not even God made God. "From eternity to eternity I am God" (Isaiah 43:13 NLT). (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God is from all eternity. His greatness is unfathomable. Remember who you ultimately live and work for—the King who will reign forever. No one is like Him.

EXPLORATION

Idolatry Punished—Exodus 22:20; Deuteronomy 4:25–28; 8:19, 20; 1 Kings 9:6, 7; Psalm 97:7; Ezekiel 7:20–22; Romans 1:22–25; Revelation 14:9, 10.

Before presenting the grace of God, we must understand the wrath of God.

—Max Lucado (In the Grip of Grace)

Nor figs on the fig tree,
And the leaf shall fade;
And *the things* I have given them shall pass away from them.” ’ ”

14 “Why do we sit still?
Assemble yourselves,
And let us enter the fortified cities,
And let us be silent there.
For the Lord our God has put us to silence
And given us water of gall to drink,
Because we have sinned against the Lord.

15 “*We* looked for peace, but no good *came;*
And for a time of health, and there was trouble!
16 The snorting of His horses was heard from Dan.
The whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of His strong ones;
For they have come and devoured the land and all that is in it,
The city and those who dwell in it.”

17 “For behold, I will send serpents among you,
Vipers which cannot be charmed,
And they shall bite you,” says the Lord.

The Prophet Mourns for the People

18 I would comfort myself in sorrow;
My heart *is* faint in me.
19 Listen! The voice,
The cry of the daughter of my people
From a far country:
“*Is* not the Lord in Zion?
Is not her King in her?”

“Why have they provoked Me to anger
With their carved images—
With foreign idols?”

20 “The harvest is past,
The summer is ended,
And we are not saved!”

21 For the hurt of the daughter of my people I am hurt.
I am mourning;
Astonishment has taken hold of me.

22 *Is there* no balm in Gilead,
Is there no physician there?
Why then is there no recovery
For the health of the daughter of my people?

9 Oh, that my head were waters,
And my eyes a fountain of tears,
That I might weep day and night
For the slain of the daughter of my people!
2 Oh, that I had in the wilderness
A lodging place for travelers;
That I might leave my people,
And go from them!
For they *are* all adulterers,
An assembly of treacherous men.

3 “And *like* their bow they have bent their tongues *for* lies.
They are not valiant for the truth on the earth.
For they proceed from evil to evil,
And they do not know Me,” says the Lord.
4 “Everyone take heed to his neighbor,
And do not trust any brother;
For every brother will utterly supplant,
And every neighbor will walk with slanderers.
5 Everyone will deceive his neighbor,
And will not speak the truth;
They have taught their tongue to speak lies;
They weary themselves to commit iniquity.
6 Your dwelling place *is* in the midst of deceit;
Through deceit they refuse to know Me,” says the Lord.

7 Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts:

“Behold, I will refine them and try them;
For how shall I deal with the daughter of My people?
8 Their tongue *is* an arrow shot out;
It speaks deceit;
One speaks peaceably to his neighbor with his mouth,
But in his heart he lies in wait.
9 Shall I not punish them for these *things?*” says the Lord.

"Shall I not avenge Myself on such a
nation as this?"

10 I will take up a weeping and wailing for
the mountains,
And for the dwelling places of the
wilderness a lamentation,
Because they are burned up,
So that no one can pass through;
Nor can *men* hear the voice of the cattle.
Both the birds of the heavens and the
beasts have fled;
They are gone.

11 "I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a
den of jackals.
I will make the cities of Judah desolate,
without an inhabitant."

12 Who *is* the wise man who may understand this? And *who is he* to whom the mouth of the Lord has spoken, that he may declare it? Why does the land perish *and* burn up like a wilderness, so that no one can pass through?

13 And the Lord said, "Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice, nor walked according to it, 14 but they have walked according to the dictates of their own hearts and after the Baals, which their fathers taught them," 15 therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: "Behold, I will feed them, this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink. 16 I will scatter them also among the Gentiles, whom neither they nor their fathers have known. And I will send a sword after them until I have consumed them."

The People Mourn in Judgment

17 Thus says the Lord of hosts:

"Consider and call for the mourning
women,
That they may come;
And send for skillful *wailing* women,
That they may come.
18 Let them make haste
And take up a wailing for us,
That our eyes may run with tears,
And our eyelids gush with water.
19 For a voice of wailing is heard from Zion:
'How we are plundered!
We are greatly ashamed,
Because we have forsaken the land,
Because we have been cast out of our
dwellings.'"

20 Yet hear the word of the Lord, O women,
And let your ear receive the word of His
mouth;
Teach your daughters wailing,
And everyone her neighbor a
lamentation.
21 For death has come through our
windows,
Has entered our palaces,
To kill off the children—*no longer to be*
outside!
And the young men—*no longer* on the
streets!

22 Speak, "Thus says the Lord:

'Even the carcasses of men shall fall as
refuse on the open field,
Like cuttings after the harvester,
And no one shall gather *them.*'"

23 Thus says the Lord:

"Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom,
Let not the mighty *man* glory in his might,
Nor let the rich *man* glory in his riches;
24 But let him who glories glory in this,
That he understands and knows Me,
That I *am* the Lord, exercising
lovingkindness, judgment, and
righteousness in the earth.
For in these I delight," says the Lord.

25 "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "that I will punish all *who are* circumcised with the uncircumcised— 26 Egypt, Judah, Edom, the people of Ammon, Moab, and all *who are* in the farthest corners, who dwell in the wilderness. For all *these* nations *are* uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel *are* uncircumcised in the heart."

Idols and the True God

10 Hear the word which the Lord speaks to you, O house of Israel.

2 Thus says the Lord:

"Do not learn the way of the Gentiles;
Do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven,
For the Gentiles are dismayed at them.
3 For the customs of the peoples *are* futile;
For *one* cuts a tree from the forest,
The work of the hands of the workman, with the ax.
4 They decorate it with silver and gold;
They fasten it with nails and hammers
So that it will not topple.
5 They *are* upright, like a palm tree,
And they cannot speak;
They must be carried,
Because they cannot go *by themselves.*
Do not be afraid of them,
For they cannot do evil,
Nor can they do any good."

6 Inasmuch as *there is* none like You, O Lord
(You *are* great, and Your name *is* great in might),
7 Who would not fear You, O King of the nations?
For this is Your rightful due.
For among all the wise *men* of the nations,
And in all their kingdoms,
There is none like You.
8 But they are altogether dull-hearted and foolish;
A wooden idol *is* a worthless doctrine.
9 Silver is beaten into plates;
It is brought from Tarshish,
And gold from Uphaz,
The work of the craftsman
And of the hands of the metalsmith;
Blue and purple *are* their clothing;
They *are* all the work of skillful *men.*
10 But the Lord *is* the true God;
He *is* the living God and the everlasting King.
At His wrath the earth will tremble,
And the nations will not be able to endure His indignation.

11 Thus you shall say to them: "The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens."

12 He has made the earth by His power,
He has established the world by His wisdom,
And has stretched out the heavens at His discretion.
13 When He utters His voice,
There is a multitude of waters in the heavens:
"And He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth.
He makes lightning for the rain,
He brings the wind out of His treasuries."[a]

14 Everyone is dull-hearted, without knowledge;
Every metalsmith is put to shame by an image;
For his molded image *is* falsehood,
And *there is* no breath in them.
15 They *are* futile, a work of errors;
In the time of their punishment they shall perish.
16 The Portion of Jacob *is* not like them,
For He *is* the Maker of all *things,*
And Israel *is* the tribe of His inheritance;
The Lord of hosts *is* His name.

The Coming Captivity of Judah

17 Gather up your wares from the land,
O inhabitant of the fortress!

18 For thus says the Lord:

"Behold, I will throw out at this time
The inhabitants of the land,
And will distress them,
That they may find *it so.*"

19 Woe is me for my hurt!
My wound is severe.
But I say, "Truly this *is* an infirmity,
And I must bear it."
20 My tent is plundered,
And all my cords are broken;
My children have gone from me,
And they *are* no more.

10:13 [a]Psalm 135:7

There is no one to pitch my tent anymore,
Or set up my curtains.

21 For the shepherds have become dull-hearted,
And have not sought the Lord;
Therefore they shall not prosper,
And all their flocks shall be scattered.
22 Behold, the noise of the report has come,
And a great commotion out of the north country,
To make the cities of Judah desolate, a den of jackals.

23 O Lord, I know the way of man *is* not in himself;
It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.
24 O Lord, correct me, but with justice;
Not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing.
25 Pour out Your fury on the Gentiles, who do not know You,
And on the families who do not call on Your name;
For they have eaten up Jacob,
Devoured him and consumed him,
And made his dwelling place desolate.

The Broken Covenant

11 The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, 2 "Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; 3 and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "Cursed *is* the man who does not obey the words of this covenant 4 which I commanded your fathers in the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, 'Obey My voice, and do according to all that I command you; so shall you be My people, and I will be your God,' 5 that I may establish the oath which I have sworn to your fathers, to give them 'a land flowing with milk and honey,'[a] as *it is* this day."' "

And I answered and said, "So be it, Lord."

6 Then the Lord said to me, "Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying: 'Hear the words of this covenant and do them. 7 For I earnestly exhorted your fathers in the day I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, until this day, rising early and exhorting, saying, "Obey My voice." 8 Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone followed the dictates of his evil heart; therefore I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded *them* to do, but *which* they have not done.' "

9 And the Lord said to me, "A conspiracy has been found among the men of Judah and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 10 They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers who refused to hear My words, and they have gone after other gods to serve them; the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers."

11 Therefore thus says the Lord: "Behold, I will surely bring calamity on them which they will not be able to escape; and though they cry out to Me, I will not listen to them. 12 Then the cities of Judah and the

11:5 [a] Exodus 3:8

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 11:1–23

SITUATION
God would bring disaster on Israel if they would not repent. He would refuse to hear their prayers and let foreigners invade who would kill and exile many. God granted the Israelites an opportunity to acknowledge their sin and repent.

OBSERVATION
After rebuking the people for their sin, Jeremiah overheard about a plot to kill him. The prophet complained to the Lord. He was frustrated and hurt by the hostility he continued to endure.

INSPIRATION
Where is God when we hurt? Where is He when sleep won't come? Where is He when we awaken in a hospital bed with pain that won't subside? He's right here! He hung on the gallows to prove once and for all, with pierced hands and bloodstained face—that He's here—that He didn't create the hurt, but He came to take it away.

When you hurt, God hurts with you. When no one listens to you, God listens to you. When you wipe away tears of loneliness or frustration or anguish, in heaven there's a pierced hand approaching a heavenly face wiping away a tear.

Sometimes storms of life come to teach us that God is in control, that we must lean on Him and learn to be thankful for the richness of His blessings to us.

We should serve God even if there is darkness enveloping our life and

inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry out to the gods to whom they offer incense, but they will not save them at all in the time of their trouble. 13 For *according to* the number of your cities were your gods, O Judah; and *according to* the number of the streets of Jerusalem you have set up altars to *that* shameful thing, altars to burn incense to Baal.

14 "So do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them; for I will not hear *them* in the time that they cry out to Me because of their trouble.

15 "What has My beloved to do in My house,
Having done lewd deeds with many?
And the holy flesh has passed from you.
When you do evil, then you rejoice.
16 The Lord called your name,
Green Olive Tree, Lovely *and* of Good Fruit.
With the noise of a great tumult
He has kindled fire on it,
And its branches are broken.

17 "For the Lord of hosts, who planted you, has pronounced doom against you for the evil of the house of Israel and of the house of Judah, which they have done against themselves to provoke Me to anger in offering incense to Baal."

Jeremiah's Life Threatened

18 Now the Lord gave me knowledge *of it,* and I know *it;* for You showed me their doings. 19 But I *was* like a docile lamb brought to the slaughter; and I did not know that they had devised schemes against me, *saying,* "Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be remembered no more."

20 But, O Lord of hosts,
You who judge righteously,
Testing the mind and the heart,
Let me see Your vengeance on them,
For to You I have revealed my cause.

21 "Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the men of Anathoth who seek your life, saying, 'Do not prophesy in the name of the Lord, lest you die by our hand'— 22 therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Behold, I will punish them. The young men shall die by the sword, their sons and their daughters shall die by famine; 23 and there shall be no remnant of them, for I will bring catastrophe on the men of Anathoth, *even* the year of their punishment.' "

Jeremiah's Question

12 Righteous *are* You, O Lord, when I plead with You;
Yet let me talk with You about *Your* judgments.
Why does the way of the wicked prosper?
Why are those happy who deal so treacherously?

even if we don't understand what's happening . . . even when the circumstances of our life don't make sense: Because He is worthy of praise, *because* He is God. (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "Hurt")

APPLICATION

In what areas of your life do you need to trust God to do what is right? What does it mean to you to believe that He is a sovereign God, in control of every aspect of your life? Thank God that He knows everything about you and still loves you.

EXPLORATION

God's Sovereignty—Exodus 18:11; 1 Chronicles 29:11, 12; Job 33:12; Psalm 93:1, 2; Jeremiah 27:5.

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 12:1—13:27

SITUATION
Jeremiah complained to God that the people of Israel were evil and questioned God's justice regarding these people. God responded that He will punish Israel, but He also would restore them in His mercy and grace.

OBSERVATION
While it is tempting to judge others, particularly other Christians, we shouldn't look down on them. Instead, we should reach out to them with God's love and mercy.

INSPIRATION
My friend Buckner Fanning experienced this firsthand. He was a marine in World War II, stationed in Nagasaki three weeks after the dropping of the atomic bomb. Can you imagine a young American soldier amid the rubble and wreckage of the demolished city? Radiation-burned victims wandering the streets. Atomic fallout showering on the city. Bodies burned to a casket black. Survivors shuffling through the streets, searching for family, food, and hope. The conquering soldier feeling not victory but grief for the suffering around him.

Instead of anger and revenge, Buckner found an oasis of grace. While patrolling the narrow streets, he came upon a sign that bore an English phrase: Methodist Church. He noted the location and resolved to return the next Sunday morning.

When he did, he entered a partially collapsed

2 You have planted them, yes, they have taken root;
They grow, yes, they bear fruit.
You *are* near in their mouth
But far from their mind.

3 But You, O Lord, know me;
You have seen me,
And You have tested my heart toward You.
Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter,
And prepare them for the day of slaughter.
4 How long will the land mourn,
And the herbs of every field wither?
The beasts and birds are consumed,
For the wickedness of those who dwell there,
Because they said, "He will not see our final end."

The Lord Answers Jeremiah

5 "If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you,
Then how can you contend with horses?
And *if* in the land of peace,
In which you trusted, *they wearied you,*
Then how will you do in the floodplain[a] of the Jordan?
6 For even your brothers, the house of your father,
Even they have dealt treacherously with you;
Yes, they have called a multitude after you.
Do not believe them,
Even though they speak smooth words to you.

7 "I have forsaken My house, I have left My heritage;
I have given the dearly beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies.
8 My heritage is to Me like a lion in the forest;
It cries out against Me;
Therefore I have hated it.
9 My heritage *is* to Me *like* a speckled vulture;
The vultures all around *are* against her.
Come, assemble all the beasts of the field,
Bring them to devour!

10 "Many rulers[a] have destroyed My vineyard,
They have trodden My portion underfoot;
They have made My pleasant portion a desolate wilderness.
11 They have made it desolate;
Desolate, it mourns to Me;
The whole land is made desolate,
Because no one takes *it* to heart.
12 The plunderers have come
On all the desolate heights in the wilderness,
For the sword of the Lord shall devour
From *one* end of the land to the *other* end of the land;

12:5 [a]Or *thicket* **12:10** [a]Literally *shepherds* or *pastors*

No flesh shall have peace.
13 They have sown wheat but reaped thorns;
They have put themselves to pain *but* do not profit.
But be ashamed of your harvest
Because of the fierce anger of the Lord."

14 Thus says the Lord: "Against all My evil neighbors who touch the inheritance which I have caused My people Israel to inherit—behold, I will pluck them out of their land and pluck out the house of Judah from among them. 15 Then it shall be, after I have plucked them out, that I will return and have compassion on them and bring them back, everyone to his heritage and everyone to his land. 16 And it shall be, if they will learn carefully the ways of My people, to swear by My name, 'As the Lord lives,' as they taught My people to swear by Baal, then they shall be established in the midst of My people. 17 But if they do not obey, I will utterly pluck up and destroy that nation," says the Lord.

Symbol of the Linen Sash

13 Thus the Lord said to me: "Go and get yourself a linen sash, and put it around your waist, but do not put it in water." 2 So I got a sash according to the word of the Lord, and put *it* around my waist.

3 And the word of the Lord came to me the second time, saying, 4 "Take the sash that you acquired, which *is* around your waist, and arise, go to the Euphrates,[a] and hide it there in a hole in the rock." 5 So I went and hid it by the Euphrates, as the Lord commanded me.

6 Now it came to pass after many days that the Lord said to me, "Arise, go to the Euphrates, and take from there the sash which I commanded you to hide there." 7 Then I went to the Euphrates and dug, and I took the sash from the place where I had hidden it; and there was the sash, ruined. It was profitable for nothing.

8 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 9 "Thus says the Lord: 'In this manner I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. 10 This evil people, who refuse to hear My words, who follow the dictates of their hearts, and walk after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be just like this sash which is profitable for nothing. 11 For as the sash clings to the waist of a man, so I have caused the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah to cling to Me,' says the Lord, 'that they may become My people, for renown, for praise, and for glory; but they would not hear.'

Symbol of the Wine Bottles

12 "Therefore you shall speak to them this word: 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "Every bottle shall be filled with wine." '

"And they will say to you, 'Do we not certainly know that every bottle will be filled with wine?'

13 "Then you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord: "Behold, I will fill all the inhabitants of this land—even the kings who sit on David's throne, the priests, the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusa-

13:4 [a]Hebrew *Perath*

structure. Windows, shattered. Walls, buckled. The young marine stepped through the rubble, unsure how he would be received. Fifteen or so Japanese were setting up chairs and removing debris. When the uniformed American entered their midst, they stopped and turned.

He knew only one word in Japanese. He heard it. Brother. "They welcomed me as a friend," Buckner relates, the power of the moment still resonating more than sixty years after the events. They offered him a seat. He opened his Bible and, not understanding the sermon, sat and observed. During communion the worshippers brought him the elements. In that quiet moment the enmity of their nations and the hurt of the war was set aside as one Christian served another the body and blood of Christ. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

On what issues do you disagree with other believers—a disagreement caused because you both want to honor God and do what is best? How can you best show love (as opposed to giving them "right answers") to help them live out their faith?

EXPLORATION

Judging Others—Psalm 1:1; Matthew 13:40–43; John 8:7; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 1 Corinthians 5:12.

lem—with drunkenness! 14And I will dash
them one against another, even the fathers
and the sons together," says the Lord. "I will
not pity nor spare nor have mercy, but will
destroy them."'"

Pride Precedes Captivity

15 Hear and give ear:
Do not be proud,
For the Lord has spoken.
16 Give glory to the Lord your God
Before He causes darkness,
And before your feet stumble
On the dark mountains,
And while you are looking for light,
He turns it into the shadow of death
And makes *it* dense darkness.
17 But if you will not hear it,
My soul will weep in secret for *your*
pride;
My eyes will weep bitterly
And run down with tears,
Because the Lord's flock has been taken
captive.

18 Say to the king and to the queen mother,
"Humble yourselves;
Sit down,
For your rule shall collapse, the crown of
your glory."
19 The cities of the South shall be shut up,
And no one shall open *them;*
Judah shall be carried away captive, all
of it;
It shall be wholly carried away captive.

20 Lift up your eyes and see
Those who come from the north.
Where *is* the flock *that* was given to you,
Your beautiful sheep?
21 What will you say when He punishes you?
For you have taught them
To be chieftains, to be head over you.
Will not pangs seize you,
Like a woman in labor?
22 And if you say in your heart,
"Why have these things come upon me?"
For the greatness of your iniquity
Your skirts have been uncovered,
Your heels made bare.
23 Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the
leopard its spots?
Then may you also do good who are
accustomed to do evil.

24 "Therefore I will scatter them like stubble
That passes away by the wind of the
wilderness.
25 This is your lot,
The portion of your measures from Me,"
says the Lord,
"Because you have forgotten Me
And trusted in falsehood.
26 Therefore I will uncover your skirts over
your face,
That your shame may appear.
27 I have seen your adulteries
And your *lustful* neighings,
The lewdness of your harlotry,
Your abominations on the hills in the
fields.
Woe to you, O Jerusalem!
Will you still not be made clean?"

Sword, Famine, and Pestilence

14 The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah concerning the droughts.

2 "Judah mourns,
And her gates languish;
They mourn for the land,
And the cry of Jerusalem has gone up.
3 Their nobles have sent their lads for
water;
They went to the cisterns *and* found no
water.
They returned with their vessels empty;
They were ashamed and confounded
And covered their heads.
4 Because the ground is parched,
For there was no rain in the land,
The plowmen were ashamed;
They covered their heads.
5 Yes, the deer also gave birth in the field,
But left because there was no grass.
6 And the wild donkeys stood in the
desolate heights;
They sniffed at the wind like jackals;
Their eyes failed because *there was* no
grass."

7 O Lord, though our iniquities testify
against us,
Do it for Your name's sake;

For our backslidings are many,
We have sinned against You.
8 O the Hope of Israel, his Savior in time of trouble,
Why should You be like a stranger in the land,
And like a traveler *who* turns aside to tarry for a night?
9 Why should You be like a man astonished,
Like a mighty one *who* cannot save?
Yet You, O Lord, *are* in our midst,
And we are called by Your name;
Do not leave us!

10 Thus says the Lord to this people:

"Thus they have loved to wander;
They have not restrained their feet.
Therefore the Lord does not accept them;
He will remember their iniquity now,
And punish their sins."

11 Then the Lord said to me, "Do not pray for this people, for *their* good. 12 When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence."

13 Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Behold, the prophets say to them, 'You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.' "

14 And the Lord said to me, "The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart. 15 Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who prophesy in My name, whom I did not send, and who say, 'Sword and famine shall not be in this land'—'By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed! 16 And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; they will have no one to bury them—them nor their wives, their sons nor their daughters—for I will pour their wickedness on them.'

17 "Therefore you shall say this word to them:

'Let my eyes flow with tears night and day,
And let them not cease;
For the virgin daughter of my people
Has been broken with a mighty stroke, with a very severe blow.
18 If I go out to the field,
Then behold, those slain with the sword!
And if I enter the city,
Then behold, those sick from famine!
Yes, both prophet and priest go about in a land they do not know.' "

The People Plead for Mercy

19 Have You utterly rejected Judah?
Has Your soul loathed Zion?

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 14:1—17:27

SITUATION
Jeremiah prophesied drought, famine, and days of disaster for God's people.

OBSERVATION
Sin requires judgment. Sin can distort our judgment of good and evil. God calls us to repent and to have moral outrage for violations of His holiness.

INSPIRATION
"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). The Spiritual Cardiologist scans our hearts and finds deep disease: "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness" (Mark 7:21, 22). He describes our problem in pandemic proportions: "No one is righteous—not even one. No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God" (Romans 3:10, 11 NLT).

Surely this is an overstatement, an exaggeration. Can it be that "we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us" (Romans 3:23 MSG)?

This current generation is oddly silent about sin. Late-night talk shows don't discuss humanity's shortcomings. Some mental-health professionals mock our need for divine forgiveness. . . .

Barbarism apparently is alive and well on the planet Earth. Deny our sin? Quasimodo could more

easily deny his hump. Our heart problem? It's universal.
And personal. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What views about sin have softened so that they are even acceptable among Christians? What areas of life has this affected? Male-female relationships? Social settings? Family life? Don't be drawn in by the world's standards. Be morally pure in your dating or marriage relationship. Be bold in keeping a high standard. Don't let Satan wear down your defenses.

EXPLORATION
Endurance—Philippians 3:12–16; 4:11–13; Jude 17–25.

Why have You stricken us so that *there is* no healing for us?
We looked for peace, but *there was* no good;
And for the time of healing, and there was trouble.
20 We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness
And the iniquity of our fathers,
For we have sinned against You.
21 Do not abhor *us,* for Your name's sake;
Do not disgrace the throne of Your glory.
Remember, do not break Your covenant with us.
22 Are there any among the idols of the nations that can cause rain?
Or can the heavens give showers?
Are You not He, O Lord our God?
Therefore we will wait for You,
Since You have made all these.

The Lord Will Not Relent

15 Then the Lord said to me, "*Even* if Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My mind *would* not *be* favorable toward this people. Cast *them* out of My sight, and let them go forth. 2 And it shall be, if they say to you, 'Where should we go?' then you shall tell them, 'Thus says the Lord:

"Such as *are* for death, to death;
And such as *are* for the sword, to the sword;
And such as *are* for the famine, to the famine;
And such as *are* for the captivity, to the captivity." '

3 "And I will appoint over them four forms *of destruction,*" says the Lord: "the sword to slay, the dogs to drag, the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy. 4 I will hand them over to trouble, to all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for what he did in Jerusalem.

5 "For who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem?
Or who will bemoan you?
Or who will turn aside to ask how you are doing?
6 You have forsaken Me," says the Lord,
"You have gone backward.
Therefore I will stretch out My hand against you and destroy you;
I am weary of relenting!
7 And I will winnow them with a winnowing fan in the gates of the land;
I will bereave *them* of children;
I will destroy My people,
Since they do not return from their ways.
8 Their widows will be increased to Me more than the sand of the seas;
I will bring against them,
Against the mother of the young men,
A plunderer at noonday;
I will cause anguish and terror to fall on them suddenly.

9 "She languishes who has borne seven;
She has breathed her last;
Her sun has gone down
While *it was* yet day;
She has been ashamed and confounded.
And the remnant of them I will deliver to the sword
Before their enemies," says the Lord.

Jeremiah's Dejection

10 Woe is me, my mother,
That you have borne me,
A man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth!
I have neither lent for interest,
Nor have men lent to me for interest.
Every one of them curses me.

11 The Lord said:

"Surely it will be well with your remnant;
Surely I will cause the enemy to intercede with you
In the time of adversity and in the time of affliction.
12 Can anyone break iron,
The northern iron and the bronze?
13 Your wealth and your treasures
I will give as plunder without price,
Because of all your sins,
Throughout your territories.
14 And I will make *you* cross over with[a] your enemies
Into a land *which* you do not know;
For a fire is kindled in My anger,
Which shall burn upon you."

15 O Lord, You know;
Remember me and visit me,
And take vengeance for me on my persecutors.
In Your enduring patience, do not take me away.
Know that for Your sake I have suffered rebuke.
16 Your words were found, and I ate them,
And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart;
For I am called by Your name,
O Lord God of hosts.
17 I did not sit in the assembly of the mockers,
Nor did I rejoice;
I sat alone because of Your hand,
For You have filled me with indignation.
18 Why is my pain perpetual
And my wound incurable,
Which refuses to be healed?
Will You surely be to me like an unreliable stream,
As waters *that* fail?

The Lord Reassures Jeremiah

19 Therefore thus says the Lord:

"If you return,
Then I will bring you back;
You shall stand before Me;
If you take out the precious from the vile,
You shall be as My mouth.
Let them return to you,
But you must not return to them.
20 And I will make you to this people a fortified bronze wall;
And they will fight against you,
But they shall not prevail against you;
For I *am* with you to save you
And deliver you," says the Lord.
21 "I will deliver you from the hand of the wicked,
And I will redeem you from the grip of the terrible."

Jeremiah's Lifestyle and Message

16 The word of the Lord also came to me, saying, 2 "You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place."
3 For thus says the Lord concerning the sons and daughters who are born in this place, and concerning their mothers who bore them and their fathers who begot them in this land:
4 "They shall die gruesome deaths; they shall not be lamented nor shall they be buried, *but* they shall be like refuse on the face of the earth. They shall be consumed by the sword and by famine, and their corpses shall be meat for the birds of heaven and for the beasts of the earth."

5 For thus says the Lord: "Do not enter the house of mourning, nor go to lament or

15:14 [a] Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Septuagint, Syriac, and Targum read *cause you to serve* (compare 17:4).

bemoan them; for I have taken away My peace
from this people," says the Lord, "lovingkind-
ness and mercies. 6Both the great and the
small shall die in this land. They shall not be
buried; neither shall men lament for them,
cut themselves, nor make themselves bald for
them. 7Nor shall *men* break *bread* in mourn-
ing for them, to comfort them for the dead;
nor shall *men* give them the cup of consola-
tion to drink for their father or their mother.
8Also you shall not go into the house of feast-
ing to sit with them, to eat and drink."

9For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God
of Israel: "Behold, I will cause to cease from
this place, before your eyes and in your days,
the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness,
the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of
the bride.

10"And it shall be, when you show this peo-
ple all these words, and they say to you, 'Why
has the Lord pronounced all this great disaster
against us? Or what *is* our iniquity? Or what *is*
our sin that we have committed against the
Lord our God?' 11then you shall say to them,
'Because your fathers have forsaken Me,' says
the Lord; 'they have walked after other gods
and have served them and worshiped them,
and have forsaken Me and not kept My law.
12And you have done worse than your fathers,
for behold, each one follows the dictates of his
own evil heart, so that no one listens to Me.
13Therefore I will cast you out of this land into
a land that you do not know, neither you nor
your fathers; and there you shall serve other
gods day and night, where I will not show you
favor.'

God Will Restore Israel

14"Therefore behold, the days are coming,"
says the Lord, "that it shall no more be said,
'The Lord lives who brought up the children
of Israel from the land of Egypt,' 15but, 'The
Lord lives who brought up the children of
Israel from the land of the north and from all
the lands where He had driven them.' For I will
bring them back into their land which I gave
to their fathers.

16"Behold, I will send for many fishermen,"
says the Lord, "and they shall fish them; and
afterward I will send for many hunters, and
they shall hunt them from every mountain
and every hill, and out of the holes of the
rocks. 17For My eyes *are* on all their ways;
they are not hidden from My face, nor is their
iniquity hidden from My eyes. 18And first I will
repay double for their iniquity and their sin,
because they have defiled My land; they have
filled My inheritance with the carcasses of
their detestable and abominable idols."

19 O Lord, my strength and my fortress,
My refuge in the day of affliction,
The Gentiles shall come to You
From the ends of the earth and say,
"Surely our fathers have inherited lies,
Worthlessness and unprofitable *things.*"
20 Will a man make gods for himself,
Which *are* not gods?

21 "Therefore behold, I will this once cause
them to know,
I will cause them to know
My hand and My might;
And they shall know that My name *is* the
Lord.

Judah's Sin and Punishment

17 "The sin of Judah *is* written with a pen
of iron;
With the point of a diamond *it is*
engraved
On the tablet of their heart,
And on the horns of your altars,
2 While their children remember
Their altars and their wooden images[a]
By the green trees on the high hills.
3 O My mountain in the field,
I will give as plunder your wealth, all your
treasures,
And your high places of sin within all
your borders.
4 And you, even yourself,
Shall let go of your heritage which I gave
you;
And I will cause you to serve your
enemies
In the land which you do not know;
For you have kindled a fire in My anger
which shall burn forever."

17:2 [a]Hebrew *Asherim,* Canaanite deities

5 Thus says the Lord:

"Cursed *is* the man who trusts in man
And makes flesh his strength,
Whose heart departs from the Lord.
6 For he shall be like a shrub in the desert,
And shall not see when good comes,
But shall inhabit the parched places in
the wilderness,
In a salt land *which is* not inhabited.

7 "Blessed *is* the man who trusts in the Lord,
And whose hope is the Lord.
8 For he shall be like a tree planted by the
waters,
Which spreads out its roots by the river,
And will not fear[a] when heat comes;
But its leaf will be green,
And will not be anxious in the year of
drought,
Nor will cease from yielding fruit.

9 "The heart *is* deceitful above all *things,*
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?
10 I, the Lord, search the heart,
I test the mind,
Even to give every man according to his
ways,
According to the fruit of his doings.

11 "*As* a partridge that broods but does not
hatch,
So is he who gets riches, but not by right;
It will leave him in the midst of his days,
And at his end he will be a fool."

12 A glorious high throne from the beginning
Is the place of our sanctuary.
13 O Lord, the hope of Israel,
All who forsake You shall be ashamed.

"Those who depart from Me
Shall be written in the earth,
Because they have forsaken the Lord,
The fountain of living waters."

Jeremiah Prays for Deliverance

14 Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed;
Save me, and I shall be saved,
For You *are* my praise.

15 Indeed they say to me,
"Where *is* the word of the Lord?
Let it come now!"
16 As for me, I have not hurried away from
being a shepherd *who* follows You,
Nor have I desired the woeful day;
You know what came out of my lips;
It was right there before You.
17 Do not be a terror to me;
You *are* my hope in the day of doom.
18 Let them be ashamed who persecute me,
But do not let me be put to shame;
Let them be dismayed,
But do not let me be dismayed.
Bring on them the day of doom,
And destroy them with double destruction!

Hallow the Sabbath Day

19 Thus the Lord said to me: "Go and stand in the gate of the children of the people, by which the kings of Judah come in and by which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem; 20 and say to them, 'Hear the word of the Lord, you kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who enter by these gates. 21 Thus says the Lord: "Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring *it* in by the gates of Jerusalem; 22 nor carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, nor do any work, but hallow the Sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers. 23 But they did not obey nor incline their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear nor receive instruction.

24 "And it shall be, if you heed Me carefully," says the Lord, "to bring no burden through the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but hallow the Sabbath day, to do no work in it, 25 then shall enter the gates of this city kings and princes sitting on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their princes, accompanied by the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city shall remain forever. 26 And they shall come from the cities of Judah and from the places around Jerusalem, from the land of Benjamin and from the lowland, from the mountains and from the South, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings and incense, bringing sacrifices of praise to the house of the Lord.

17:8 [a]Qere and Targum read *see.*

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 18:1—20:18

SITUATION
God sent Jeremiah to a potter's shop. While there, God told him that Jerusalem would be destroyed as easily as a clay pot. The people persecuted Jeremiah for his unpopular message.

OBSERVATION
God shapes our lives like a potter shapes clay.

INSPIRATION
I recently met a twenty-year-old who . . . was pondering his future. He bore a square jaw, a forearm tattoo, and a common question. He didn't know what to do with the rest of his life. As we shared a flight, he told me about his uncle, a New England priest. "What a great man," the ex-soldier sighed. "He helps kids and feeds the hungry. I'd love to make a difference like that."

So I asked him the question of this chapter. "What were some occasions when you did something you love to do and did it well?"

He dismissed me at first. "Aw, what I love to do is stupid."

"Try me," I invited.

"Well, I love to rebuild stuff."

"What do you mean?"

He spoke of an old coffee table he had found in a garage. Seeing its potential, he shaved off the paint, fixed the broken legs, and restored it. With great pride, he presented it to his mom.

"Tell me another time," I prompted.

"This one is really dumb," he discounted. "But when I worked at a butcher shop, I used to find meat on the bones others threw out. My

27 "But if you will not heed Me to hallow the Sabbath day, such as
not carrying a burden when entering the gates of Jerusalem on the
Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the
palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched." ' "

The Potter and the Clay

18 The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying:
2 "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause
you to hear My words." 3 Then I went down to the potter's house, and
there he was, making something at the wheel. 4 And the vessel that he
made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again
into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make.

5 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 6 "O house of Israel,
can I not do with you as this potter?" says the Lord. "Look, as the clay
is in the potter's hand, so *are* you in My hand, O house of Israel! 7 The
instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to
pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy *it,* 8 if that nation against whom
I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I
thought to bring upon it. 9 And the instant I speak concerning a nation
and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant *it,* 10 if it does evil in
My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concern-
ing the good with which I said I would benefit it.

11 "Now therefore, speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants
of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: "Behold, I am fashioning a
disaster and devising a plan against you. Return now every one from
his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good." ' "

God's Warning Rejected

12 And they said, "That is hopeless! So we will walk according to our
own plans, and we will every one obey the dictates of his evil heart."

13 Therefore thus says the Lord:

"Ask now among the Gentiles,
Who has heard such things?
The virgin of Israel has done a very horrible thing.
14 Will *a man* leave the snow water of Lebanon,
Which comes from the rock of the field?
Will the cold flowing waters be forsaken for strange waters?

15 "Because My people have forgotten Me,
They have burned incense to worthless idols.
And they have caused themselves to stumble in their ways,
From the ancient paths,
To walk in pathways and not on a highway,
16 To make their land desolate *and* a perpetual hissing;
Everyone who passes by it will be astonished
And shake his head.
17 I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy;
I will show them[a] the back and not the face
In the day of their calamity."

18:17 [a] Following Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text reads *look them in*.

Jeremiah Persecuted

18 Then they said, "Come and let us devise plans against Jeremiah;
for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise,
nor the word from the prophet. Come and let us attack him with the
tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words."

19 Give heed to me, O Lord,
And listen to the voice of those who contend with me!
20 Shall evil be repaid for good?
For they have dug a pit for my life.
Remember that I stood before You
To speak good for them,
To turn away Your wrath from them.
21 Therefore deliver up their children to the famine,
And pour out their *blood*
By the force of the sword;
Let their wives *become* widows
And bereaved of their children.
Let their men be put to death,
Their young men *be* slain
By the sword in battle.
22 Let a cry be heard from their houses,
When You bring a troop suddenly upon them;
For they have dug a pit to take me,
And hidden snares for my feet.
23 Yet, Lord, You know all their counsel
Which is against me, to slay *me*.
Provide no atonement for their iniquity,
Nor blot out their sin from Your sight;
But let them be overthrown before You.
Deal *thus* with them
In the time of Your anger.

The Sign of the Broken Flask

19 Thus says the Lord: "Go and get a potter's earthen flask, and *take* some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests. 2 And go out to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, which *is* by the entry of the Potsherd Gate; and proclaim there the words that I will tell you, 3 and say, 'Hear the word of the Lord, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: "Behold, I will bring such a catastrophe on this place, that whoever hears of it, his ears will tingle.

4 "Because they have forsaken Me and made this an alien place, because they have burned incense in it to other gods whom neither they, their fathers, nor the kings of Judah have known, and have filled this place with the blood of the innocents 5 (they have also built the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire *for* burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or speak, nor did it come into My mind), 6 therefore behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "that this place shall no more be called Tophet or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter. 7 And I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place, and I will cause them

boss loved me! I could find several pounds of product just by giving the bone a second try."

As the plane was nosing down, I tested a possibility with him. "You love to salvage stuff. You salvage furniture, salvage meat. God gave you the ability to find a treasure in someone else's trash."

My idea surprised him. "God? God did that?"

"Yes, God. Your ability to restore a table is every bit as holy as your uncle's ability to restore a life." You would have thought he'd just been handed a newborn baby. As my words sank in, the tough soldier teared up.

See your desires as gifts to heed rather than longings to suppress, and you'll feel the same joy.

So go ahead; reflect on your life. What have you always done well and loved to do? . . .

Read your life backward and check your supplies. Re-relish your moments of success and satisfaction. For in the merger of the two, you find your uniqueness. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God is the Potter; we are the clay. He fashions us, molds us, shapes us, and calls us to tasks we are uniquely created to do. In what way has God uniquely created you?

EXPLORATION

Trusting God in Difficult Times—Psalm 27:5; Matthew 5:4, 10; Romans 8:28; 2 Timothy 1:11, 12.

to fall by the sword before their enemies and
by the hands of those who seek their lives;
their corpses I will give as meat for the birds
of the heaven and for the beasts of the earth.
8 I will make this city desolate and a hissing;
everyone who passes by it will be astonished
and hiss because of all its plagues. 9 And I will
cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and
the flesh of their daughters, and everyone
shall eat the flesh of his friend in the siege and
in the desperation with which their enemies
and those who seek their lives shall drive them
to despair.' '

10 "Then you shall break the flask in the
sight of the men who go with you, 11 and say
to them, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Even
so I will break this people and this city, as
one breaks a potter's vessel, which cannot be
made whole again; and they shall bury *them*
in Tophet till *there is* no place to bury. 12 Thus
I will do to this place," says the Lord, "and to
its inhabitants, and make this city like Tophet.
13 And the houses of Jerusalem and the houses
of the kings of Judah shall be defiled like the
place of Tophet, because of all the houses
on whose roofs they have burned incense to
all the host of heaven, and poured out drink
offerings to other gods."' "

14 Then Jeremiah came from Tophet, where
the Lord had sent him to prophesy; and he
stood in the court of the Lord's house and
said to all the people, 15 "Thus says the Lord of
hosts, the God of Israel: 'Behold, I will bring on
this city and on all her towns all the doom that
I have pronounced against it, because they
have stiffened their necks that they might not
hear My words.' "

The Word of God to Pashhur

20 Now Pashhur the son of Immer, the
priest who *was* also chief governor in
the house of the Lord, heard that Jeremiah
prophesied these things. 2 Then Pashhur
struck Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in
the stocks that *were* in the high gate of Benja-
min, which *was* by the house of the Lord.

3 And it happened on the next day that
Pashhur brought Jeremiah out of the stocks.
Then Jeremiah said to him, "The Lord has
not called your name Pashhur, but Magor-
Missabib.[a] 4 For thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I
will make you a terror to yourself and to all
your friends; and they shall fall by the sword
of their enemies, and your eyes shall see *it.* I
will give all Judah into the hand of the king of
Babylon, and he shall carry them captive to
Babylon and slay them with the sword. 5 More-
over I will deliver all the wealth of this city, all
its produce, and all its precious things; all the
treasures of the kings of Judah I will give into
the hand of their enemies, who will plunder
them, seize them, and carry them to Babylon.
6 And you, Pashhur, and all who dwell in your
house, shall go into captivity. You shall go to
Babylon, and there you shall die, and be bur-
ied there, you and all your friends, to whom
you have prophesied lies.' "

Jeremiah's Unpopular Ministry

7 O Lord, You induced me, and I was
persuaded;
You are stronger than I, and have
prevailed.
I am in derision daily;
Everyone mocks me.
8 For when I spoke, I cried out;
I shouted, "Violence and plunder!"
Because the word of the Lord was made
to me
A reproach and a derision daily.
9 Then I said, "I will not make mention of
Him,
Nor speak anymore in His name."
But *His word* was in my heart like a
burning fire
Shut up in my bones;
I was weary of holding *it* back,
And I could not.
10 For I heard many mocking:
"Fear on every side!"
"Report," *they say,* "and we will
report it!"
All my acquaintances watched for my
stumbling, *saying,*
"Perhaps he can be induced;
Then we will prevail against him,
And we will take our revenge on him."

11 But the Lord *is* with me as a mighty,
awesome One.

20:3 [a] Literally *Fear on Every Side*

Therefore my persecutors will stumble, and will not prevail.
They will be greatly ashamed, for they will not prosper.
Their everlasting confusion will never be forgotten.
12 But, O Lord of hosts,
You who test the righteous,
And see the mind and heart,
Let me see Your vengeance on them;
For I have pleaded my cause before You.

13 Sing to the Lord! Praise the Lord!
For He has delivered the life of the poor
From the hand of evildoers.

14 Cursed *be* the day in which I was born!
Let the day not be blessed in which my mother bore me!
15 Let the man *be* cursed
Who brought news to my father, saying,
"A male child has been born to you!"
Making him very glad.
16 And let that man be like the cities
Which the Lord overthrew, and did not relent;
Let him hear the cry in the morning
And the shouting at noon,
17 Because he did not kill me from the womb,
That my mother might have been my grave,
And her womb always enlarged *with me.*
18 Why did I come forth from the womb to see labor and sorrow,
That my days should be consumed with shame?

Jerusalem's Doom Is Sealed

21 The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur the son of Melchiah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, saying, 2 "Please inquire of the Lord for us, for Nebuchadnezzar[a] king of Babylon makes war against us. Perhaps the Lord will deal with us according to all His wonderful works, that *the king* may go away from us."

3 Then Jeremiah said to them, "Thus you shall say to Zedekiah, 4 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that *are* in your hands, with which you fight against the king of Babylon and the Chaldeans[a] who besiege you outside the walls; and I will assemble them in the midst of this city. 5 I Myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger and fury and great wrath. 6 I will strike the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast; they shall die of a great pestilence. 7 And afterward," says the Lord, "I will deliver Zedekiah king of Judah, his servants and the people, and such as are left in this city from the pestilence and the sword and the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those who seek their life; and he shall strike them

21:2 [a]Hebrew *Nebuchadrezzar,* and so elsewhere **21:4** [a]Or *Babylonians*

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 21:1—23:40

SITUATION
God had allowed many disobedient kings to continue ruling. But now God forewarned the people of His plan for a harsh discipline if they once again refused to return to Him. Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, attacked Jerusalem between 588 and 586 B.C. When he destroyed the city, he was fulfilling God's prophecy.

OBSERVATION
God makes clear what is right and wrong. When people choose to do wrong, God helps them see their sin. God's discipline arises from His love for His people.

INSPIRATION
King David marveled, "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?" (Psalm 139:7). God reminds us, "'Am I a God near at hand,' says the Lord, 'And not a God afar off? . . . Do I not fill heaven and earth?' says the Lord" (Jeremiah 23:23, 24).

See the "holy otherness" of God? In Isaiah's encounter, those who see Him most clearly regard Him most highly [Isaiah 6]. He is so holy that sinless seraphim cannot bear to look at Him! They cover their faces with their wings. They also, oddly, cover their feet. Why? In Hebrew the word for *feet* and the word for *genitalia* are the same. Forgive the thought, but the confession of the angels is that they are *absolutely impotent in the presence of God*. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
God loves us so very much—His love is beyond understanding, beyond explanation, beyond imagination. We can never be lost to Him.

EXPLORATION
God's Discipline—Deuteronomy 8:2–5; Proverbs 10:17; Jeremiah 32:33; Hosea 6:1–3; 14:1, 2, 4; Joel 2:13; Micah 7:18, 19; Haggai 2:17; 2 Corinthians 7:10; Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 12:5–11.

Any injustice in this life is offset by the honor of choosing our destiny in the next.

—Max Lucado (He Chose the Nails)

with the edge of the sword. He shall not spare them, or have pity or mercy.'"

8 "Now you shall say to this people, 'Thus says the Lord: "Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death. 9 He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but he who goes out and defects to the Chaldeans who besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be as a prize to him. 10 For I have set My face against this city for adversity and not for good," says the Lord. "It shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire."'

Message to the House of David

11 "And concerning the house of the king of Judah, *say,* 'Hear the word of the Lord, 12 O house of David! Thus says the Lord:

"Execute judgment in the morning;
And deliver *him who is* plundered
Out of the hand of the oppressor,
Lest My fury go forth like fire
And burn so that no one can quench *it,*
Because of the evil of your doings.

13 "Behold, I *am* against you, O inhabitant of the valley,
And rock of the plain," says the Lord,
"Who say, 'Who shall come down against us?
Or who shall enter our dwellings?'
14 But I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings," says
the Lord;
"I will kindle a fire in its forest,
And it shall devour all things around it."'"

22 Thus says the Lord: "Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and there speak this word, 2 and say, 'Hear the word of the Lord, O king of Judah, you who sit on the throne of David, you and your servants and your people who enter these gates! 3 Thus says the Lord: "Execute judgment and righteousness, and deliver the plundered out of the hand of the oppressor. Do no wrong and do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, or the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place. 4 For if you indeed do this thing, then shall enter the gates of this house, riding on horses and in chariots, accompanied by servants and people, kings who sit on the throne of David. 5 But if you will not hear these words, I swear by Myself," says the Lord, "that this house shall become a desolation."'"

6 For thus says the Lord to the house of the king of Judah:

"You *are* Gilead to Me,
The head of Lebanon;
Yet I surely will make you a wilderness,
Cities *which* are not inhabited.
7 I will prepare destroyers against you,
Everyone with his weapons;
They shall cut down your choice cedars
And cast *them* into the fire.

8 And many nations will pass by this city; and
everyone will say to his neighbor, 'Why has
the Lord done so to this great city?' 9 Then
they will answer, 'Because they have forsaken
the covenant of the Lord their God, and wor-
shiped other gods and served them.' "

10 Weep not for the dead, nor bemoan him;
Weep bitterly for him who goes away,
For he shall return no more,
Nor see his native country.

Message to the Sons of Josiah

11 For thus says the Lord concerning
Shallum[a] the son of Josiah, king of Judah,
who reigned instead of Josiah his father, who
went from this place: "He shall not return here
anymore, 12 but he shall die in the place where
they have led him captive, and shall see this
land no more.

13 "Woe to him who builds his house by
unrighteousness
And his chambers by injustice,
Who uses his neighbor's service without
wages
And gives him nothing for his work,
14 Who says, 'I will build myself a wide
house with spacious chambers,
And cut out windows for it,
Paneling *it* with cedar
And painting *it* with vermilion.'

15 "Shall you reign because you enclose
yourself in cedar?
Did not your father eat and drink,
And do justice and righteousness?
Then *it was* well with him.
16 He judged the cause of the poor and
needy;
Then *it was* well.
Was not this knowing Me?" says the
Lord.
17 "Yet your eyes and your heart *are* for
nothing but your covetousness,
For shedding innocent blood,
And practicing oppression and violence."

18 Therefore thus says the Lord concerning
Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah:

"They shall not lament for him,
Saying, 'Alas, my brother!' or 'Alas, my
sister!'
They shall not lament for him,
Saying, 'Alas, master!' or 'Alas, his
glory!'
19 He shall be buried with the burial of a
donkey,
Dragged and cast out beyond the gates of
Jerusalem.

20 "Go up to Lebanon, and cry out,
And lift up your voice in Bashan;
Cry from Abarim,
For all your lovers are destroyed.
21 I spoke to you in your prosperity,
But you said, 'I will not hear.'
This *has been* your manner from your
youth,
That you did not obey My voice.
22 The wind shall eat up all your rulers,
And your lovers shall go into captivity;
Surely then you will be ashamed and
humiliated
For all your wickedness.
23 O inhabitant of Lebanon,
Making your nest in the cedars,
How gracious will you be when pangs
come upon you,
Like the pain of a woman in labor?

Message to Coniah

24 "*As* I live," says the Lord, "though Coniah[a]
the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the
signet on My right hand, yet I would pluck
you off; 25 and I will give you into the hand
of those who seek your life, and into the
hand *of those* whose face you fear—the hand
of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and the
hand of the Chaldeans. 26 So I will cast you out,
and your mother who bore you, into another
country where you were not born; and there
you shall die. 27 But to the land to which they
desire to return, there they shall not return.

28 "Is this man Coniah a despised, broken
idol—
A vessel in which *is* no pleasure?
Why are they cast out, he and his
descendants,

22:11 [a]Also called *Jehoahaz* **22:24** [a]Also called *Jeconiah* and *Jehoiachin*

And cast into a land which they do not
know?
29 O earth, earth, earth,
Hear the word of the Lord!
30 Thus says the Lord:
'Write this man down as childless,
A man *who* shall not prosper in his days;
For none of his descendants shall
prosper,
Sitting on the throne of David,
And ruling anymore in Judah.' "

The Branch of Righteousness

23 "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!" says the Lord. 2 Therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: "You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings," says the Lord. 3 "But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. 4 I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking," says the Lord.

5 "Behold, *the* days are coming," says the
Lord,
"That I will raise to David a Branch of
righteousness;
A King shall reign and prosper,
And execute judgment and righteousness
in the earth.
6 In His days Judah will be saved,
And Israel will dwell safely;
Now this *is* His name by which He will be
called:

THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.[a]

7 "Therefore, behold, *the* days are coming," says the Lord, "that they shall no longer say, 'As the Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,' 8 but, 'As the Lord lives who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel from the north country and from all the countries where I had driven them.' And they shall dwell in their own land."

False Prophets and Empty Oracles

9 My heart within me is broken
Because of the prophets;
All my bones shake.
I am like a drunken man,
And like a man whom wine has overcome,
Because of the Lord,
And because of His holy words.
10 For the land is full of adulterers;
For because of a curse the land mourns.
The pleasant places of the wilderness are
dried up.
Their course of life is evil,
And their might *is* not right.

11 "For both prophet and priest are profane;
Yes, in My house I have found their
wickedness," says the Lord.
12 "Therefore their way shall be to them
Like slippery *ways;*
In the darkness they shall be driven on
And fall in them;
For I will bring disaster on them,
The year of their punishment," says the
Lord.
13 "And I have seen folly in the prophets of
Samaria:
They prophesied by Baal
And caused My people Israel to err.
14 Also I have seen a horrible thing in the
prophets of Jerusalem:
They commit adultery and walk in lies;
They also strengthen the hands of
evildoers,
So that no one turns back from his
wickedness.
All of them are like Sodom to Me,
And her inhabitants like Gomorrah.

15 "Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets:

'Behold, I will feed them with wormwood,
And make them drink the water of gall;
For from the prophets of Jerusalem
Profaneness has gone out into all the
land.' "

23:6 [a] Hebrew *YHWH Tsidkenu*

16 Thus says the Lord of hosts:

"Do not listen to the words of the prophets
who prophesy to you.
They make you worthless;
They speak a vision of their own heart,
Not from the mouth of the Lord.
17 They continually say to those who
despise Me,
'The Lord has said, "You shall have peace" ';
And *to* everyone who walks according to
the dictates of his own heart, they
say,
'No evil shall come upon you.' "

18 For who has stood in the counsel of the
Lord,
And has perceived and heard His word?
Who has marked His word and heard *it?*
19 Behold, a whirlwind of the Lord has gone
forth in fury—
A violent whirlwind!
It will fall violently on the head of the
wicked.
20 The anger of the Lord will not turn back
Until He has executed and performed the
thoughts of His heart.
In the latter days you will understand it
perfectly.

21 "I have not sent these prophets, yet they
ran.
I have not spoken to them, yet they
prophesied.
22 But if they had stood in My counsel,
And had caused My people to hear My
words,
Then they would have turned them from
their evil way
And from the evil of their doings.

23 "*Am* I a God near at hand," says the Lord,
"And not a God afar off?
24 Can anyone hide himself in secret places,
So I shall not see him?" says the Lord;
"Do I not fill heaven and earth?" says the
Lord.

25 "I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in My name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!' 26 How long will *this* be in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies? Indeed *they are* prophets of the deceit of their own heart, 27 who try to make My people forget My name by their dreams which everyone tells his neighbor, as their fathers forgot My name for Baal.

28 "The prophet who has a dream, let him tell
a dream;
And he who has My word, let him speak
My word faithfully.
What *is* the chaff to the wheat?" says the
Lord.
29 "*Is* not My word like a fire?" says the Lord,
"And like a hammer *that* breaks the rock
in pieces?

30 "Therefore behold, I *am* against the prophets," says the Lord, "who steal My words every one from his neighbor. 31 Behold, I *am* against the prophets," says the Lord, "who use their tongues and say, 'He says.' 32 Behold, I *am* against those who prophesy false dreams," says the Lord, "and tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies and by their recklessness. Yet I did not send them or command them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all," says the Lord.

33 "So when these people or the prophet or the priest ask you, saying, 'What is the oracle of the Lord?' you shall then say to them, 'What oracle?'[a] I will even forsake you," says the Lord. 34 "And *as for* the prophet and the priest and the people who say, 'The oracle of the Lord!' I will even punish that man and his house. 35 Thus every one of you shall say to his neighbor, and every one to his brother, 'What has the Lord answered?' and, 'What has the Lord spoken?' 36 And the oracle of the Lord you shall mention no more. For every man's word will be his oracle, for you have perverted the words of the living God, the Lord of hosts, our God. 37 Thus you shall say to the prophet, 'What has the Lord answered you?' and, 'What has the Lord spoken?' 38 But since you say, 'The oracle of the Lord!' therefore thus says the Lord: 'Because you say this word, "The oracle of the Lord!" and I have sent to you, saying, "Do not say, 'The oracle of the Lord!' "

23:33 [a] Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate read '*You are the burden.*'

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 24:1—26:24

SITUATION
Unless they turned from their sins, God vowed to exile Judah into Babylon for seventy years. Although the king threatened Jeremiah, the priests gradually believed that Jeremiah spoke with God's authority.

OBSERVATION
God promised protection for His people if they turned from their sin. If not, they would suffer His fierce wrath.

INSPIRATION
"What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but *gave him up for us all*—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:31, 32 NIV emphasis mine)

Is that how You felt, God? Is what I felt this morning anything like what You felt when You gave up Your Son?

If so, it explains so much. It explains the proclamation of the angels to the shepherds outside Bethlehem. (A proud Father was announcing the birth of a Son.)

It explains the voice at Jesus' baptism, "This is my Son. . . ." (You did what I wanted to do, but couldn't.)

It explains the transfiguration of Moses and Elijah on the mountaintop. (You sent them to encourage Him.)

And it explains how Your heart must have ached as you heard the cracking voice of Your Son, "Father, take this cup away." . . .

You said good-bye to

39 therefore behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you and forsake you,
and the city that I gave you and your fathers, and *will cast you* out of
My presence. 40 And I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you,
and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten.' "

The Sign of Two Baskets of Figs

24 The Lord showed me, and there were two baskets of figs set
before the temple of the Lord, after Nebuchadnezzar king of
Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king
of Judah, and the princes of Judah with the craftsmen and smiths,
from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon. 2 One basket *had*
very good figs, like the figs *that are* first ripe; and the other basket *had*
very bad figs which could not be eaten, they were so bad. 3 Then the
Lord said to me, "What do you see, Jeremiah?"

And I said, "Figs, the good figs, very good; and the bad, very bad,
which cannot be eaten, they are so bad."

4 Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 5 "Thus says the
Lord, the God of Israel: 'Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge
those who are carried away captive from Judah, whom I have sent out
of this place for *their own* good, into the land of the Chaldeans. 6 For
I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this
land; I will build them and not pull *them* down, and I will plant them
and not pluck *them* up. 7 Then I will give them a heart to know Me,
that I *am* the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their
God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart.

8 'And as the bad figs which cannot be eaten, they are so bad'—
surely thus says the Lord—'so will I give up Zedekiah the king of
Judah, his princes, the residue of Jerusalem who remain in this land,
and those who dwell in the land of Egypt. 9 I will deliver them to trou-
ble into all the kingdoms of the earth, for *their* harm, *to be* a reproach
and a byword, a taunt and a curse, in all places where I shall drive
them. 10 And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence
among them, till they are consumed from the land that I gave to them
and their fathers.' "

Seventy Years of Desolation

25 The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of
Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of
Judah (which *was* the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon),
2 which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and to
all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying: 3 "From the thirteenth year
of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even to this day, this *is* the
twenty-third year in which the word of the Lord has come to me; and
I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, but you have not
listened. 4 And the Lord has sent to you all His servants the prophets,
rising early and sending *them,* but you have not listened nor inclined
your ear to hear. 5 They said, 'Repent now everyone of his evil way
and his evil doings, and dwell in the land that the Lord has given to
you and your fathers forever and ever. 6 Do not go after other gods to
serve them and worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with
the works of your hands; and I will not harm you.' 7 Yet you have not

listened to Me," says the Lord, "that you might provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt.

8 "Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Because you have not heard My words, 9 behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' says the Lord, 'and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations. 10 Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. 11 And this whole land shall be a desolation *and* an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

12 'Then it will come to pass, when seventy years are completed, *that* I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity,' says the Lord; 'and I will make it a perpetual desolation. 13 So I will bring on that land all My words which I have pronounced against it, all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah has prophesied concerning all the nations. 14 (For many nations and great kings shall be served by them also; and I will repay them according to their deeds and according to the works of their own hands.)' "

Judgment on the Nations

15 For thus says the Lord God of Israel to me: "Take this wine cup of fury from My hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send you, to drink it. 16 And they will drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them."

17 Then I took the cup from the Lord's hand, and made all the nations drink, to whom the Lord had sent me: 18 Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, its kings and its princes, to make them a desolation, an astonishment, a hissing, and a curse, as *it is* this day; 19 Pharaoh king of Egypt, his servants, his princes, and all his people; 20 all the mixed multitude, all the kings of the land of Uz, all the kings of the land of the Philistines (namely, Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod); 21 Edom, Moab, and the people of Ammon; 22 all the kings of Tyre, all the kings of Sidon, and the kings of the coastlands which *are* across the sea; 23 Dedan, Tema, Buz, and all *who are* in the farthest corners; 24 all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the mixed multitude who dwell in the desert; 25 all the kings of Zimri, all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of the Medes; 26 all the kings of the north, far and near, one with another; and all the kingdoms of the world which *are* on the face of the earth. Also the king of Sheshach[a] shall drink after them.

27 "Therefore you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: "Drink, be drunk, and vomit! Fall and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you." ' 28 And it shall be, if they refuse to take the cup from your hand to drink, then you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: "You shall certainly drink! 29 For behold, I begin to bring calamity on the city which is called by

25:26 [a] A code word for Babylon (compare 51:41)

Your Son fully aware that when He would need You the most, when His cry of despair would roar through the heavens, You would sit in silence. The angels, though positioned, would hear no command from You. Your Son, though in anguish, would feel no comfort from Your hands.

"He gave His best," Paul reasons. "Why should we doubt His love?" (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Be thankful for a patient and loving God who forgives you when you are willing to honor and obey Him. But don't take His graciousness lightly. Express your gratefulness for His mercy.

EXPLORATION

Repentance—Exodus 9:27–34; Jonah 3:10; Luke 15:8–10.

My name, and should you be utterly unpunished? You shall not be unpunished, for I will call for a sword on all the inhabitants of the earth," says the Lord of hosts.'

30 "Therefore prophesy against them all these words, and say to them:

'The Lord will roar from on high,
And utter His voice from His holy habitation;
He will roar mightily against His fold.
He will give a shout, as those who tread *the grapes,*
Against all the inhabitants of the earth.
31 A noise will come to the ends of the earth—
For the Lord has a controversy with the nations;
He will plead His case with all flesh.
He will give those *who are* wicked to the sword,' says the Lord."

32 Thus says the Lord of hosts:

"Behold, disaster shall go forth
From nation to nation,
And a great whirlwind shall be raised up
From the farthest parts of the earth.

33 "And at that day the slain of the Lord shall be from *one* end of the earth even to the *other* end of the earth. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall become refuse on the ground.

34 "Wail, shepherds, and cry!
Roll about *in the ashes,*
You leaders of the flock!
For the days of your slaughter and your dispersions are fulfilled;
You shall fall like a precious vessel.
35 And the shepherds will have no way to flee,
Nor the leaders of the flock to escape.
36 A voice of the cry of the shepherds,
And a wailing of the leaders to the flock *will be heard.*
For the Lord has plundered their pasture,
37 And the peaceful dwellings are cut down
Because of the fierce anger of the Lord.
38 He has left His lair like the lion;
For their land is desolate
Because of the fierceness of the Oppressor,
And because of His fierce anger."

Jeremiah Saved from Death

26 In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from the Lord, saying, 2 "Thus says the Lord: 'Stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship *in* the Lord's house, all the words that I command you to speak to them. Do not diminish a word. 3 Perhaps everyone will listen and turn from his evil way, that I may relent concerning the calamity which I purpose to bring on them because of the evil of their doings.' 4 And you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord: "If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you, 5 to heed the words of My servants the prophets whom I sent to you, both rising up early and sending *them* (but you have not heeded), 6 then I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth."' "

7 So the priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the Lord. 8 Now it happened, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the Lord had commanded *him* to speak to all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, "You will surely die! 9 Why have you prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, 'This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without an inhabitant'?" And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the Lord.

10 When the princes of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of the Lord and sat down in the entry of the New Gate of the Lord's *house.* 11 And the priests and the prophets spoke to the princes and all the people, saying, "This man deserves to die! For he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your ears."

12 Then Jeremiah spoke to all the princes and all the people, saying: "The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city with all the words that you have heard. 13 Now therefore, amend your ways and

your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God; then the Lord will relent concerning the doom that He has pronounced against you. 14 As for me, here I am, in your hand; do with me as seems good and proper to you. 15 But know for certain that if you put me to death, you will surely bring innocent blood on yourselves, on this city, and on its inhabitants; for truly the Lord has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing."

16 So the princes and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, "This man does not deserve to die. For he has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God."

17 Then certain of the elders of the land rose up and spoke to all the assembly of the people, saying: 18 "Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and spoke to all the people of Judah, saying, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts:

"Zion shall be plowed *like* a field,
Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins,
And the mountain of the temple[a]
Like the bare hills of the forest." '[b]

19 Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah ever put him to death? Did he not fear the Lord and seek the Lord's favor? And the Lord relented concerning the doom which He had pronounced against them. But we are doing great evil against ourselves."

20 Now there was also a man who prophesied in the name of the Lord, Urijah the son of Shemaiah of Kirjath Jearim, who prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah. 21 And when Jehoiakim the king, with all his mighty men and all the princes, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death; but when Urijah heard *it,* he was afraid and fled, and went to Egypt. 22 Then Jehoiakim the king sent men to Egypt: Elnathan the son of Achbor, and *other* men *who went* with him to Egypt. 23 And they brought Urijah from Egypt and brought him to Jehoiakim the king, who killed him with the sword and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people.

24 Nevertheless the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, so that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death.

Symbol of the Bonds and Yokes

27 In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim[a] the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying,[b] 2 "Thus says the Lord to me: 'Make for yourselves bonds and yokes, and put them on your neck, 3 and send them to the king of Edom, the king of Moab, the king of the Ammonites, the king of Tyre, and the king of Sidon, by the hand of the messengers who come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah king of Judah. 4 And command them to say to their masters, "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of

26:18 [a]Literally *house* [b]Compare Micah 3:12 **27:1** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; some Hebrew manuscripts, Arabic, and Syriac read *Zedekiah* (compare 27:3, 12; 28:1). [b]Septuagint omits verse 1.

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 27:1—29:32

SITUATION
Jeremiah responded to the false prophets. One false prophet, Hananiah, said that the "yoke" of Babylon would be broken in two years.

OBSERVATION
After seventy years the people would seek for God and would find Him (29:10–14). We, too, need to trust Him for the future and seek Him in all our circumstances.

INSPIRATION
"If only you knew . . ." are God's words to us.

No lectures. No speeches. No homilies on how far He has come to help. No finger-pointing at our past. None of that. Just an appeal. An appeal for trust. "If only you knew . . ."

"If only you knew that I came to help and not condemn. If only you knew that tomorrow will be better than today. If only you knew the gift I have brought: eternal life. If only you knew I want you safely home."

If only you knew.

What wistful words to come from the lips of God. How kind that He would let us hear them. How crucial that we pause to hear them. If only we knew to trust. Trust that God is in our corner. Trust that God wants what is best. Trust that He really means it when He says, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11).

If only we could learn to trust Him.

But how hard it is. We quiver like the bird on the

ledge, ducking the hand that comes to help. We forget that He is the pilot and we are His passengers.

We accuse, falsely. We reject, naively.

If only we knew.

When He washed the disciples' feet, He was washing ours; when He calmed their storms, He was calming yours; when He forgave Peter, He was forgiving all the penitent. If only we knew.

He still sends pigeons to convince the lost and music to inspire the dance.

He still makes our storms His path, our graves His proof, and our souls His passion.

He hasn't changed. He trims branches so we can bear fruit; He calls the sheep that we might be safe; He hears the prayers of crooks so we might go home.

His thunder is still gentle.

And His gentleness still thunders.

If only you knew "the free gift of God and who it is that is asking you . . ."

The gift and the Giver. If you know them, you know all you need. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

In what aspects of your life are you having trouble trusting God? Commit those areas to God and trust that he knows what is best for you. Ask Him for strength for difficult times. If you're struggling with where you are now, ask Him to help your attitude.

EXPLORATION

Trusting In God—Joshua 1:9; Psalm 20:7; Proverbs 3:5; 16:20; Romans 4:5; 10:11; 1 Peter 2:6.

Israel—thus you shall say to your masters: 5 'I have made the earth, the man and the beast that *are* on the ground, by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and have given it to whom it seemed proper to Me. 6 And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of the field I have also given him to serve him. 7 So all nations shall serve him and his son and his son's son, until the time of his land comes; and then many nations and great kings shall make him serve them. 8 And it shall be, *that* the nation and kingdom which will not serve Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and which will not put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation I will punish,' says the Lord, 'with the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand. 9 Therefore do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your soothsayers, or your sorcerers, who speak to you, saying, "You shall not serve the king of Babylon." 10 For they prophesy a lie to you, to remove you far from your land; and I will drive you out, and you will perish. 11 But the nations that bring their necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will let them remain in their own land,' says the Lord, 'and they shall till it and dwell in it.'" '"

12 I also spoke to Zedekiah king of Judah according to all these words, saying, "Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live! 13 Why will you die, you and your people, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, as the Lord has spoken against the nation that will not serve the king of Babylon? 14 Therefore do not listen to the words of the prophets who speak to you, saying, 'You shall not serve the king of Babylon,' for they prophesy a lie to you; 15 for I have not sent them," says the Lord, "yet they prophesy a lie in My name, that I may drive you out, and that you may perish, you and the prophets who prophesy to you."

16 Also I spoke to the priests and to all this people, saying, "Thus says the Lord: 'Do not listen to the words of your prophets who prophesy to you, saying, "Behold, the vessels of the Lord's house will now shortly be brought back from Babylon"; for they prophesy a lie to you. 17 Do not listen to them; serve the king of Babylon, and live! Why should this city be laid waste? 18 But if they *are* prophets, and if the word of the Lord is with them, let them now make intercession to the Lord of hosts, that the vessels which are left in the house of the Lord, *in* the house of the king of Judah, and at Jerusalem, do not go to Babylon.'

19 "For thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the pillars, concerning the Sea, concerning the carts, and concerning the remainder of the vessels that remain in this city, 20 which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon did not take, when he carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, from Jerusalem to Babylon, and all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem— 21 yes, thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning the vessels that remain in the house of the Lord, and in the house of the king of Judah and of Jerusalem: 22 'They shall be carried to Babylon, and there they shall be until the day that I visit them,' says the Lord. 'Then I will bring them up and restore them to this place.' "

Hananiah's Falsehood and Doom

28 And it happened in the same year, at
the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah
king of Judah, in the fourth year *and* in the
fifth month, *that* Hananiah the son of Azur
the prophet, who *was* from Gibeon, spoke to
me in the house of the Lord in the presence
of the priests and of all the people, saying,
2 "Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, the God of
Israel, saying: 'I have broken the yoke of the
king of Babylon. 3 Within two full years I will
bring back to this place all the vessels of the
Lord's house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of
Babylon took away from this place and car-
ried to Babylon. 4 And I will bring back to this
place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of
Judah, with all the captives of Judah who went
to Babylon,' says the Lord, 'for I will break the
yoke of the king of Babylon.' "

5 Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to the
prophet Hananiah in the presence of the
priests and in the presence of all the people
who stood in the house of the Lord, 6 and the
prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen! The Lord do so;
the Lord perform your words which you have
prophesied, to bring back the vessels of the
Lord's house and all who were carried away
captive, from Babylon to this place. 7 Never-
theless hear now this word that I speak in your
hearing and in the hearing of all the people:
8 The prophets who have been before me and
before you of old prophesied against many
countries and great kingdoms—of war and
disaster and pestilence. 9 As for the prophet
who prophesies of peace, when the word of
the prophet comes to pass, the prophet will be
known *as* one whom the Lord has truly sent."

10 Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke
off the prophet Jeremiah's neck and broke it.
11 And Hananiah spoke in the presence of all
the people, saying, "Thus says the Lord: 'Even
so I will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar
king of Babylon from the neck of all nations
within the space of two full years.' " And the
prophet Jeremiah went his way.

12 Now the word of the Lord came to
Jeremiah, after Hananiah the prophet had
broken the yoke from the neck of the prophet
Jeremiah, saying, 13 "Go and tell Hananiah,
saying, 'Thus says the Lord: "You have broken
the yokes of wood, but you have made in their
place yokes of iron." 14 For thus says the Lord
of hosts, the God of Israel: "I have put a yoke of
iron on the neck of all these nations, that they
may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon;
and they shall serve him. I have given him the
beasts of the field also." ' "

15 Then the prophet Jeremiah said to
Hananiah the prophet, "Hear now, Hananiah,
the Lord has not sent you, but you make this
people trust in a lie. 16 Therefore thus says the
Lord: 'Behold, I will cast you from the face of
the earth. This year you shall die, because you
have taught rebellion against the Lord.' "

17 So Hananiah the prophet died the same
year in the seventh month.

Jeremiah's Letter to the Captives

29 Now these *are* the words of the letter
that Jeremiah the prophet sent from
Jerusalem to the remainder of the elders who
were carried away captive—to the priests,
the prophets, and all the people whom
Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive
from Jerusalem to Babylon. 2 (This happened
after Jeconiah the king, the queen mother,
the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jeru-
salem, the craftsmen, and the smiths had
departed from Jerusalem.) 3 *The letter was sent*
by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan,
and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, whom
Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon, to
Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, saying,

4 Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God
of Israel, to all who were carried away
captive, whom I have caused to be carried
away from Jerusalem to Babylon:

5 Build houses and dwell *in them;* plant
gardens and eat their fruit. 6 Take wives
and beget sons and daughters; and
take wives for your sons and give your
daughters to husbands, so that they may
bear sons and daughters—that you may
be increased there, and not diminished.
7 And seek the peace of the city where
I have caused you to be carried away
captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for
in its peace you will have peace. 8 For
thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of
Israel: Do not let your prophets and your
diviners who are in your midst deceive
you, nor listen to your dreams which you

cause to be dreamed. 9For they prophesy
falsely to you in My name; I have not sent
them, says the Lord.

10 For thus says the Lord: After seventy years
are completed at Babylon, I will visit you
and perform My good word toward you,
and cause you to return to this place.
11For I know the thoughts that I think
toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of
peace and not of evil, to give you a future
and a hope. 12Then you will call upon Me
and go and pray to Me, and I will listen
to you. 13And you will seek Me and find
Me, when you search for Me with all your
heart. 14I will be found by you, says the
Lord, and I will bring you back from your
captivity; I will gather you from all the
nations and from all the places where I
have driven you, says the Lord, and I will
bring you to the place from which I cause
you to be carried away captive.

15 Because you have said, "The Lord has
raised up prophets for us in Babylon"—
16therefore thus says the Lord concerning
the king who sits on the throne of David,
concerning all the people who dwell in
this city, and concerning your brethren
who have not gone out with you into
captivity— 17thus says the Lord of hosts:
Behold, I will send on them the sword,
the famine, and the pestilence, and will
make them like rotten figs that cannot be
eaten, they are so bad. 18And I will pursue
them with the sword, with famine, and
with pestilence; and I will deliver them
to trouble among all the kingdoms of the
earth—to be a curse, an astonishment,
a hissing, and a reproach among all
the nations where I have driven them,
19because they have not heeded My
words, says the Lord, which I sent to them
by My servants the prophets, rising up
early and sending *them;* neither would
you heed, says the Lord. 20Therefore
hear the word of the Lord, all you of the
captivity, whom I have sent from Jerusa-
lem to Babylon.

21 Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God
of Israel, concerning Ahab the son
of Kolaiah, and Zedekiah the son of
Maaseiah, who prophesy a lie to you in
My name: Behold, I will deliver them
into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of
Babylon, and he shall slay them before
your eyes. 22And because of them a curse
shall be taken up by all the captivity
of Judah who *are* in Babylon, saying,
"The Lord make you like Zedekiah
and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon
roasted in the fire"; 23because they have
done disgraceful things in Israel, have
committed adultery with their neighbors'
wives, and have spoken lying words in
My name, which I have not commanded
them. Indeed I know, and *am* a witness,
says the Lord.

24 You shall also speak to Shemaiah the
Nehelamite, saying, 25Thus speaks the
Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying:
You have sent letters in your name to
all the people who *are* at Jerusalem, to
Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the
priest, and to all the priests, saying,
26"The Lord has made you priest instead
of Jehoiada the priest, so that there
should be officers *in* the house of the
Lord over every man *who* is demented
and considers himself a prophet, that
you should put him in prison and in the
stocks. 27Now therefore, why have you
not rebuked Jeremiah of Anathoth who
makes himself a prophet to you? 28For he
has sent to us *in* Babylon, saying, 'This
captivity is long; build houses and dwell
in them, and plant gardens and eat their
fruit.'"

29 Now Zephaniah the priest read this letter
in the hearing of Jeremiah the prophet.
30Then the word of the Lord came to
Jeremiah, saying: 31Send to all those
in captivity, saying, Thus says the Lord
concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite:
Because Shemaiah has prophesied to
you, and I have not sent him, and he has
caused you to trust in a lie— 32therefore
thus says the Lord: Behold, I will punish
Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his family:
he shall not have anyone to dwell among
this people, nor shall he see the good that

I will do for My people, says the Lord, because he has taught
rebellion against the Lord.

Restoration of Israel and Judah

30 The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, 2 "Thus
speaks the Lord God of Israel, saying: 'Write in a book for your-
self all the words that I have spoken to you. 3 For behold, the days are
coming,' says the Lord, 'that I will bring back from captivity My peo-
ple Israel and Judah,' says the Lord. 'And I will cause them to return to
the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.' "

4 Now these *are* the words that the Lord spoke concerning Israel
and Judah.

5 "For thus says the Lord:

'We have heard a voice of trembling,
Of fear, and not of peace.
6 Ask now, and see,
Whether a man is ever in labor with child?
So why do I see every man *with* his hands on his loins
Like a woman in labor,
And all faces turned pale?
7 Alas! For that day *is* great,
So that none *is* like it;
And it *is* the time of Jacob's trouble,
But he shall be saved out of it.

8 'For it shall come to pass in that day,'
Says the Lord of hosts,
'*That* I will break his yoke from your neck,
And will burst your bonds;
Foreigners shall no more enslave them.
9 But they shall serve the Lord their God,
And David their king,
Whom I will raise up for them.

10 'Therefore do not fear, O My servant Jacob,' says the Lord,
'Nor be dismayed, O Israel;
For behold, I will save you from afar,
And your seed from the land of their captivity.
Jacob shall return, have rest and be quiet,
And no one shall make *him* afraid.
11 For I *am* with you,' says the Lord, 'to save you;
Though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered
you,
Yet I will not make a complete end of you.
But I will correct you in justice,
And will not let you go altogether unpunished.'

12 "For thus says the Lord:

'Your affliction *is* incurable,
Your wound *is* severe.

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 30:1—33:26

SITUATION
Jeremiah did not just preach doom and gloom. He told the people to hope in God, who would restore them.

OBSERVATION
Christians must never lose all hope. Our belief in Jesus Christ gives us hope for the future.

INSPIRATION
For thousands of years, using his wit and charm, man had tried to be friends with God. And for thousands of years he had let God down more than he had lifted Him up. He's done the very thing he promised he'd never do. It was a fiasco. Even the holiest of the heroes sometimes forgot whose side they were on. Some of the scenarios in the Bible look more like the adventures of Sinbad the sailor than stories for vacation Bible school. Remember these characters?

Aaron. Right-hand man to Moses. Witness of the plagues. Member of the "Red Sea Riverbed Expedition." Holy priest of God. But if he was so saintly, what is he doing leading the Israelites in fireside aerobics in front of the golden calf?

The sons of Jacob. The fathers of the tribes of Israel. Great-grandsons of Abraham. Yet, if they were so special, why were they gagging their younger brother and sending him to Egypt?

David. The man after God's own heart. The King's king. The giant-slayer and songwriter. He's also the guy whose glasses got steamy as

a result of a bath on a roof. Unfortunately, the water wasn't his, nor was the woman he was watching.

And Samson. Swooning on Delilah's couch, drunk on the wine, perfume, and soft lights. He's thinking, *She's putting on something more comfortable.* She's thinking, *I know I put those shears in here somewhere.*

Adam adorned in fig leaves and stains of forbidden fruit. Moses throwing both a staff and a temper tantrum. King Saul looking into a crystal ball for the will of God. Noah, drunk and naked in his own tent.

These are the chosen ones of God? This is the royal lineage of the King? These are the ones who were to carry out God's mission?

It's easy to see the absurdity.

Why didn't He give up? Why didn't He let the globe spin off its axis?

Even after generations of people had spit in His face, He still loved them. After a nation of chosen ones had stripped Him naked and ripped His incarnated flesh, He still died for them. And even today, after billions have chosen to prostitute themselves before the pimps of power, fame, and wealth, He still waits for them.

It *is* inexplicable. It doesn't have a drop of logic nor a thread of rationality.

And yet, it is that very irrationality that gives the gospel its greatest defense. For only God could love like that. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do this project with someone close to you: spend an hour on your own making a list of all God has done for you. Then share together and rejoice in His goodness and faithfulness.

13 *There is* no one to plead your cause,
That you may be bound up;
You have no healing medicines.
14 All your lovers have forgotten you;
They do not seek you;
For I have wounded you with the wound of an enemy,
With the chastisement of a cruel one,
For the multitude of your iniquities,
Because your sins have increased.
15 Why do you cry about your affliction?
Your sorrow *is* incurable.
Because of the multitude of your iniquities,
Because your sins have increased,
I have done these things to you.

16 'Therefore all those who devour you shall be devoured;
And all your adversaries, every one of them, shall go into captivity;
Those who plunder you shall become plunder,
And all who prey upon you I will make a prey.
17 For I will restore health to you
And heal you of your wounds,' says the Lord,
'Because they called you an outcast *saying:*
"This *is* Zion;
No one seeks her."'

18 "Thus says the Lord:

'Behold, I will bring back the captivity of Jacob's tents,
And have mercy on his dwelling places;
The city shall be built upon its own mound,
And the palace shall remain according to its own plan.
19 Then out of them shall proceed thanksgiving
And the voice of those who make merry;
I will multiply them, and they shall not diminish;
I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small.
20 Their children also shall be as before,
And their congregation shall be established before Me;
And I will punish all who oppress them.
21 Their nobles shall be from among them,
And their governor shall come from their midst;
Then I will cause him to draw near,
And he shall approach Me;
For who *is* this who pledged his heart to approach Me?' says the Lord.
22 'You shall be My people,
And I will be your God.'"

23 Behold, the whirlwind of the Lord
Goes forth with fury,
A continuing whirlwind;
It will fall violently on the head of the wicked.

24 The fierce anger of the Lord will not return until He has done it,
And until He has performed the intents of His heart.

In the latter days you will consider it.

The Remnant of Israel Saved

31 "At the same time," says the Lord, "I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people."
2 Thus says the Lord:

"The people who survived the sword
Found grace in the wilderness—
Israel, when I went to give him rest."

3 The Lord has appeared of old to me, *saying:*
"Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love;
Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.
4 Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt,
O virgin of Israel!
You shall again be adorned with your tambourines,
And shall go forth in the dances of those who rejoice.
5 You shall yet plant vines on the mountains of Samaria;
The planters shall plant and eat *them* as ordinary food.
6 For there shall be a day
When the watchmen will cry on Mount Ephraim,
'Arise, and let us go up *to* Zion,
To the Lord our God.'"

7 For thus says the Lord:

"Sing with gladness for Jacob,
And shout among the chief of the nations;
Proclaim, give praise, and say,
'O Lord, save Your people,
The remnant of Israel!'
8 Behold, I will bring them from the north country,
And gather them from the ends of the earth,
Among them the blind and the lame,
The woman with child
And the one who labors with child, together;
A great throng shall return there.
9 They shall come with weeping,
And with supplications I will lead them.
I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters,
In a straight way in which they shall not stumble;
For I am a Father to Israel,
And Ephraim *is* My firstborn.

10 "Hear the word of the Lord, O nations,
And declare *it* in the isles afar off, and say,
'He who scattered Israel will gather him,
And keep him as a shepherd *does* his flock.'

EXPLORATION
Hope—Proverbs 13:12; Isaiah 40:31; Jeremiah 29:11; Romans 15:13; Hebrews 11:1.

The truth is, every touchdown in life is a team effort. Applaud your teammates.

—Max Lucado (Traveling Light)

11 For the Lord has redeemed Jacob,
And ransomed him from the hand of one
stronger than he.
12 Therefore they shall come and sing in the
height of Zion,
Streaming to the goodness of the Lord—
For wheat and new wine and oil,
For the young of the flock and the herd;
Their souls shall be like a well-watered
garden,
And they shall sorrow no more at all.

13 "Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance,
And the young men and the old, together;
For I will turn their mourning to joy,
Will comfort them,
And make them rejoice rather than
sorrow.
14 I will satiate the soul of the priests with
abundance,
And My people shall be satisfied with My
goodness, says the Lord."

Mercy on Ephraim

15 Thus says the Lord:

"A voice was heard in Ramah,
Lamentation *and* bitter weeping,
Rachel weeping for her children,
Refusing to be comforted for her
children,
Because they *are* no more."

16 Thus says the Lord:

"Refrain your voice from weeping,
And your eyes from tears;
For your work shall be rewarded, says the
Lord,
And they shall come back from the land
of the enemy.
17 There is hope in your future, says the
Lord,
That *your* children shall come back to
their own border.

18 "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning
himself:
'You have chastised me, and I was
chastised,
Like an untrained bull;
Restore me, and I will return,
For You *are* the Lord my God.
19 Surely, after my turning, I repented;
And after I was instructed, I struck myself
on the thigh;
I was ashamed, yes, even humiliated,
Because I bore the reproach of my
youth.'
20 *Is* Ephraim My dear son?
Is he a pleasant child?
For though I spoke against him,
I earnestly remember him still;
Therefore My heart yearns for him;
I will surely have mercy on him, says the
Lord.

21 "Set up signposts,
Make landmarks;
Set your heart toward the highway,
The way in *which* you went.
Turn back, O virgin of Israel,
Turn back to these your cities.
22 How long will you gad about,
O you backsliding daughter?
For the Lord has created a new thing in
the earth—
A woman shall encompass a man."

Future Prosperity of Judah

23 Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: "They shall again use this speech in the land of Judah and in its cities, when I bring back their captivity: 'The Lord bless you, O home of justice, *and* mountain of holiness!' 24 And there shall dwell in Judah itself, and in all its cities together, farmers and those going out with flocks. 25 For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul."

26 After this I awoke and looked around, and my sleep was sweet to me.

27 "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast. 28 And it shall come to pass, *that* as I have watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to throw down, to destroy, and to afflict, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord. 29 In those days they shall say no more:

'The fathers have eaten sour grapes,
And the children's teeth are set on edge.'

30 But every one shall die for his own iniquity;
every man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth
shall be set on edge.

A New Covenant

31 "Behold, the days are coming, says the
Lord, when I will make a new covenant with
the house of Israel and with the house of
Judah— 32 not according to the covenant that
I made with their fathers in the day *that* I
took them by the hand to lead them out of
the land of Egypt, My covenant which they
broke, though I was a husband to them,[a] says
the Lord. 33 But this *is* the covenant that I will
make with the house of Israel after those days,
says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds,
and write it on their hearts; and I will be their
God, and they shall be My people. 34 No more
shall every man teach his neighbor, and every
man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for
they all shall know Me, from the least of them
to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I
will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will
remember no more."

35 Thus says the Lord,
Who gives the sun for a light by day,
The ordinances of the moon and the stars
for a light by night,
Who disturbs the sea,
And its waves roar
(The Lord of hosts *is* His name):

36 "If those ordinances depart
From before Me, says the Lord,
Then the seed of Israel shall also cease
From being a nation before Me forever."

37 Thus says the Lord:

"If heaven above can be measured,
And the foundations of the earth
searched out beneath,
I will also cast off all the seed of Israel
For all that they have done, says the Lord.

38 "Behold, the days are coming, says the
Lord, that the city shall be built for the Lord
from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner
Gate. 39 The surveyor's line shall again extend
straight forward over the hill Gareb; then it
shall turn toward Goath. 40 And the whole val-
ley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and
all the fields as far as the Brook Kidron, to the
corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, *shall
be* holy to the Lord. It shall not be plucked up
or thrown down anymore forever."

Jeremiah Buys a Field

32 The word that came to Jeremiah from
the Lord in the tenth year of Zedekiah
king of Judah, which was the eighteenth
year of Nebuchadnezzar. 2 For then the king
of Babylon's army besieged Jerusalem, and
Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court
of the prison, which *was in* the king of Judah's
house. 3 For Zedekiah king of Judah had shut
him up, saying, "Why do you prophesy and
say, 'Thus says the Lord: "Behold, I will give
this city into the hand of the king of Babylon,
and he shall take it; 4 and Zedekiah king of
Judah shall not escape from the hand of the
Chaldeans, but shall surely be delivered into
the hand of the king of Babylon, and shall
speak with him face to face,[a] and see him
eye to eye; 5 then he shall lead Zedekiah to
Babylon, and there he shall be until I visit
him," says the Lord; "though you fight with the
Chaldeans, you shall not succeed" '?"

6 And Jeremiah said, "The word of the Lord
came to me, saying, 7 'Behold, Hanamel the
son of Shallum your uncle will come to you,
saying, "Buy my field which *is* in Anathoth,
for the right of redemption *is* yours to buy
it." ' 8 Then Hanamel my uncle's son came to
me in the court of the prison according to the
word of the Lord, and said to me, 'Please buy
my field that *is* in Anathoth, which *is* in the
country of Benjamin; for the right of inheri-
tance *is* yours, and the redemption yours;
buy *it* for yourself.' Then I knew that this was
the word of the Lord. 9 So I bought the field
from Hanamel, the son of my uncle who *was*
in Anathoth, and weighed *out to* him the
money—seventeen shekels of silver. 10 And I
signed the deed and sealed *it,* took witnesses,
and weighed the money on the scales. 11 So
I took the purchase deed, *both* that which

31:32 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint and Syriac read *and I turned away from them.*
32:4 [a]Literally *mouth to mouth*

was sealed *according* to the law and custom,
and that which was open; 12 and I gave the
purchase deed to Baruch the son of Neriah,
son of Mahseiah, in the presence of Hanamel
my uncle's *son,* and in the presence of the wit-
nesses who signed the purchase deed, before
all the Jews who sat in the court of the prison.
13 "Then I charged Baruch before them,
saying, 14 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, the
God of Israel: "Take these deeds, both this
purchase deed which is sealed and this deed
which is open, and put them in an earthen
vessel, that they may last many days." 15 For
thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel:
"Houses and fields and vineyards shall be pos-
sessed again in this land." '

Jeremiah Prays for Understanding

16 "Now when I had delivered the purchase
deed to Baruch the son of Neriah, I prayed
to the Lord, saying: 17 'Ah, Lord God! Behold,
You have made the heavens and the earth
by Your great power and outstretched arm.
There is nothing too hard for You. 18 *You* show
lovingkindness to thousands, and repay the
iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their
children after them—the Great, the Mighty
God, whose name *is* the Lord of hosts. 19 *You*
are great in counsel and mighty in work, for
Your eyes *are* open to all the ways of the sons
of men, to give everyone according to his
ways and according to the fruit of his doings.
20 You have set signs and wonders in the land
of Egypt, to this day, and in Israel and among
other men; and You have made Yourself a
name, as it is this day. 21 You have brought Your
people Israel out of the land of Egypt with
signs and wonders, with a strong hand and an
outstretched arm, and with great terror; 22 You
have given them this land, of which You swore
to their fathers to give them—"a land flowing
with milk and honey."[a] 23 And they came in
and took possession of it, but they have not
obeyed Your voice or walked in Your law. They
have done nothing of all that You commanded
them to do; therefore You have caused all this
calamity to come upon them.
24 'Look, the siege mounds! They have come
to the city to take it; and the city has been
given into the hand of the Chaldeans who
fight against it, because of the sword and
famine and pestilence. What You have spoken
has happened; there You see *it!* 25 And You
have said to me, O Lord God, "Buy the field for
money, and take witnesses"!—yet the city has
been given into the hand of the Chaldeans.' "

God's Assurance of the People's Return

26 Then the word of the Lord came to
Jeremiah, saying, 27 "Behold, I *am* the Lord,
the God of all flesh. Is there anything too
hard for Me? 28 Therefore thus says the Lord:
'Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the
Chaldeans, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar
king of Babylon, and he shall take it. 29 And
the Chaldeans who fight against this city shall
come and set fire to this city and burn it, with
the houses on whose roofs they have offered
incense to Baal and poured out drink offer-
ings to other gods, to provoke Me to anger;
30 because the children of Israel and the chil-
dren of Judah have done only evil before Me
from their youth. For the children of Israel
have provoked Me only to anger with the work
of their hands,' says the Lord. 31 'For this city
has been to Me *a provocation of* My anger and
My fury from the day that they built it, even
to this day; so I will remove it from before My
face 32 because of all the evil of the children of
Israel and the children of Judah, which they
have done to provoke Me to anger—they,
their kings, their princes, their priests, their
prophets, the men of Judah, and the inhabit-
ants of Jerusalem. 33 And they have turned to
Me the back, and not the face; though I taught
them, rising up early and teaching *them,* yet
they have not listened to receive instruction.
34 But they set their abominations in the house
which is called by My name, to defile it. 35 And
they built the high places of Baal which *are*
in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause
their sons and their daughters to pass through
the fire to Molech, which I did not command
them, nor did it come into My mind that they
should do this abomination, to cause Judah
to sin.'
36 "Now therefore, thus says the Lord, the
God of Israel, concerning this city of which
you say, 'It shall be delivered into the hand

32:22 [a]Exodus 3:8

of the king of Babylon by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: 37 Behold, I will gather them out of all countries where I have driven them in My anger, in My fury, and in great wrath; I will bring them back to this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely. 38 They shall be My people, and I will be their God; 39 then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. 40 And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me. 41 Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in this land, with all My heart and with all My soul.'

42 "For thus says the Lord: 'Just as I have brought all this great calamity on this people, so I will bring on them all the good that I have promised them. 43 And fields will be bought in this land of which you say, "*It is* desolate, without man or beast; it has been given into the hand of the Chaldeans." 44 Men will buy fields for money, sign deeds and seal *them,* and take witnesses, in the land of Benjamin, in the places around Jerusalem, in the cities of Judah, in the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the lowland, and in the cities of the South; for I will cause their captives to return,' says the Lord."

Excellence of the Restored Nation

33 Moreover the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah a second time, while he was still shut up in the court of the prison, saying, 2 "Thus says the Lord who made it, the Lord who formed it to establish it (the Lord *is* His name): 3 'Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.'

4 "For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city and the houses of the kings of Judah, which have been pulled down *to fortify*[a] against the siege mounds and the sword: 5 'They come to fight with the Chaldeans, but *only* to fill their places[a] with the dead bodies of men whom I will slay in My anger and My fury, all for whose wickedness I have hidden My face from this city. 6 Behold, I will bring it health and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them the abundance of peace and truth. 7 And I will cause the captives of Judah and the captives of Israel to return, and will rebuild those places as at the first. 8 I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned and by which they have transgressed against Me. 9 Then it shall be to Me a name of joy, a praise, and an honor before all nations of the earth, who shall hear all the good that I do to them; they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and all the prosperity that I provide for it.'

10 "Thus says the Lord: 'Again there shall be heard in this place—of which you say, "It *is* desolate, without man and without beast"—in the cities of Judah, in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man and without inhabitant and without beast, 11 the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who will say:

"Praise the Lord of hosts,
For the Lord *is* good,
For His mercy *endures* forever"—

and of those *who will* bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord. For I will cause the captives of the land to return as at the first,' says the Lord.

12 "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'In this place which is desolate, without man and without beast, and in all its cities, there shall again be a dwelling place of shepherds causing *their* flocks to lie down. 13 In the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the lowland, in the cities of the South, in the land of Benjamin, in the places around Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, the flocks shall again pass under the hands of him who counts *them,*' says the Lord.

14 'Behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord, 'that I will perform that good thing which I have promised to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah:

15 'In those days and at that time
I will cause to grow up to David

33:4 [a]Compare Isaiah 22:10 **33:5** [a]Compare 2 Kings 23:14

A Branch of righteousness;
He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.
16 In those days Judah will be saved,
And Jerusalem will dwell safely.
And this *is the name* by which she will be called:

THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.'[a]

17 "For thus says the Lord: 'David shall never lack a man to sit on the
throne of the house of Israel; 18 nor shall the priests, the Levites, lack a
man to offer burnt offerings before Me, to kindle grain offerings, and
to sacrifice continually.' "

The Permanence of God's Covenant

19 And the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying, 20 "Thus says
the Lord: 'If you can break My covenant with the day and My cov-
enant with the night, so that there will not be day and night in their
season, 21 then My covenant may also be broken with David My ser-
vant, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and with
the Levites, the priests, My ministers. 22 As the host of heaven cannot
be numbered, nor the sand of the sea measured, so will I multiply
the descendants of David My servant and the Levites who minister
to Me.' "

23 Moreover the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying, 24 "Have
you not considered what these people have spoken, saying, 'The two
families which the Lord has chosen, He has also cast them off'? Thus
they have despised My people, as if they should no more be a nation
before them.

25 "Thus says the Lord: 'If My covenant *is* not with day and night,
and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth,
26 then I will cast away the descendants of Jacob and David My ser-
vant, *so* that I will not take *any* of his descendants *to be* rulers over
the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will cause their
captives to return, and will have mercy on them.' "

Zedekiah Warned by God

34 The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, when
Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army, all the
kingdoms of the earth under his dominion, and all the people, fought
against Jerusalem and all its cities, saying, 2 "Thus says the Lord,
the God of Israel: 'Go and speak to Zedekiah king of Judah and tell
him, "Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will give this city into the hand
of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire. 3 And you shall
not escape from his hand, but shall surely be taken and delivered
into his hand; your eyes shall see the eyes of the king of Babylon,
he shall speak with you face to face,[a] and you shall go to Babylon.' " '
4 Yet hear the word of the Lord, O Zedekiah king of Judah! Thus says
the Lord concerning you: 'You shall not die by the sword. 5 You shall
die in peace; as in the ceremonies of your fathers, the former kings
who were before you, so they shall burn *incense* for you and lament

33:16 [a]Compare 23:5, 6 **34:3** [a]Literally *mouth to mouth*

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 34:1—35:19

SITUATION
Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem with a huge army. King Zedekiah of Judah fought for survival.

OBSERVATION
In chapter 35 the author contrasted faithless Judah and the faithful Recabites. The obedience of the latter would be rewarded.

INSPIRATION
God won't be cajoled, commanded, conjured up, or called down. He is a personal God who loves and heals and helps and intervenes. He doesn't respond to magic potions or clever slogans. He looks for more. He looks for reverence, obedience, and God-hungry hearts.

And when He sees them, He comes! And when He comes, let the band begin. And, yes, a reverent heart and a dancing foot can belong to the same person. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Have you ever promised to do something for the Lord if He would grant your request? Then you're making a demand on God; He doesn't work that way. He wants us to be loyal and obedient constantly. His answer to our prayers reflects His perfect will for us.

EXPLORATION
Obedience—Genesis 2:16, 17; Exodus 8:25–29; Joshua 11:15; 1 Samuel 15:1–3, 9; Matthew 23:23, 24; Romans 6:17.

for you, *saying,* "Alas, lord!" For I have pronounced the word, says the Lord.' "

6 Then Jeremiah the prophet spoke all these words to Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem, 7 when the king of Babylon's army fought against Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish and Azekah; for *only* these fortified cities remained of the cities of Judah.

Treacherous Treatment of Slaves

8 *This is* the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people who *were* at Jerusalem to proclaim liberty to them: 9 that every man should set free his male and female slave—a Hebrew man or woman—that no one should keep a Jewish brother in bondage. 10 Now when all the princes and all the people, who had entered into the covenant, heard that everyone should set free his male and female slaves, that no one should keep them in bondage anymore, they obeyed and let *them* go. 11 But afterward they changed their minds and made the male and female slaves return, whom they had set free, and brought them into subjection as male and female slaves.

12 Therefore the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, 13 "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: 'I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, saying, 14 "At the end of seven years let every man set free his Hebrew brother, who has been sold to him; and when he has served you six years, you shall let him go free from you." But your fathers did not obey Me nor incline their ear. 15 Then you recently turned and did what was right in My sight—every man proclaiming liberty to his neighbor; and you made a covenant before Me in the house which is called by My name. 16 Then you turned around and profaned My name, and every one of you brought back his male and female slaves, whom you had set at liberty, at their pleasure, and brought them back into subjection, to be your male and female slaves.'

17 "Therefore thus says the Lord: 'You have not obeyed Me in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother and every one to his neighbor. Behold, I proclaim liberty to you,' says the Lord—'to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine! And I will deliver you to trouble among all the kingdoms of the earth. 18 And I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not performed the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between the parts of it— 19 the princes of Judah, the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf— 20 I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life. Their dead bodies shall be for meat for the birds of the heaven and the beasts of the earth. 21 And I will give Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes into the hand of their enemies, into the hand of those who seek their life, and into the hand of the king of Babylon's army which has gone back from you. 22 Behold, I will command,' says the Lord, 'and cause them to return to this city. They will fight against it and take it and burn it with fire; and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without inhabitant.' "

The Obedient Rechabites

35 The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying, 2 "Go to the house of the Rechabites, speak to them, and bring them into the house of the Lord, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink."

3 Then I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habazziniah, his brothers and all his sons, and the whole house of the Rechabites, 4 and I brought them into the house of the Lord, into the chamber of the sons of Hanan the son of Igdaliah, a man of God, which *was* by the chamber of the princes, above the chamber of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the keeper of the door. 5 Then I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites bowls full of wine, and cups; and I said to them, "Drink wine."

6 But they said, "We will drink no wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying, 'You shall drink no wine, you nor your sons, forever. 7 You shall not build a house, sow seed, plant a vineyard, nor have *any of these;* but all your days you shall dwell in tents, that you may live many days in

the land where you are sojourners.' 8Thus we have obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, in all that he charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, or our daughters, 9nor to build ourselves houses to dwell in; nor do we have vineyard, field, or seed. 10But we have dwelt in tents, and have obeyed and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us. 11But it came to pass, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up into the land, that we said, 'Come, let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans and for fear of the army of the Syrians.' So we dwell at Jerusalem."

12Then came the word of the Lord to Jeremiah, saying, 13"Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Go and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, "Will you not receive instruction to obey My words?" says the Lord. 14"The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, which he commanded his sons, not to drink wine, are performed; for to this day they drink none, and obey their father's commandment. But although I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, you did not obey Me. 15I have also sent to you all My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending *them,* saying, 'Turn now everyone from his evil way, amend your doings, and do not go after other gods to serve them; then you will dwell in the land which I have given you and your fathers.' But you have not inclined your ear, nor obeyed Me. 16Surely the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father, which he commanded them, but this people has not obeyed Me." '

17"Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Behold, I will bring on Judah and on all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the doom that I have pronounced against them; because I have spoken to them but they have not heard, and I have called to them but they have not answered.' "

18And Jeremiah said to the house of the Rechabites, "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Because you have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts and done according to all that he commanded you, 19therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: "Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not lack a man to stand before Me forever." ' "

The Scroll Read in the Temple

36 Now it came to pass in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, *that* this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: 2"Take a scroll of a book and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah even to this day. 3It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the adversities which I purpose to bring upon them, that everyone may turn from his evil way, that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin."

4Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah; and Baruch wrote on a scroll of a book, at the instruction of Jeremiah,[a] all the words of the Lord which He had spoken to him. 5And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, "I *am* confined, I cannot go into the house of the Lord.

36:4 [a]Literally *from Jeremiah's mouth*

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 36:1–32

SITUATION
When he heard Jeremiah's prophecy, King Jehoiakim instructed his aide to burn Jeremiah's message. The king also issued a decree to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch the scribe, but God aided them.

OBSERVATION
Pride blinds people and can endanger a person's spiritual life.

INSPIRATION
Thousands of years before Jesus was called the Lamb of God, God promised forgiveness.

"Someday," God confided to Jeremiah, "these people will be my people and I will be their God."

"And someday," wrote David, "the mistakes of men will be tossed, not under a rug, or behind the sofa, but far, far away. As far as the east is from the west."

And do you know what? That someday came. On a garbage heap outside of Jerusalem.

Someday the almighty God, who has every right to make me burn forever, will look past my apathy, point to the Cross and invite me to come home . . . forgiven . . . forever. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Do you know someone who has asked God for forgiveness, yet still dwells in guilt? Write that person a note with a fitting Scripture verse and a word of encouragement that God forgives first, then He forgets.

6 You go, therefore, and read from the scroll which you have written at
my instruction,[a] the words of the Lord, in the hearing of the people in
the Lord's house on the day of fasting. And you shall also read them
in the hearing of all Judah who come from their cities. 7 It may be that
they will present their supplication before the Lord, and everyone will
turn from his evil way. For great *is* the anger and the fury that the Lord
has pronounced against this people." 8 And Baruch the son of Neriah
did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, read-
ing from the book the words of the Lord in the Lord's house.

9 Now it came to pass in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of
Josiah, king of Judah, in the ninth month, *that* they proclaimed a fast
before the Lord to all the people in Jerusalem, and to all the people
who came from the cities of Judah to Jerusalem. 10 Then Baruch read
from the book the words of Jeremiah in the house of the Lord, in the
chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the upper
court at the entry of the New Gate of the Lord's house, in the hearing
of all the people.

The Scroll Read in the Palace

11 When Michaiah the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, heard
all the words of the Lord from the book, 12 he then went down to the
king's house, into the scribe's chamber; and there all the princes were
sitting—Elishama the scribe, Delaiah the son of Shemaiah, Elnathan
the son of Achbor, Gemariah the son of Shaphan, Zedekiah the son of
Hananiah, and all the princes. 13 Then Michaiah declared to them all
the words that he had heard when Baruch read the book in the hear-
ing of the people. 14 Therefore all the princes sent Jehudi the son of
Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cushi, to Baruch, saying,
"Take in your hand the scroll from which you have read in the hearing
of the people, and come." So Baruch the son of Neriah took the scroll
in his hand and came to them. 15 And they said to him, "Sit down now,
and read it in our hearing." So Baruch read *it* in their hearing.

16 Now it happened, when they had heard all the words, that they
looked in fear from one to another, and said to Baruch, "We will surely
tell the king of all these words." 17 And they asked Baruch, saying, "Tell
us now, how did you write all these words—at his instruction?"[a]

18 So Baruch answered them, "He proclaimed with his mouth all
these words to me, and I wrote *them* with ink in the book."

19 Then the princes said to Baruch, "Go and hide, you and Jeremiah;
and let no one know where you are."

The King Destroys Jeremiah's Scroll

20 And they went to the king, into the court; but they stored the
scroll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and told all the words in
the hearing of the king. 21 So the king sent Jehudi to bring the scroll,
and he took it from Elishama the scribe's chamber. And Jehudi read
it in the hearing of the king and in the hearing of all the princes who
stood beside the king. 22 Now the king was sitting in the winter house
in the ninth month, with *a fire* burning on the hearth before him.
23 And it happened, when Jehudi had read three or four columns,

36:6 [a]Literally *from my mouth* **36:17** [a]Literally *with his mouth*

EXPLORATION
God Provided a Way—Psalm 68:18; Isaiah 63:9; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:23.

that the king cut it with the scribe's knife and cast *it* into the fire that *was* on the hearth, until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that *was* on the hearth. 24 Yet they were not afraid, nor did they tear their garments, the king nor any of his servants who heard all these words. 25 Nevertheless Elnathan, Delaiah, and Gemariah implored the king not to burn the scroll; but he would not listen to them. 26 And the king commanded Jerahmeel the king's[a] son, Seraiah the son of Azriel, and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel, to seize Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet, but the Lord hid them.

Jeremiah Rewrites the Scroll

27 Now after the king had burned the scroll with the words which Baruch had written at the instruction of Jeremiah,[a] the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying: 28 "Take yet another scroll, and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll which Jehoiakim the king of Judah has burned. 29 And you shall say to Jehoiakim king of Judah, 'Thus says the Lord: "You have burned this scroll, saying, 'Why have you written in it that the king of Babylon will certainly come and destroy this land, and cause man and beast to cease from here?' " 30 Therefore thus says the Lord concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: "He shall have no one to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat of the day and the frost of the night. 31 I will punish him, his family, and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring on them, on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and on the men of Judah all the doom that I have pronounced against them; but they did not heed." ' "

32 Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah, who wrote on it at the instruction of Jeremiah[a] all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And besides, there were added to them many similar words.

Zedekiah's Vain Hope

37 Now King Zedekiah the son of Josiah reigned instead of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made king in the land of Judah. 2 But neither he nor his servants nor the people of the land gave heed to the words of the Lord which He spoke by the prophet Jeremiah.

3 And Zedekiah the king sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, to the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "Pray now to the Lord our God for us." 4 Now Jeremiah was coming and going among the people, for they had not *yet* put him in prison. 5 Then Pharaoh's army came up from Egypt; and when the Chaldeans who were besieging Jerusalem heard news of them, they departed from Jerusalem.

6 Then the word of the Lord came to the prophet Jeremiah, saying, 7 "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Thus you shall say to the king of Judah, who sent you to Me to inquire of Me: "Behold, Pharaoh's army which has come up to help you will return to Egypt, to their

36:26 [a]Hebrew *Hammelech* **36:27** [a]Literally *from Jeremiah's mouth*
36:32 [a]Literally *from Jeremiah's mouth*

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 37:1–21

SITUATION
When Jeremiah prophesied against the king, the king imprisoned him on the false charge of treason. After a lengthy stay in prison, King Zedekiah released Jeremiah.

OBSERVATION
The world hates to hear what God says. As a result, unbelievers will sometimes accuse God's servants falsely. We need not be afraid because we trust in God.

INSPIRATION
What if your fears are nothing more than the devil's hoax? A hell-hatched, joy-stealing prank?

I have a friend who was dreading a letter from the IRS. According to their early calculation, he owed them money, money he did not have. He was told to expect a letter detailing the amount. When the letter arrived, his courage failed him. He couldn't bear to open it, so the envelope sat on his desk for five days while he writhed in dread. How much could it be? Where would he get the funds? For how long would he be sent to prison? Finally he summoned the gumption to open the envelope. He found, not a bill to be paid, but a check to be cashed. The IRS, as it turned out, owed him money! He had wasted five days on needless fear. There are very few monsters who warrant the fear we have of them. . . .

The apostle Paul . . . penned his final words in the bowels of a Roman prison, chained to a guard—within earshot of

own land. 8And the Chaldeans shall come back and fight against this city, and take it and burn it with fire."' 9Thus says the Lord: 'Do not deceive yourselves, saying, "The Chaldeans will surely depart from us," for they will not depart. 10For though you had defeated the whole army of the Chaldeans who fight against you, and there remained *only* wounded men among them, they would rise up, every man in his tent, and burn the city with fire.'"

Jeremiah Imprisoned

11And it happened, when the army of the Chaldeans left *the siege* of Jerusalem for fear of Pharaoh's army, 12that Jeremiah went out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin to claim his property there among the people. 13And when he was in the Gate of Benjamin, a captain of the guard *was* there whose name *was* Irijah the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah; and he seized Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "You are defecting to the Chaldeans!"

14Then Jeremiah said, "False! I am not defecting to the Chaldeans." But he did not listen to him.

So Irijah seized Jeremiah and brought him to the princes. 15Therefore the princes were angry with Jeremiah, and they struck him and put him in prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe. For they had made that the prison.

16When Jeremiah entered the dungeon and the cells, and Jeremiah had remained there many days, 17then Zedekiah the king sent and took him *out*. The king asked him secretly in his house, and said, "Is there *any* word from the Lord?"

And Jeremiah said, "There is." Then he said, "You shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon!"

18Moreover Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah, "What offense have I committed against you, against your servants, or against this people, that you have put me in prison? 19Where now *are* your prophets who prophesied to you, saying, 'The king of Babylon will not come against you or against this land'? 20Therefore please hear now, O my lord the king. Please, let my petition be accepted before you, and do not make me return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there."

21Then Zedekiah the king commanded that they should commit Jeremiah to the court of the prison, and that they should give him daily a piece of bread from the bakers' street, until all the bread in the city was gone. Thus Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.

Jeremiah in the Dungeon

38 Now Shephatiah the son of Mattan, Gedaliah the son of Pashhur, Jucal[a] the son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur the son of Malchiah heard the words that Jeremiah had spoken to all the people, saying, 2"Thus says the Lord: 'He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but he who goes over to the Chaldeans shall live; his life shall be as a prize to him, and he shall live.'[a] 3Thus says the Lord: 'This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which shall take it.'"

4Therefore the princes said to the king, "Please, let this man be

38:1 [a]Same as *Jehucal* (compare 37:3) **38:2** [a]Compare 21:9

his executioner's footsteps. Worst-case scenario? Not from Paul's perspective. "God's looking after me, keeping me safe in the kingdom of heaven. All praise to him, praise forever!" (2 Timothy 4:18 MSG).

Paul chose to trust his Father. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Jesus promised that difficult times would come and that His followers would face persecution for believing in Him. Being afraid does nothing but waste our time. We should instead pray to God to help us past our fear so that we trust in Him.

EXPLORATION

Unjust Suffering—Philippians 1:29; James 5:10; 1 Peter 5:10.

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 38:1–28

SITUATION

Judah's leaders had persecuted Jeremiah repeatedly for faithfully proclaiming God's message. In this passage, the prophet was thrown into a well to die. A Cushite, Ebed-Melech, was willing to stand up for Jeremiah and plead for his life.

put to death, for thus he weakens the hands of the men of war who remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man does not seek the welfare of this people, but their harm."

5 Then Zedekiah the king said, "Look, he *is* in your hand. For the king can *do* nothing against you." 6 So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the king's[a] son, which *was* in the court of the prison, and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. And in the dungeon *there was* no water, but mire. So Jeremiah sank in the mire.

7 Now Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs, who was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon. When the king was sitting at the Gate of Benjamin, 8 Ebed-Melech went out of the king's house and spoke to the king, saying: 9 "My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon, and he is likely to die from hunger in the place where he is. For *there is* no more bread in the city." 10 Then the king commanded Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian, saying, "Take from here thirty men with you, and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon before he dies." 11 So Ebed-Melech took the men with him and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took from there old clothes and old rags, and let them down by ropes into the dungeon to Jeremiah. 12 Then Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian said to Jeremiah, "Please put these old clothes and rags under your armpits, under the ropes." And Jeremiah did so. 13 So they pulled Jeremiah up with ropes and lifted him out of the dungeon. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.

Zedekiah's Fears and Jeremiah's Advice

14 Then Zedekiah the king sent and had Jeremiah the prophet brought to him at the third entrance of the house of the Lord. And the king said to Jeremiah, "I will ask you something. Hide nothing from me."

15 Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "If I declare *it* to you, will you not surely put me to death? And if I give you advice, you will not listen to me."

16 So Zedekiah the king swore secretly to Jeremiah, saying, "*As* the Lord lives, who made our very souls, I will not put you to death, nor will I give you into the hand of these men who seek your life."

17 Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "Thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: 'If you surely surrender to the king of Babylon's princes, then your soul shall live; this city shall not be burned with fire, and you and your house shall live. 18 But if you do not surrender to the king of Babylon's princes, then this city shall be given into the hand of the Chaldeans; they shall burn it with fire, and you shall not escape from their hand.'"

19 And Zedekiah the king said to Jeremiah, "I am afraid of the Jews who have defected to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they abuse me."

20 But Jeremiah said, "They shall not deliver *you.* Please, obey the voice of the Lord which I speak to you. So it shall be well with you,

38:6 [a] Hebrew *Hammelech*

OBSERVATION
Followers of Christ should expect to be persecuted. Commitment to God will not always make life easy.

INSPIRATION
Make sure the hull of your convictions can withstand the stress of collisions . . . How sturdy are the bolts of your belief? Reinforce them with daily Bible readings, regular worship, and earnest communion with God. . . .

And remember: "All these [challenging times] are the beginning of birth pains" (Matthew 24:8 NIV), and birth pangs aren't all bad. (Easy for me to say.) Birth pains signal the onset of the final push. The pediatrician assures the mom-to-be, "It's going to hurt for a time, but it's going to get better." Jesus assures us of the same. Global conflicts indicate our date on the maternity calendar. We are in the final hours, just a few pushes from delivery, a few brief ticks of eternity's clock from the great crowning of creation. A whole new world is coming!

"These things must come to pass" (Matthew 24:6). *Must* is a welcome word that affirms that all events, even the most violent, are under a divine plan. Every trial and trouble has a place in God's scheme. . . .

All things, big and small, flow out of the purpose of God and serve His good will. When the world appears out of control, it isn't. When warmongers appear to be in charge, they aren't. When ecological catastrophes dominate the day, don't let them dominate you. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado).

APPLICATION
Are you going through a difficult time because of your faith in Christ? Do people look down upon you or exclude you because of

and your soul shall live. 21 But if you refuse to surrender, this *is* the word that the Lord has shown me: 22 'Now behold, all the women who are left in the king of Judah's house *shall be* surrendered to the king of Babylon's princes, and those *women* shall say:

"Your close friends have set upon you
And prevailed against you;
Your feet have sunk in the mire,
And they have turned away again."

23 'So they shall surrender all your wives and children to the Chaldeans. You shall not escape from their hand, but shall be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon. And you shall cause this city to be burned with fire.' "

24 Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "Let no one know of these words, and you shall not die. 25 But if the princes hear that I have talked with you, and they come to you and say to you, 'Declare to us now what you have said to the king, and also what the king said to you; do not hide *it* from us, and we will not put you to death,' 26 then you shall say to them, 'I presented my request before the king, that he would not make me return to Jonathan's house to die there.' "

27 Then all the princes came to Jeremiah and asked him. And he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded. So they stopped speaking with him, for the conversation had not been heard. 28 Now Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison until the day that Jerusalem was taken. And he was *there* when Jerusalem was taken.

The Fall of Jerusalem

39 In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came against Jerusalem, and besieged it. 2 In the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, on the ninth *day* of the month, the city was penetrated.

3 Then all the princes of the king of Babylon came in and sat in the Middle Gate: Nergal-Sharezer, Samgar-Nebo, Sarsechim, Rabsaris,[a] Nergal-Sarezer, Rabmag,[b] with the rest of the princes of the king of Babylon.

4 So it was, when Zedekiah the king of Judah and all the men of war saw them, that they fled and went out of the city by night, by way of the king's garden, by the gate between the two walls. And he went out by way of the plain.[a] 5 But the Chaldean army pursued them and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. And when they had captured him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, to Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he pronounced judgment on him. 6 Then the king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes in Riblah; the king of Babylon also killed all the nobles of Judah. 7 Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him with bronze fetters to carry him off to Babylon. 8 And the Chaldeans burned the

39:3 [a]A title, probably *Chief Officer;* also verse 13 [b]A title, probably *Troop Commander;* also verse 13 **39:4** [a]Or *the Arabah,* that is, the Jordan Valley

your faith? Do you know some Christians who are undergoing persecution or having particularly tough times? Pray for these people. Pray for strength to endure for yourself and others, then band together with others in need.

EXPLORATION
Struggles—Mark 13:9; John 15:18–21; 2 Timothy 3:10–12; 1 Peter 4:12–19.

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 39:1–18

SITUATION
After Zedekiah had ruled Judah for eleven years, the Babylonians captured Jerusalem. The Babylonians deported the rich and powerful from the conquered land and left the poor behind.

OBSERVATION
Note the contrast in this chapter. Zedekiah had his sons killed and his eyes put out. Jeremiah, however, was rewarded by deliverance, according to God's promise to him. However, both had to face the possibility of death during the time of siege and destruction.

INSPIRATION
If you've attended a memorial service, you've heard the words (Psalm 23). If you've walked through a cemetery, you've read them. They're quoted at the gravesides of paupers, carved on the headstones of kings. Those who know nothing of the Bible know this part of the Bible. Those who quote no scripture can remember this scripture, the one about the valley and the shadow and the shepherd.

Why? Why are these

words so treasured? Why is this verse so beloved? I can think of a couple of reasons. By virtue of this psalm, David grants us two important reminders that can help us surrender our fear of the grave.

We all have to face it. In a life marked by doctor appointments, dentist appointments, and school appointments, there is one appointment that none of us will miss, the appointment with death. "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Oh, how we'd like to change that verse. Just a word or two would suffice. "Nearly everyone must die . . ." or "Everyone but me must die . . ." or "Everyone who forgets to eat right and take vitamins must die . . ." But those are not God's words. In His plan everyone must die, even those who eat right and take their vitamins.

I could have gone all day without reminding you of that. We do our best to avoid the topic. One wise man, however, urges us to face it squarely: "We all must die, and everyone living should think about this" (Ecclesiastes 7:2 NCV). Solomon isn't promoting a morbid obsession with death. He is reminding us to be honest about the inevitable.

Moses gave the same exhortation. In the only psalm attributed to his pen, he prayed, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12).

The wise remember the brevity of life. Exercise may buy us a few more heartbeats. Medicine may grant us a few more breaths. But in the end, there is an end. And the best way to face life is to be

king's house and the houses of the people with fire, and broke down the walls of Jerusalem. 9 Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive to Babylon the remnant of the people who remained in the city and those who defected to him, with the rest of the people who remained. 10 But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left in the land of Judah the poor people, who had nothing, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time.

Jeremiah Goes Free

11 Now Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon gave charge concerning Jeremiah to Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, saying, 12 "Take him and look after him, and do him no harm; but do to him just as he says to you." 13 So Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard sent Nebushasban, Rabsaris, Nergal-Sharezer, Rabmag, and all the king of Babylon's chief officers; 14 then they sent *someone* to take Jeremiah from the court of the prison, and committed him to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, that he should take him home. So he dwelt among the people.

15 Meanwhile the word of the Lord had come to Jeremiah while he was shut up in the court of the prison, saying, 16 "Go and speak to Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian, saying, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: "Behold, I will bring My words upon this city for adversity and not for good, and they shall be *performed* in that day before you. 17 But I will deliver you in that day," says the Lord, "and you shall not be given into the hand of the men of whom you *are* afraid. 18 For I will surely deliver you, and you shall not fall by the sword; but your life shall be as a prize to you, because you have put your trust in Me," says the Lord.' "

Jeremiah with Gedaliah the Governor

40 The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord after Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he had taken him bound in chains among all who were carried away captive from Jerusalem and Judah, who were carried away captive to Babylon.

2 And the captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him: "The Lord your God has pronounced this doom on this place. 3 Now the Lord has brought *it,* and has done just as He said. Because you *people* have sinned against the Lord, and not obeyed His voice, therefore this thing has come upon you. 4 And now look, I free you this day from the chains that *were* on your hand. If it seems good to you to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will look after you. But if it seems wrong for you to come with me to Babylon, remain here. See, all the land *is* before you; wherever it seems good and convenient for you to go, go there."

5 Now while Jeremiah had not yet gone back, *Nebuzaradan said,* "Go back to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon has made governor over the cities of Judah, and dwell with him among the people. Or go wherever it seems convenient for you to go." So the captain of the guard gave him rations and a gift and let him go. 6 Then Jeremiah went to Gedaliah the son of

Ahikam, to Mizpah, and dwelt with him among the people who were left in the land.

7 And when all the captains of the armies who *were* in the fields, they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam governor in the land, and had committed to him men, women, children, and the poorest of the land who had not been carried away captive to Babylon, 8 then they came to Gedaliah at Mizpah—Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah, Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth, the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, and Jezaniah[a] the son of a Maachathite, they and their men. 9 And Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, took an oath before them and their men, saying, "Do not be afraid to serve the Chaldeans. Dwell in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you. 10 As for me, I will indeed dwell at Mizpah and serve the Chaldeans who come to us. But you, gather wine and summer fruit and oil, put *them* in your vessels, and dwell in your cities that you have taken." 11 Likewise, when all the Jews who *were* in Moab, among the Ammonites, in Edom, and who *were* in all the countries, heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant of Judah, and that he had set over them Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, 12 then all the Jews returned out of all places where they had been driven, and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah, and gathered wine and summer fruit in abundance.

13 Moreover Johanan the son of Kareah and all the captains of the forces that *were* in the fields came to Gedaliah at Mizpah, 14 and said to him, "Do you certainly know that Baalis the king of the Ammonites has sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to murder you?" But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam did not believe them.

15 Then Johanan the son of Kareah spoke secretly to Gedaliah in Mizpah, saying, "Let me go, please, and I will kill Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no one will know *it.* Why should he murder you, so that all the Jews who are gathered to you would be scattered, and the remnant in Judah perish?"

16 But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam said to Johanan the son of Kareah, "You shall not do this thing, for you speak falsely concerning Ishmael."

Insurrection Against Gedaliah

41 Now it came to pass in the seventh month *that* Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the royal family and of the officers of the king, came with ten men to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, at Mizpah. And there they ate bread together in Mizpah. 2 Then Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and the ten men who were with him, arose and struck Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, with the sword, and killed him whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land. 3 Ishmael also struck down all the Jews who were with him, *that is,* with Gedaliah at Mizpah, and the Chaldeans who were found there, the men of war.

4 And it happened, on the second day after he had killed Gedaliah, when as yet no one knew *it,* 5 that certain men came from Shechem,

40:8 [a]Spelled *Jaazaniah* in 2 Kings 25:23

honest about death. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

When you consider your own mortality, what typically is your response? Take time to read the passages below about God's promises to believers concerning death and eternity. How do these passages change your thoughts about death and mortality?

EXPLORATION

Victory over Death—Psalm 23:4; 116:15; Isaiah 25:8; John 5:24; Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:51–58; Revelation 21:4.

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 40:1—45:5

SITUATION

Except for 52:31–34, chapters 40—44 are chronologically the last writings in the Book of Jeremiah. They recount the fall of Jerusalem (in 586 B.C.) and its aftermath of destruction.

OBSERVATION

After the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah ministered to the remnant in Palestine and Egypt. They may have lost hope, but God looks at the big picture.

INSPIRATION

Most of our fears are poisonous. They steal sleep and pillage peace. But [the fear of the Lord] is different. . . .

How long since you felt this fear? Since a fresh understanding of Christ buckled your knees and emptied your lungs? Since a glimpse of Him left you speechless and breathless? If it's been a while, that explains your fears.

from Shiloh, and from Samaria, eighty men with their beards shaved and their clothes torn, having cut themselves, with offerings and incense in their hand, to bring *them* to the house of the Lord. 6 Now Ishmael the son of Nethaniah went out from Mizpah to meet them, weeping as he went along; and it happened as he met them that he said to them, "Come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam!" 7 So it was, when they came into the midst of the city, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah killed them *and cast them* into the midst of a pit, he and the men who were with him. 8 But ten men were found among them who said to Ishmael, "Do not kill us, for we have treasures of wheat, barley, oil, and honey in the field." So he desisted and did not kill them among their brethren. 9 Now the pit into which Ishmael had cast all the dead bodies of the men whom he had slain, because of Gedaliah, *was* the same one Asa the king had made for fear of Baasha king of Israel. Ishmael the son of Nethaniah filled it with *the* slain. 10 Then Ishmael carried away captive all the rest of the people who *were* in Mizpah, the king's daughters and all the people who remained in Mizpah, whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had committed to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam. And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah carried them away captive and departed to go over to the Ammonites.

11 But when Johanan the son of Kareah and all the captains of the forces that *were* with him heard of all the evil that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had done, 12 they took all the men and went to fight with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah; and they found him by the great pool that *is* in Gibeon. 13 So it was, when all the people who *were* with Ishmael saw Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces who *were* with him, that they were glad. 14 Then all the people whom Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah turned around and came back, and went to Johanan the son of Kareah. 15 But Ishmael the son of Nethaniah escaped from Johanan with eight men and went to the Ammonites.

16 Then Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces that were with him, took from Mizpah all the rest of the people whom he had recovered from Ishmael the son of Nethaniah after he had murdered Gedaliah the son of Ahikam—the mighty men of war and the women and the children and the eunuchs, whom he had brought back from Gibeon. 17 And they departed and dwelt in the habitation of Chimham, which is near Bethlehem, as they went on their way to Egypt, 18 because of the Chaldeans; for they were afraid of them, because Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had murdered Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon had made governor in the land.

The Flight to Egypt Forbidden

42 Now all the captains of the forces, Johanan the son of Kareah, Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people, from the least to the greatest, came near 2 and said to Jeremiah the prophet, "Please, let our petition be acceptable to you, and pray for us to the Lord your God, for all this remnant (since we are left *but* a few of many, as you can see), 3 that the Lord your God may show us the way in which we should walk and the thing we should do."

4 Then Jeremiah the prophet said to them, "I have heard. Indeed,

When Christ is great, our fears are not.

As awe of Jesus expands, fears of life diminish. A big God translates into big courage. A small view of God generates no courage. A limp, puny, fireless Jesus has no power over cancer cells, corruption, identity theft, stock-market crashes, or global calamity. A packageable, portable Jesus might fit well in a purse or on a shelf, but he does nothing for your fears.

This must be why Jesus took the disciples up the mountain. He saw the box in which they had confined Him. He saw the future that awaited them: the fireside denial of Peter, prisons of Jerusalem and Rome, the demands of the church, and the persecutions of Nero. A box-sized version of God simply would not work. So Jesus blew the sides out of their preconceptions.

May He blow the sides out of ours. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

If you're undergoing a trial in your life, try to look at the big picture. Reflect on your current situation and ask God to help you see it from His view. Spend a day alone with God and ask Him to help you understand his perspective for life.

EXPLORATION

Guidance—Psalm 23:3; 25:4, 5; Isaiah 58:11; John 16:12, 13.

I will pray to the Lord your God according to your words, and it shall be, *that* whatever the Lord answers you, I will declare *it* to you. I will keep nothing back from you."

5 So they said to Jeremiah, "Let the Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not do according to everything which the Lord your God sends us by you. 6 Whether *it is* pleasing or displeasing, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God to whom we send you, that it may be well with us when we obey the voice of the Lord our God."

7 And it happened after ten days that the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. 8 Then he called Johanan the son of Kareah, all the captains of the forces which *were* with him, and all the people from the least even to the greatest, 9 and said to them, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your petition before Him: 10 'If you will still remain in this land, then I will build you and not pull *you* down, and I will plant you and not pluck *you* up. For I relent concerning the disaster that I have brought upon you. 11 Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom you are afraid; do not be afraid of him,' says the Lord, 'for I *am* with you, to save you and deliver you from his hand. 12 And I will show you mercy, that he may have mercy on you and cause you to return to your own land.'

13 "But if you say, 'We will not dwell in this land,' disobeying the voice of the Lord your God, 14 saying, 'No, but we will go to the land of Egypt where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor be hungry for bread, and there we will dwell'— 15 Then hear now the word of the Lord, O remnant of Judah! Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: 'If you wholly set your faces to enter Egypt, and go to dwell there, 16 then it shall be *that* the sword which you feared shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt; the famine of which you were afraid shall follow close after you there *in* Egypt; and there you shall die. 17 So shall it be with all the men who set their faces to go to Egypt to dwell there. They shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence. And none of them shall remain or escape from the disaster that I will bring upon them.'

18 "For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: 'As My anger and My fury have been poured out on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so will My fury be poured out on you when you enter Egypt. And you shall be an oath, an astonishment, a curse, and a reproach; and you shall see this place no more.'

19 "The Lord has said concerning you, O remnant of Judah, 'Do not go to Egypt!' Know certainly that I have admonished you this day. 20 For you were hypocrites in your hearts when you sent me to the Lord your God, saying, 'Pray for us to the Lord our God, and according to all that the Lord your God says, so declare to us and we will do *it*.' 21 And I have this day declared *it* to you, but you have not obeyed the voice of the Lord your God, or anything which He has sent you by me. 22 Now therefore, know certainly that you shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence in the place where you desire to go to dwell."

Jeremiah Taken to Egypt

43 Now it happened, when Jeremiah had stopped speaking to all the people all the words of the Lord their God, for which the Lord their God had sent him to them, all these words, 2 that Azariah the son of Hoshaiah, Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the proud men spoke, saying to Jeremiah, "You speak falsely! The Lord our God has not sent you to say, 'Do not go to Egypt to dwell there.' 3 But Baruch the son of Neriah has set you against us, to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they may put us to death or carry us away captive to Babylon." 4 So Johanan the son of Kareah, all the captains of the forces, and all the people would not obey the voice of the Lord, to remain in the land of Judah. 5 But Johanan the son of Kareah and all the captains of the forces took all the remnant of Judah who had returned to dwell in the land of Judah, from all nations where they had been driven— 6 men, women, children, the king's daughters, and every person whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, and Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch the son of Neriah. 7 So they went to the land of Egypt, for they did not obey the voice of the Lord. And they went as far as Tahpanhes.

8 Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah in Tahpanhes, saying, 9 "Take large stones in your hand, and hide them in the

sight of the men of Judah, in the clay in
the brick courtyard which *is* at the entrance
to Pharaoh's house in Tahpanhes; 10 and
say to them, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts,
the God of Israel: "Behold, I will send and
bring Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon,
My servant, and will set his throne above
these stones that I have hidden. And he will
spread his royal pavilion over them. 11 When
he comes, he shall strike the land of Egypt *and*
deliver to death *those appointed* for death, and
to captivity *those appointed* for captivity, and
to the sword *those appointed* for the sword.
12 I[a] will kindle a fire in the houses of the gods
of Egypt, and he shall burn them and carry
them away captive. And he shall array himself
with the land of Egypt, as a shepherd puts on
his garment, and he shall go out from there in
peace. 13 He shall also break the *sacred* pillars
of Beth Shemesh[a] that *are* in the land of Egypt;
and the houses of the gods of the Egyptians he
shall burn with fire." ' "

Israelites Will Be Punished in Egypt

44 The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews who dwell in
the land of Egypt, who dwell at Migdol, at
Tahpanhes, at Noph,[a] and in the country of
Pathros, saying, 2 "Thus says the Lord of hosts,
the God of Israel: 'You have seen all the calamity that I have brought on Jerusalem and on
all the cities of Judah; and behold, this day
they *are* a desolation, and no one dwells in
them, 3 because of their wickedness which
they have committed to provoke Me to anger,
in that they went to burn incense *and* to serve
other gods whom they did not know, they nor
you nor your fathers. 4 However I have sent to
you all My servants the prophets, rising early
and sending *them,* saying, "Oh, do not do this
abominable thing that I hate!" 5 But they did
not listen or incline their ear to turn from their
wickedness, to burn no incense to other gods.
6 So My fury and My anger were poured out
and kindled in the cities of Judah and in the
streets of Jerusalem; and they are wasted *and*
desolate, as it is this day.'

7 "Now therefore, thus says the Lord, the
God of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Why do you
commit *this* great evil against yourselves, to
cut off from you man and woman, child and
infant, out of Judah, leaving none to remain,
8 in that you provoke Me to wrath with the
works of your hands, burning incense to other
gods in the land of Egypt where you have
gone to dwell, that you may cut yourselves off
and be a curse and a reproach among all the
nations of the earth? 9 Have you forgotten the
wickedness of your fathers, the wickedness
of the kings of Judah, the wickedness of their
wives, your own wickedness, and the wickedness of your wives, which they committed in
the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? 10 They have not been humbled, to
this day, nor have they feared; they have not
walked in My law or in My statutes that I set
before you and your fathers.'

11 "Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts,
the God of Israel: 'Behold, I will set My face
against you for catastrophe and for cutting
off all Judah. 12 And I will take the remnant
of Judah who have set their faces to go into
the land of Egypt to dwell there, and they
shall all be consumed *and* fall in the land of
Egypt. They shall be consumed by the sword
and by famine. They shall die, from the least
to the greatest, by the sword and by famine;
and they shall be an oath, an astonishment,
a curse and a reproach! 13 For I will punish
those who dwell in the land of Egypt, as I have
punished Jerusalem, by the sword, by famine,
and by pestilence, 14 so that none of the remnant of Judah who have gone into the land of
Egypt to dwell there shall escape or survive,
lest they return to the land of Judah, to which
they desire to return and dwell. For none shall
return except those who escape.' "

15 Then all the men who knew that their
wives had burned incense to other gods, with
all the women who stood by, a great multitude, and all the people who dwelt in the land
of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying: 16 "*As for* the word that you have spoken to
us in the name of the Lord, we will not listen
to you! 17 But we will certainly do whatever has
gone out of our own mouth, to burn incense
to the queen of heaven and pour out drink

43:12 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *He.* **43:13** [a]Literally *House of the Sun,* ancient On; later called Heliopolis **44:1** [a]That is, ancient Memphis

offerings to her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For *then* we had plenty of food, were well-off, and saw no trouble. 18 But since we stopped burning incense to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine."

19 *The women also said,* "And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven and poured out drink offerings to her, did we make cakes for her, to worship her, and pour out drink offerings to her without our husbands' *permission?*"

20 Then Jeremiah spoke to all the people—the men, the women, and all the people who had given him *that* answer—saying: 21 "The incense that you burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your fathers, your kings and your princes, and the people of the land, did not the Lord remember them, and did it *not* come into His mind? 22 So the Lord could no longer bear *it,* because of the evil of your doings *and* because of the abominations which you committed. Therefore your land is a desolation, an astonishment, a curse, and without an inhabitant, as *it is* this day. 23 Because you have burned incense and because you have sinned against the Lord, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord or walked in His law, in His statutes or in His testimonies, therefore this calamity has happened to you, as *at* this day."

24 Moreover Jeremiah said to all the people and to all the women, "Hear the word of the Lord, all Judah who *are* in the land of Egypt! 25 Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying: 'You and your wives have spoken with your mouths and fulfilled with your hands, saying, "We will surely keep our vows that we have made, to burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her." You will surely keep your vows and perform your vows!' 26 Therefore hear the word of the Lord, all Judah who dwell in the land of Egypt: 'Behold, I have sworn by My great name,' says the Lord, 'that My name shall no more be named in the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying, "The Lord God lives." 27 Behold, I will watch over them for adversity and not for good. And all the men of Judah who *are* in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by the sword and by famine, until there is an end to them. 28 Yet a small number who escape the sword shall return from the land of Egypt to the land of Judah; and all the remnant of Judah, who have gone to the land of Egypt to dwell there, shall know whose words will stand, Mine or theirs. 29 And this *shall be* a sign to you,' says the Lord, 'that I will punish you in this place, that you may know that My words will surely stand against you for adversity.'

30 "Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will give Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies and into the hand of those who seek his life, as I gave Zedekiah king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, his enemy who sought his life.' "

Assurance to Baruch

45 The word that Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch the son of Neriah, when he had written these words in a book at the instruction of Jeremiah,[a] in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying, 2 "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, to you, O Baruch: 3 'You said, "Woe is me now! For the Lord has added grief to my sorrow. I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest." '

4 "Thus you shall say to him, 'Thus says the Lord: "Behold, what I have built I will break down, and what I have planted I will pluck up, that is, this whole land. 5 And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek *them;* for behold, I will bring adversity on all flesh," says the Lord. "But I will give your life to you as a prize in all places, wherever you go." ' "

Judgment on Egypt

46 The word of the Lord which came to Jeremiah the prophet against the nations. 2 Against Egypt.

Concerning the army of Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt, which was by the River Euphrates in Carchemish, and which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah:

45:1 [a] Literally *from Jeremiah's mouth*

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 46:1—49:39

SITUATION
Since the Book of Jeremiah is not arranged chronologically, this section of Scripture would historically follow the events of Jeremiah 25. Jeremiah anticipated Nebuchadnezzar's conquest (25:9).

OBSERVATION
God not only ruled Judah, but all nations. God doesn't just rule over Christians, but over the whole world.

INSPIRATION
God loves the nations. He loves Iraqis. Somalians. Israelis. New Zealanders. Hondurans. He has a white-hot passion to harvest His children from every jungle, neighborhood, village, and slum. "All the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord" (Numbers 14:21). During the days of Joshua, God brought His people into Canaan so "that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the Lord" (Joshua 4:24). David commanded us to "sing to the Lord, all the earth. . . . Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples" (Psalm 96:1–3). God spoke to us through Isaiah: "I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6). His vision for the end of history includes "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Is there someone God wants you to witness to? As He brings people into

3 "Order the buckler and shield,
And draw near to battle!
4 Harness the horses,
And mount up, you horsemen!
Stand forth with *your* helmets,
Polish the spears,
Put on the armor!
5 Why have I seen them dismayed *and* turned back?
Their mighty ones are beaten down;
They have speedily fled,
And did not look back,
For fear *was* all around," says the Lord.
6 "Do not let the swift flee away,
Nor the mighty man escape;
They will stumble and fall
Toward the north, by the River Euphrates.

7 "Who *is* this coming up like a flood,
Whose waters move like the rivers?
8 Egypt rises up like a flood,
And *its* waters move like the rivers;
And he says, 'I will go up *and* cover the earth,
I will destroy the city and its inhabitants.'
9 Come up, O horses, and rage, O chariots!
And let the mighty men come forth:
The Ethiopians and the Libyans who handle the shield,
And the Lydians who handle *and* bend the bow.
10 For this *is* the day of the Lord God of hosts,
A day of vengeance,
That He may avenge Himself on His adversaries.
The sword shall devour;
It shall be satiated and made drunk with their blood;
For the Lord God of hosts has a sacrifice
In the north country by the River Euphrates.

11 "Go up to Gilead and take balm,
O virgin, the daughter of Egypt;
In vain you will use many medicines;
You shall not be cured.
12 The nations have heard of your shame,
And your cry has filled the land;
For the mighty man has stumbled against the mighty;
They both have fallen together."

Babylonia Will Strike Egypt

13 The word that the Lord spoke to Jeremiah the prophet, how Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon would come *and* strike the land of Egypt.

14 "Declare in Egypt, and proclaim in Migdol;
Proclaim in Noph[a] and in Tahpanhes;

46:14 [a] That is, ancient Memphis

Say, 'Stand fast and prepare yourselves,
For the sword devours all around you.'
15 Why are your valiant *men* swept away?
They did not stand
Because the Lord drove them away.
16 He made many fall;
Yes, one fell upon another.
And they said, 'Arise!
Let us go back to our own people
And to the land of our nativity
From the oppressing sword.'
17 They cried there,
'Pharaoh, king of Egypt, *is but* a noise.
He has passed by the appointed time!'

18 "*As* I live," says the King,
Whose name *is* the Lord of hosts,
"Surely as Tabor *is* among the mountains
And as Carmel by the sea, *so* he shall come.
19 O you daughter dwelling in Egypt,
Prepare yourself to go into captivity!
For Noph[a] shall be waste and desolate, without inhabitant.

20 "Egypt *is* a very pretty heifer,
But destruction comes, it comes from the north.
21 Also her mercenaries are in her midst like fat bulls,
For they also are turned back,
They have fled away together.
They did not stand,
For the day of their calamity had come upon them,
The time of their punishment.
22 Her noise shall go like a serpent,
For they shall march with an army
And come against her with axes,
Like those who chop wood.

23 "They shall cut down her forest," says the Lord,
"Though it cannot be searched,
Because they *are* innumerable,
And more numerous than grasshoppers.
24 The daughter of Egypt shall be ashamed;
She shall be delivered into the hand
Of the people of the north."

25 The Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, says: "Behold, I will bring punishment on Amon[a] of No,[b] and Pharaoh and Egypt, with their gods and their kings—Pharaoh and those who trust in him. 26 And I will deliver them into the hand of those who seek their lives, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and the hand of his servants. Afterward it shall be inhabited as in the days of old," says the Lord.

46:19 [a] That is, ancient Memphis **46:25** [a] A sun god [b] That is, ancient Thebes

your life, take time to get to know them. Let them get to know you. As you become friends, ask God to show you the right time to share Christ with them. And let your life portray the truth of what you say.

EXPLORATION
God's Power—Job 38—41. God's Justice and Righteousness—Romans 3:9–26. Christian Witness—Romans 8:35–39; Ephesians 3:20, 21.

God's trust makes us eager to do right. Such is the genius of grace.

—Max Lucado (In the Grip of Grace)

God Will Preserve Israel

27 "But do not fear, O My servant Jacob,
And do not be dismayed, O Israel!
For behold, I will save you from afar,
And your offspring from the land of their captivity;
Jacob shall return, have rest and be at ease;
No one shall make *him* afraid.
28 Do not fear, O Jacob My servant," says the Lord,
"For I *am* with you;
For I will make a complete end of all the nations
To which I have driven you,
But I will not make a complete end of you.
I will rightly correct you,
For I will not leave you wholly unpunished."

Judgment on Philistia

47 The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah the prophet against the Philistines, before Pharaoh attacked Gaza.
2 Thus says the Lord:

"Behold, waters rise out of the north,
And shall be an overflowing flood;
They shall overflow the land and all that is in it,
The city and those who dwell within;
Then the men shall cry,
And all the inhabitants of the land shall wail.
3 At the noise of the stamping hooves of his strong horses,
At the rushing of his chariots,
At the rumbling of his wheels,
The fathers will not look back for *their* children,
Lacking courage,
4 Because of the day that comes to plunder all the Philistines,
To cut off from Tyre and Sidon every helper who remains;
For the Lord shall plunder the Philistines,
The remnant of the country of Caphtor.
5 Baldness has come upon Gaza,
Ashkelon is cut off
With the remnant of their valley.
How long will you cut yourself?

6 "O you sword of the Lord,
How long until you are quiet?
Put yourself up into your scabbard,
Rest and be still!
7 How can it be quiet,
Seeing the Lord has given it a charge
Against Ashkelon and against the seashore?
There He has appointed it."

Judgment on Moab

48 Against Moab.
Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel:

"Woe to Nebo!
For it is plundered,
Kirjathaim is shamed *and* taken;
The high stronghold[a] is shamed and dismayed—
2 No more praise of Moab.
In Heshbon they have devised evil against her:
'Come, and let us cut her off as a nation.'
You also shall be cut down, O Madmen![a]
The sword shall pursue you;
3 A voice of crying *shall be* from Horonaim:
'Plundering and great destruction!'

4 "Moab is destroyed;
Her little ones have caused a cry to be heard;[a]
5 For in the Ascent of Luhith they ascend with continual weeping;
For in the descent of Horonaim the enemies have heard a cry of destruction.

6 "Flee, save your lives!
And be like the juniper[a] in the wilderness.
7 For because you have trusted in your works and your treasures,
You also shall be taken.
And Chemosh shall go forth into captivity,

48:1 [a]Hebrew *Misgab* **48:2** [a]A city of Moab **48:4** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *Proclaim it in Zoar*. **48:6** [a]Or *Aroer,* a city of Moab

His priests and his princes together.
8 And the plunderer shall come against
every city;
No one shall escape.
The valley also shall perish,
And the plain shall be destroyed,
As the LORD has spoken.

9 "Give wings to Moab,
That she may flee and get away;
For her cities shall be desolate,
Without any to dwell in them.
10 Cursed *is* he who does the work of the
LORD deceitfully,
And cursed *is* he who keeps back his
sword from blood.

11 "Moab has been at ease from his[a] youth;
He has settled on his dregs,
And has not been emptied from vessel to
vessel,
Nor has he gone into captivity.
Therefore his taste remained in him,
And his scent has not changed.

12 "Therefore behold, the days are coming,"
says the LORD,
"That I shall send him wine-workers
Who will tip him over
And empty his vessels
And break the bottles.
13 Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh,
As the house of Israel was ashamed of
Bethel, their confidence.

14 "How can you say, 'We *are* mighty
And strong men for the war'?
15 Moab is plundered and gone up *from* her
cities;
Her chosen young men have gone down
to the slaughter," says the King,
Whose name *is* the LORD of hosts.

16 "The calamity of Moab *is* near at hand,
And his affliction comes quickly.
17 Bemoan him, all you who are around
him;
And all you who know his name,
Say, 'How the strong staff is broken,
The beautiful rod!'

18 "O daughter inhabiting Dibon,
Come down from *your* glory,
And sit in thirst;
For the plunderer of Moab has come
against you,
He has destroyed your strongholds.
19 O inhabitant of Aroer,
Stand by the way and watch;
Ask him who flees
And her who escapes;
Say, 'What has happened?'
20 Moab is shamed, for he is broken down.
Wail and cry!
Tell it in Arnon, that Moab is plundered.

21 "And judgment has come on the plain
country:
On Holon and Jahzah and Mephaath,
22 On Dibon and Nebo and Beth
Diblathaim,
23 On Kirjathaim and Beth Gamul and Beth
Meon,
24 On Kerioth and Bozrah,
On all the cities of the land of Moab,
Far or near.
25 The horn of Moab is cut off,
And his arm is broken," says the LORD.

26 "Make him drunk,
Because he exalted *himself* against the
LORD.
Moab shall wallow in his vomit,
And he shall also be in derision.
27 For was not Israel a derision to you?
Was he found among thieves?
For whenever you speak of him,
You shake *your head in scorn.*
28 You who dwell in Moab,
Leave the cities and dwell in the rock,
And be like the dove *which* makes her
nest
In the sides of the cave's mouth.

29 "We have heard the pride of Moab
(He *is* exceedingly proud),
Of his loftiness and arrogance and pride,
And of the haughtiness of his heart."

30 "I know his wrath," says the LORD,
"But it *is* not right;

48:11 [a]The Hebrew uses masculine and feminine pronouns interchangeably in this chapter.

His lies have made nothing right.
31 Therefore I will wail for Moab,
And I will cry out for all Moab;
I[a] will mourn for the men of Kir Heres.
32 O vine of Sibmah! I will weep for you with the weeping of Jazer.
Your plants have gone over the sea,
They reach to the sea of Jazer.
The plunderer has fallen on your summer fruit and your vintage.
33 Joy and gladness are taken
From the plentiful field
And from the land of Moab;
I have caused wine to fail from the winepresses;
No one will tread with joyous shouting—
Not joyous shouting!

34 "From the cry of Heshbon to Elealeh and to Jahaz
They have uttered their voice,
From Zoar to Horonaim,
Like a three-year-old heifer;[a]
For the waters of Nimrim also shall be desolate.

35 "Moreover," says the Lord,
"I will cause to cease in Moab
The one who offers *sacrifices* in the high places
And burns incense to his gods.
36 Therefore My heart shall wail like flutes for Moab,
And like flutes My heart shall wail
For the men of Kir Heres.
Therefore the riches they have acquired have perished.

37 "For every head *shall be* bald, and every beard clipped;
On all the hands *shall be* cuts, and on the loins sackcloth—
38 A general lamentation
On all the housetops of Moab,
And in its streets;
For I have broken Moab like a vessel in which *is* no pleasure," says the Lord.
39 "They shall wail:
'How she is broken down!
How Moab has turned her back with shame!'
So Moab shall be a derision
And a dismay to all those about her."

40 For thus says the Lord:

"Behold, one shall fly like an eagle,
And spread his wings over Moab.
41 Kerioth is taken,
And the strongholds are surprised;
The mighty men's hearts in Moab on that day shall be
Like the heart of a woman in birth pangs.
42 And Moab shall be destroyed as a people,
Because he exalted *himself* against the Lord.
43 Fear and the pit and the snare *shall be* upon you,
O inhabitant of Moab," says the Lord.
44 "He who flees from the fear shall fall into the pit,
And he who gets out of the pit shall be caught in the snare.
For upon Moab, upon it I will bring
The year of their punishment," says the Lord.

45 "Those who fled stood under the shadow of Heshbon
Because of exhaustion.
But a fire shall come out of Heshbon,
A flame from the midst of Sihon,
And shall devour the brow of Moab,
The crown of the head of the sons of tumult.
46 Woe to you, O Moab!
The people of Chemosh perish;
For your sons have been taken captive,
And your daughters captive.

47 "Yet I will bring back the captives of Moab
In the latter days," says the Lord.

Thus far *is* the judgment of Moab.

Judgment on Ammon

49 Against the Ammonites.
Thus says the Lord:

48:31 [a]Following Dead Sea Scrolls, Septuagint, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text reads *He*. **48:34** [a]Or *The Third Eglath*, an unknown city (compare Isaiah 15:5)

"Has Israel no sons?
Has he no heir?
Why *then* does Milcom[a] inherit Gad,
And his people dwell in its cities?
2 Therefore behold, the days are coming,"
says the Lord,
"That I will cause to be heard an alarm of war
In Rabbah of the Ammonites;
It shall be a desolate mound,
And her villages shall be burned with fire.
Then Israel shall take possession of his inheritance," says the Lord.

3 "Wail, O Heshbon, for Ai is plundered!
Cry, you daughters of Rabbah,
Gird yourselves with sackcloth!
Lament and run to and fro by the walls;
For Milcom shall go into captivity
With his priests and his princes together.
4 Why do you boast in the valleys,
Your flowing valley, O backsliding daughter?
Who trusted in her treasures, *saying,*
'Who will come against me?'
5 Behold, I will bring fear upon you,"
Says the Lord God of hosts,
"From all those who are around you;
You shall be driven out, everyone headlong,
And no one will gather those who wander off.
6 But afterward I will bring back
The captives of the people of Ammon,"
says the Lord.

Judgment on Edom

7 Against Edom.
Thus says the Lord of hosts:

"*Is* wisdom no more in Teman?
Has counsel perished from the prudent?
Has their wisdom vanished?
8 Flee, turn back, dwell in the depths, O inhabitants of Dedan!
For I will bring the calamity of Esau upon him,
The time *that* I will punish him.
9 If grape-gatherers came to you,
Would they not leave *some* gleaning grapes?
If thieves by night,
Would they not destroy until they have enough?
10 But I have made Esau bare;
I have uncovered his secret places,[a]
And he shall not be able to hide himself.
His descendants are plundered,
His brethren and his neighbors,
And he *is* no more.
11 Leave your fatherless children,
I will preserve *them* alive;
And let your widows trust in Me."

12 For thus says the Lord: "Behold, those whose judgment *was* not to drink of the cup have assuredly drunk. And *are* you the one who will altogether go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished, but you shall surely drink *of it.* 13 For I have sworn by Myself," says the Lord, "that Bozrah shall become a desolation, a reproach, a waste, and a curse. And all its cities shall be perpetual wastes."

14 I have heard a message from the Lord,
And an ambassador has been sent to the nations:
"Gather together, come against her,
And rise up to battle!

15 "For indeed, I will make you small among nations,
Despised among men.
16 Your fierceness has deceived you,
The pride of your heart,
O you who dwell in the clefts of the rock,
Who hold the height of the hill!
Though you make your nest as high as the eagle,
I will bring you down from there," says the Lord.[a]

17 "Edom also shall be an astonishment;
Everyone who goes by it will be astonished
And will hiss at all its plagues.
18 As in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah

49:1 [a]Hebrew *Malcam,* literally *their king,* a god of the Ammonites; also called *Molech* (compare verse 3)
49:10 [a]Compare Obadiah 5, 6 **49:16** [a]Compare Obadiah 3, 4

And their neighbors," says the Lord,
"No one shall remain there,
Nor shall a son of man dwell in it.

19 "Behold, he shall come up like a lion from
the floodplain[a] of the Jordan
Against the dwelling place of the strong;
But I will suddenly make him run away
from her.
And who *is* a chosen *man that* I may
appoint over her?
For who *is* like Me?
Who will arraign Me?
And who *is* that shepherd
Who will withstand Me?"

20 Therefore hear the counsel of the Lord
that He has taken against Edom,
And His purposes that He has proposed
against the inhabitants of Teman:
Surely the least of the flock shall draw
them out;
Surely He shall make their dwelling
places desolate with them.
21 The earth shakes at the noise of their fall;
At the cry its noise is heard at the Red Sea.
22 Behold, He shall come up and fly like the
eagle,
And spread His wings over Bozrah;
The heart of the mighty men of Edom in
that day shall be
Like the heart of a woman in birth pangs.

Judgment on Damascus

23 Against Damascus.

"Hamath and Arpad are shamed,
For they have heard bad news.
They are fainthearted;
There is trouble on the sea;
It cannot be quiet.
24 Damascus has grown feeble;
She turns to flee,
And fear has seized *her.*
Anguish and sorrows have taken her like
a woman in labor.
25 Why is the city of praise not deserted, the
city of My joy?
26 Therefore her young men shall fall in her
streets,
And all the men of war shall be cut off in
that day," says the Lord of hosts.
27 "I will kindle a fire in the wall of
Damascus,
And it shall consume the palaces of Ben-
Hadad."[a]

Judgment on Kedar and Hazor

28 Against Kedar and against the kingdoms of Hazor, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon shall strike.
Thus says the Lord:

"Arise, go up to Kedar,
And devastate the men of the East!
29 Their tents and their flocks they shall take
away.
They shall take for themselves their
curtains,
All their vessels and their camels;
And they shall cry out to them,
'Fear *is* on every side!'

30 "Flee, get far away! Dwell in the depths,
O inhabitants of Hazor!" says the Lord.
"For Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has
taken counsel against you,
And has conceived a plan against you.

31 "Arise, go up to the wealthy nation that
dwells securely," says the Lord,
"Which has neither gates nor bars,
Dwelling alone.
32 Their camels shall be for booty,
And the multitude of their cattle for
plunder.
I will scatter to all winds those in the
farthest corners,
And I will bring their calamity from all its
sides," says the Lord.
33 "Hazor shall be a dwelling for jackals, a
desolation forever;
No one shall reside there,
Nor son of man dwell in it."

Judgment on Elam

34 The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah the prophet against Elam, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, saying, 35 "Thus says the Lord of hosts:

49:19 [a]Or *thicket* **49:27** [a]Compare Amos 1:4

'Behold, I will break the bow of Elam,
The foremost of their might.
36 Against Elam I will bring the four winds
From the four quarters of heaven,
And scatter them toward all those winds;
There shall be no nations where the outcasts of Elam will not go.
37 For I will cause Elam to be dismayed before their enemies
And before those who seek their life.
I will bring disaster upon them,
My fierce anger,' says the Lord;
'And I will send the sword after them
Until I have consumed them.
38 I will set My throne in Elam,
And will destroy from there the king and the princes,' says the
Lord.

39 'But it shall come to pass in the latter days:
I will bring back the captives of Elam,' says the Lord."

Judgment on Babylon and Babylonia

50 The word that the Lord spoke against Babylon *and* against the land of the Chaldeans by Jeremiah the prophet.

2 "Declare among the nations,
Proclaim, and set up a standard;
Proclaim—do not conceal *it*—
Say, 'Babylon is taken, Bel is shamed.
Merodach[a] is broken in pieces;
Her idols are humiliated,
Her images are broken in pieces.'
3 For out of the north a nation comes up against her,
Which shall make her land desolate,
And no one shall dwell therein.
They shall move, they shall depart,
Both man and beast.

4 "In those days and in that time," says the Lord,
"The children of Israel shall come,
They and the children of Judah together;
With continual weeping they shall come,
And seek the Lord their God.
5 They shall ask the way to Zion,
With their faces toward it, *saying,*
'Come and let us join ourselves to the Lord
In a perpetual covenant
That will not be forgotten.'

6 "My people have been lost sheep.
Their shepherds have led them astray;
They have turned them away *on* the mountains.

50:2 [a]A Babylonian god; sometimes spelled *Marduk*

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 50:1—51:64

SITUATION
Jeremiah foretold the fall of Babylon. The powerful and arrogant Babylonians would be conquered by a power from the north. Under the Messiah, Israel would rise again and would regain her preeminent status among nations.

OBSERVATION
God gave His people something to hope in. A new Israel, led by God's chosen Messiah, would arrive after Babylon was crushed.

INSPIRATION
There is a story told in Brazil about a missionary who discovered a tribe of Indians in a remote part of the jungle. They lived near a large river. The tribe was friendly and in need of medical attention. A contagious disease was ravaging the population and people were dying daily. An infirmary was located in another part of the jungle and the missionary determined that the only hope for the tribe was to go to the hospital for treatment and inoculations. In order to reach the hospital, however, the Indians would have to cross the river—a feat they were unwilling to perform.

The river, they believed, was inhabited by evil spirits. To enter the water meant certain death. The missionary set about the difficult task of overcoming the superstition of the tribe.

He explained how he had crossed the river and arrived unharmed. No luck. He led the people to the bank and placed his hand in the water. The people

still wouldn't believe him. He walked out into the river and splashed water on his face. The people watched closely, yet were still hesitant. Finally he turned and dove into the water. He swam beneath the surface until he emerged on the other side.

Having proven that the power of the river was a farce, the missionary punched a triumphant fist into the air. He had entered the water and escaped. The Indians broke into cheers and followed him across.

Jesus saw people enslaved by their fear of a cheap power. He explained that the river of death was nothing to fear. The people wouldn't believe Him. He touched a boy and called Him back to life. The followers were still unconvinced. He whispered life into the dead body of a girl. The people were still cynical. He let a dead man spend four days in a grave and then called him out. Is that enough? Apparently not. For it was necessary for Him to enter the river, to submerge Himself in the water of death before people would believe that death had been conquered.

But after He did, after He came out on the other side of death's river, it was time to sing . . . it was time to celebrate. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Trusting Jesus gives us hope. Did you trust Him to work out your day's worth of headaches, to get you to work safely, to help you get your homework done, or to get along with your spouse? When you pray, go over each detail of your day. Who will you see and talk to? What projects need to get done? Where will you drive . . . ? Don't live any part of your day without

They have gone from mountain to hill;
They have forgotten their resting place.
7 All who found them have devoured them;
And their adversaries said, 'We have not offended,
Because they have sinned against the Lord, the habitation of justice,
The Lord, the hope of their fathers.'

8 "Move from the midst of Babylon,
Go out of the land of the Chaldeans;
And be like the rams before the flocks.
9 For behold, I will raise and cause to come up against Babylon
An assembly of great nations from the north country,
And they shall array themselves against her;
From there she shall be captured.
Their arrows *shall be* like *those* of an expert warrior;[a]
None shall return in vain.
10 And Chaldea shall become plunder;
All who plunder her shall be satisfied," says the Lord.

11 "Because you were glad, because you rejoiced,
You destroyers of My heritage,
Because you have grown fat like a heifer threshing grain,
And you bellow like bulls,
12 Your mother shall be deeply ashamed;
She who bore you shall be ashamed.
Behold, the least of the nations *shall be* a wilderness,
A dry land and a desert.
13 Because of the wrath of the Lord
She shall not be inhabited,
But she shall be wholly desolate.
Everyone who goes by Babylon shall be horrified
And hiss at all her plagues.

14 "Put yourselves in array against Babylon all around,
All you who bend the bow;
Shoot at her, spare no arrows,
For she has sinned against the Lord.
15 Shout against her all around;
She has given her hand,
Her foundations have fallen,
Her walls are thrown down;
For it *is* the vengeance of the Lord.
Take vengeance on her.
As she has done, so do to her.
16 Cut off the sower from Babylon,
And him who handles the sickle at harvest time.
For fear of the oppressing sword

50:9 [a]Following some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, and Syriac; Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate read *a warrior who makes childless*.

Everyone shall turn to his own people,
And everyone shall flee to his own land.

17 "Israel *is* like scattered sheep;
The lions have driven *him* away.
First the king of Assyria devoured him;
Now at last this Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has broken his bones."

18 Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel:

"Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land,
As I have punished the king of Assyria.
19 But I will bring back Israel to his home,
And he shall feed on Carmel and Bashan;
His soul shall be satisfied on Mount Ephraim and Gilead.
20 In those days and in that time," says the Lord,
"The iniquity of Israel shall be sought, but *there shall be* none;
And the sins of Judah, but they shall not be found;
For I will pardon those whom I preserve.

21 "Go up against the land of Merathaim, against it,
And against the inhabitants of Pekod.
Waste and utterly destroy them," says the Lord,
"And do according to all that I have commanded you.
22 A sound of battle *is* in the land,
And of great destruction.
23 How the hammer of the whole earth has been cut apart and broken!
How Babylon has become a desolation among the nations!
24 I have laid a snare for you;
You have indeed been trapped, O Babylon,
And you were not aware;
You have been found and also caught,
Because you have contended against the Lord.
25 The Lord has opened His armory,
And has brought out the weapons of His indignation;
For this *is* the work of the Lord God of hosts
In the land of the Chaldeans.
26 Come against her from the farthest border;
Open her storehouses;
Cast her up as heaps of ruins,
And destroy her utterly;
Let nothing of her be left.
27 Slay all her bulls,
Let them go down to the slaughter.
Woe to them!
For their day has come, the time of their punishment.
28 The voice of those who flee and escape from the land of Babylon
Declares in Zion the vengeance of the Lord our God,
The vengeance of His temple.

letting God know you are looking to Him for stamina.

EXPLORATION
Hope—Leviticus 26:40–45; Mark 5:35, 36; 1 Corinthians 15:54–57; 2 Corinthians 4:8.

29 "Call together the archers against Babylon.
All you who bend the bow, encamp
against it all around;
Let none of them escape.[a]
Repay her according to her work;
According to all she has done, do to her;
For she has been proud against the Lord,
Against the Holy One of Israel.
30 Therefore her young men shall fall in the
streets,
And all her men of war shall be cut off in
that day," says the Lord.
31 "Behold, I *am* against you,
O most haughty one!" says the Lord God
of hosts;
"For your day has come,
The time *that* I will punish you.[a]
32 The most proud shall stumble and fall,
And no one will raise him up;
I will kindle a fire in his cities,
And it will devour all around him."

33 Thus says the Lord of hosts:

"The children of Israel *were* oppressed,
Along with the children of Judah;
All who took them captive have held
them fast;
They have refused to let them go.
34 Their Redeemer *is* strong;
The Lord of hosts *is* His name.
He will thoroughly plead their case,
That He may give rest to the land,
And disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon.

35 "A sword *is* against the Chaldeans," says
the Lord,
"Against the inhabitants of Babylon,
And against her princes and her wise
men.
36 A sword *is* against the soothsayers, and
they will be fools.
A sword *is* against her mighty men, and
they will be dismayed.
37 A sword *is* against their horses,
Against their chariots,
And against all the mixed peoples who
are in her midst;
And they will become like women.
A sword *is* against her treasures, and they
will be robbed.
38 A drought[a] *is* against her waters, and they
will be dried up.
For it *is* the land of carved images,
And they are insane with *their* idols.

39 "Therefore the wild desert beasts shall
dwell *there* with the jackals,
And the ostriches shall dwell in it.
It shall be inhabited no more forever,
Nor shall it be dwelt in from generation
to generation.
40 As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah
And their neighbors," says the Lord,
"*So* no one shall reside there,
Nor son of man dwell in it.

41 "Behold, a people shall come from the
north,
And a great nation and many kings
Shall be raised up from the ends of the
earth.
42 They shall hold the bow and the lance;
They *are* cruel and shall not show mercy.
Their voice shall roar like the sea;
They shall ride on horses,
Set in array, like a man for the battle,
Against you, O daughter of Babylon.

43 "The king of Babylon has heard the report
about them,
And his hands grow feeble;
Anguish has taken hold of him,
Pangs as of a woman in childbirth.

44 "Behold, he shall come up like a lion from
the floodplain[a] of the Jordan
Against the dwelling place of the strong;
But I will make them suddenly run away
from her.
And who *is* a chosen *man that* I may
appoint over her?
For who *is* like Me?
Who will arraign Me?
And who *is* that shepherd
Who will withstand Me?"

50:29 [a]Qere, some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, and Targum add *to her*. **50:31** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Septuagint and Vulgate read *The time of your punishment*. **50:38** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Syriac reads *sword;* Septuagint omits *A drought is*. **50:44** [a]Or *thicket*

45 Therefore hear the counsel of the Lord
that He has taken against Babylon,
And His purposes that He has proposed
against the land of the Chaldeans:
Surely the least of the flock shall draw
them out;
Surely He will make their dwelling place
desolate with them.
46 At the noise of the taking of Babylon
The earth trembles,
And the cry is heard among the nations.

The Utter Destruction of Babylon

51 Thus says the Lord:
"Behold, I will raise up against Babylon,
Against those who dwell in Leb Kamai,[a]
A destroying wind.
2 And I will send winnowers to Babylon,
Who shall winnow her and empty her
land.
For in the day of doom
They shall be against her all around.
3 Against *her* let the archer bend his bow,
And lift himself up against *her* in his
armor.
Do not spare her young men;
Utterly destroy all her army.
4 Thus the slain shall fall in the land of the
Chaldeans,
And *those* thrust through in her streets.
5 For Israel is not forsaken, nor Judah,
By his God, the Lord of hosts,
Though their land was filled with sin
against the Holy One of Israel."

6 Flee from the midst of Babylon,
And every one save his life!
Do not be cut off in her iniquity,
For this *is* the time of the Lord's
vengeance;
He shall recompense her.
7 Babylon *was* a golden cup in the Lord's
hand,
That made all the earth drunk.
The nations drank her wine;
Therefore the nations are deranged.
8 Babylon has suddenly fallen and been
destroyed.
Wail for her!
Take balm for her pain;
Perhaps she may be healed.

9 We would have healed Babylon,
But she is not healed.
Forsake her, and let us go everyone to his
own country;
For her judgment reaches to heaven and
is lifted up to the skies.
10 The Lord has revealed our righteousness.
Come and let us declare in Zion the work
of the Lord our God.

11 Make the arrows bright!
Gather the shields!
The Lord has raised up the spirit of the
kings of the Medes.
For His plan *is* against Babylon to
destroy it,
Because it *is* the vengeance of the Lord,
The vengeance for His temple.
12 Set up the standard on the walls of
Babylon;
Make the guard strong,
Set up the watchmen,
Prepare the ambushes.
For the Lord has both devised and done
What He spoke against the inhabitants of
Babylon.
13 O you who dwell by many waters,
Abundant in treasures,
Your end has come,
The measure of your covetousness.
14 The Lord of hosts has sworn by Himself:
"Surely I will fill you with men, as with
locusts,
And they shall lift up a shout against
you."

15 He has made the earth by His power;
He has established the world by His
wisdom,
And stretched out the heaven by His
understanding.
16 When He utters *His* voice—
There is a multitude of waters in the
heavens:
"He causes the vapors to ascend from the
ends of the earth;
He makes lightnings for the rain;

51:1 [a]A code word for Chaldea (Babylonia); may be translated *The Midst of Those Who Rise Up Against Me*

He brings the wind out of His
treasuries."[a]

17 Everyone is dull-hearted, without
knowledge;
Every metalsmith is put to shame by the
carved image;
For his molded image *is* falsehood,
And *there is* no breath in them.
18 They *are* futile, a work of errors;
In the time of their punishment they shall
perish.
19 The Portion of Jacob *is* not like them,
For He *is* the Maker of all things;
And *Israel is* the tribe of His inheritance.
The Lord of hosts *is* His name.

20 "You *are* My battle-ax *and* weapons of war:
For with you I will break the nation in
pieces;
With you I will destroy kingdoms;
21 With you I will break in pieces the horse
and its rider;
With you I will break in pieces the chariot
and its rider;
22 With you also I will break in pieces man
and woman;
With you I will break in pieces old and
young;
With you I will break in pieces the young
man and the maiden;
23 With you also I will break in pieces the
shepherd and his flock;
With you I will break in pieces the farmer
and his yoke of oxen;
And with you I will break in pieces
governors and rulers.

24 "And I will repay Babylon
And all the inhabitants of Chaldea
For all the evil they have done
In Zion in your sight," says the Lord.

25 "Behold, I *am* against you, O destroying
mountain,
Who destroys all the earth," says the Lord.
"And I will stretch out My hand against
you,
Roll you down from the rocks,
And make you a burnt mountain.
26 They shall not take from you a stone for a
corner
Nor a stone for a foundation,
But you shall be desolate forever," says
the Lord.

27 Set up a banner in the land,
Blow the trumpet among the nations!
Prepare the nations against her,
Call the kingdoms together against her:
Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz.
Appoint a general against her;
Cause the horses to come up like the
bristling locusts.
28 Prepare against her the nations,
With the kings of the Medes,
Its governors and all its rulers,
All the land of his dominion.
29 And the land will tremble and sorrow;
For every purpose of the Lord shall be
performed against Babylon,
To make the land of Babylon a desolation
without inhabitant.
30 The mighty men of Babylon have ceased
fighting,
They have remained in their
strongholds;
Their might has failed,
They became *like* women;
They have burned her dwelling places,
The bars of her *gate* are broken.
31 One runner will run to meet another,
And one messenger to meet another,
To show the king of Babylon that his city
is taken on *all* sides;
32 The passages are blocked,
The reeds they have burned with fire,
And the men of war are terrified.

33 For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God
of Israel:

"The daughter of Babylon *is* like a
threshing floor
When it is time to thresh her;
Yet a little while
And the time of her harvest will come."

34 "Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon
Has devoured me, he has crushed me;

51:16 [a]Psalm 135:7

He has made me an empty vessel,
He has swallowed me up like a monster;
He has filled his stomach with my delicacies,
He has spit me out.
35 Let the violence *done* to me and my flesh *be* upon Babylon,"
The inhabitant of Zion will say;
"And my blood be upon the inhabitants of Chaldea!"
Jerusalem will say.

36 Therefore thus says the Lord:

"Behold, I will plead your case and take vengeance for you.
I will dry up her sea and make her springs dry.
37 Babylon shall become a heap,
A dwelling place for jackals,
An astonishment and a hissing,
Without an inhabitant.
38 They shall roar together like lions,
They shall growl like lions' whelps.
39 In their excitement I will prepare their feasts;
I will make them drunk,
That they may rejoice,
And sleep a perpetual sleep
And not awake," says the Lord.
40 "I will bring them down
Like lambs to the slaughter,
Like rams with male goats.

41 "Oh, how Sheshach[a] is taken!
Oh, how the praise of the whole earth is seized!
How Babylon has become desolate among the nations!
42 The sea has come up over Babylon;
She is covered with the multitude of its waves.
43 Her cities are a desolation,
A dry land and a wilderness,
A land where no one dwells,
Through which no son of man passes.
44 I will punish Bel in Babylon,
And I will bring out of his mouth what he has swallowed;
And the nations shall not stream to him anymore.
Yes, the wall of Babylon shall fall.

45 "My people, go out of the midst of her!
And let everyone deliver himself from the fierce anger of the Lord.
46 And lest your heart faint,
And you fear for the rumor that *will be* heard in the land
(A rumor will come *one* year,
And after that, in *another* year
A rumor *will come,*
And violence in the land,
Ruler against ruler),
47 Therefore behold, the days are coming
That I will bring judgment on the carved images of Babylon;
Her whole land shall be ashamed,
And all her slain shall fall in her midst.
48 Then the heavens and the earth and all that *is* in them
Shall sing joyously over Babylon;
For the plunderers shall come to her from the north," says the Lord.

49 As Babylon *has caused* the slain of Israel to fall,
So at Babylon the slain of all the earth shall fall.
50 You who have escaped the sword,
Get away! Do not stand still!
Remember the Lord afar off,
And let Jerusalem come to your mind.

51 We are ashamed because we have heard reproach.
Shame has covered our faces,
For strangers have come into the sanctuaries of the Lord's house.

52 "Therefore behold, the days are coming," says the Lord,
"That I will bring judgment on her carved images,
And throughout all her land the wounded shall groan.
53 Though Babylon were to mount up to heaven,

51:41 [a]A code word for Babylon (compare Jeremiah 25:26)

And though she were to fortify the height
of her strength,
Yet from Me plunderers would come to
her," says the Lord.

54 The sound of a cry *comes* from Babylon,
And great destruction from the land of
the Chaldeans,
55 Because the Lord is plundering Babylon
And silencing her loud voice,
Though her waves roar like great
waters,
And the noise of their voice is uttered,
56 Because the plunderer comes against her,
against Babylon,
And her mighty men are taken.
Every one of their bows is broken;
For the Lord *is* the God of recompense,
He will surely repay.

57 "And I will make drunk
Her princes and wise men,
Her governors, her deputies, and her
mighty men.
And they shall sleep a perpetual sleep
And not awake," says the King,
Whose name *is* the Lord of hosts.

58 Thus says the Lord of hosts:

"The broad walls of Babylon shall be
utterly broken,
And her high gates shall be burned with
fire;
The people will labor in vain,
And the nations, because of the fire;
And they shall be weary."

Jeremiah's Command to Seraiah

59 The word which Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah the son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, when he went with Zedekiah the king of Judah to Babylon in the fourth year of his reign. And Seraiah *was* the quartermaster. 60 So Jeremiah wrote in a book all the evil that would come upon Babylon, all these words that are written against Babylon. 61 And Jeremiah said to Seraiah, "When you arrive in Babylon and see it, and read all these words, 62 then you shall say, 'O Lord, You have spoken against this place to cut it off, so that none shall remain in it, neither man nor beast, but it shall be desolate forever.' 63 Now it shall be, when you have finished reading this book, *that* you shall tie a stone to it and throw it out into the Euphrates. 64 Then you shall say, 'Thus Babylon shall sink and not rise from the catastrophe that I will bring upon her. And they shall be weary.' "

Thus far *are* the words of Jeremiah.

The Fall of Jerusalem Reviewed

52 Zedekiah *was* twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name *was* Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. 2 He also did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. 3 For because of the anger of the Lord *this* happened in Jerusalem and Judah, till He finally cast them out from His presence. Then Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

4 Now it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth *day* of the month, *that* Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came against Jerusalem and encamped against it; and *they* built a siege wall against it all around. 5 So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. 6 By the fourth month, on the ninth day of the month, the famine had become so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. 7 Then the city *wall* was broken through, and all the men of war fled and went out of the city at night by way of the gate between the two walls, which *was* by the king's garden, even though the Chaldeans *were* near the city all around. And they went by way of the plain.[a]

8 But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and they overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. All his army was scattered from him. 9 So they took the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, and he pronounced judgment on him. 10 Then the king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. And he killed all the princes of Judah in Riblah. 11 He also put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the

52:7 [a] Or *the Arabah,* that is, the Jordan Valley

king of Babylon bound him in bronze fetters, took him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death.

The Temple and City Plundered and Burned

12 Now in the fifth month, on the tenth *day* of the month (which *was* the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, *who* served the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. 13 He burned the house of the Lord and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire. 14 And all the army of the Chaldeans who *were* with the captain of the guard broke down all the walls of Jerusalem all around. 15 Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive *some* of the poor people, the rest of the people who remained in the city, the defectors who had deserted to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the craftsmen. 16 But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left *some* of the poor of the land as vinedressers and farmers.

17 The bronze pillars that *were* in the house of the Lord, and the carts and the bronze Sea that *were* in the house of the Lord, the Chaldeans broke in pieces, and carried all their bronze to Babylon. 18 They also took away the pots, the shovels, the trimmers, the bowls, the spoons, and all the bronze utensils with which the *priests* ministered. 19 The basins, the firepans, the bowls, the pots, the lampstands, the spoons, and the cups, whatever *was* solid gold and whatever *was* solid silver, the captain of the guard took away. 20 The two pillars, one Sea, the twelve bronze bulls which *were* under *it, and* the carts, which King Solomon had made for the house of the Lord—the bronze of all these articles was beyond measure. 21 Now *concerning* the pillars: the height of one pillar *was* eighteen cubits, a measuring line of twelve cubits could measure its circumference, and its thickness *was* four fingers; *it was* hollow. 22 A capital of bronze *was* on it; and the height of one capital *was* five cubits, with a network and pomegranates all around the capital, all of bronze. The second pillar, with pomegranates was the same. 23 There were ninety-six pomegranates on the sides; all the pomegranates, all around on the network, *were* one hundred.

The People Taken Captive to Babylonia

24 The captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, Zephaniah the second priest, and the three doorkeepers. 25 He also took out of the city an officer who had charge of the men of war, seven men of the king's close associates who were found in the city, the principal scribe of the army who mustered the people of the land, and sixty men of the people of the land who were found in the midst of the city. 26 And Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took these and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. 27 Then the king of Babylon struck them and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. Thus Judah was carried away captive from its own land.

28 These *are* the people whom Nebuchadnezzar carried away captive: in the seventh year, three thousand and twenty-three Jews; 29 in the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar he carried away captive from Jerusalem eight hundred and thirty-two persons; 30 in the twenty-third

Life Lessons

Jeremiah 52:1–34

SITUATION
Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians after a two-year siege. The Babylonians blinded King Zedekiah, looted the Temple, and destroyed the city. Many Israelites were exiled to Babylon. God completely fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy.

OBSERVATION
True to His word, God punished unrepentant Israel through conquest by Babylon.

INSPIRATION
Don't we need to know the transfigured Christ? One who spits holy fires? Who convenes and commands historical figures? Who occupies the loftiest perch and wears the only true crown of the universe, God's beloved Son? One who takes friends to Mount Hermon's peak so they can peek into heaven?

Ascend it. Stare long and longingly at the Bonfire, the Holy One, the Highest One, the Only One. As you do, all your fears, save the fear of Christ Himself, will melt like ice cubes on a summer sidewalk. You will agree with David: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" (Psalm 27:1). . . .

The longer we live in Him, the greater He becomes in us. It's not that He changes but that we do; we see more of Him. We see dimensions, aspects, and characteristics we never saw before, increasing and astonishing increments of His purity, power, and uniqueness. We discard boxes and old images of Christ like used tissues.

year of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive of the Jews seven hundred and forty-five persons. All the persons *were* four thousand six hundred.

Jehoiachin Released from Prison

31 Now it came to pass in the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of
Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth
day of the month, *that* Evil-Merodach[a] king of Babylon, in the *first*
year of his reign, lifted up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah and
brought him out of prison. 32 And he spoke kindly to him and gave
him a more prominent seat than those of the kings who *were* with him
in Babylon. 33 So Jehoiachin changed from his prison garments, and
he ate bread regularly before the *king* all the days of his life. 34 And as
for his provisions, there was a regular ration given him by the king of
Babylon, a portion for each day until the day of his death, all the days
of his life.

52:31 [a] Or *Awil-Marduk*

We don't dare place Jesus on a political donkey or elephant. Arrogance certainty becomes meek curiosity. Define Jesus with a doctrine or confine Him to an opinion? By no means. We'll sooner capture the Caribbean in a butterfly net than we'll capture Christ in a box. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Is someone in your family anxious? In a panic? Help that person to face the chaos, to work through the pain with God's help, to face the problems peacefully.

EXPLORATION

Punishment—Genesis 3:14–19; 9:11–15; Exodus 32:34; Psalm 38:2–4; Isaiah 13:11; Jeremiah 52.

THE BOOK OF

LAMENTATIONS

INTRODUCTION

You're looking for Jeremiah? Come, look out the window. That's him. That's him walking through the rubble. Shoulders stooped, step slow.

He's a tired man. I knew him when he was young.

But that was long ago.

That was before the walls fell.

That was before the enemy came.

Look at him sort through the stones. He does this all day. He'll spot a dish that once sat on a table or a sandal once worn by a child. Each item he clutches, not to keep but to mourn. He'll hold the plate to his chest and fall on his knees and wail. Sobbing erupts like cloudbursts. He'll stay there and weep until he has mourned the memory of the object, and then he'll place it back on the pile and move on.

Soon he sees another item, and the weeping starts all over again.

Some people think he's crazy. Some people think he's lost what little sense he had.

I don't. I don't think him insane. After all, didn't he tell us this would happen? No, he's not crazy. He's just sad.

I told him the other day, I said, "Jeremiah, write these things down. These feelings that you have. This sorrow that you feel—write it down."

He looked at me from under those bushy eyebrows and said, "Maybe you're right . . . maybe you're right. I just don't want the people to forget."

I told him to write it down. I hope he will.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: The prophet Jeremiah

Date Written: 625–586 B.C. after the fall of Jerusalem

Key Themes:

- There are consequences for every person's actions as there were for Jerusalem's.
- No matter how difficult the circumstances, God's mercies still stand.
- The effects of sin are dreadful.

Key Verses:

"Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22, 23).

Contents:

I. Destruction of Jerusalem 1:1–22

II. God's Anger and the People's Sins 2:1–22

III. Jeremiah's Grief and Confession 3:1–66

IV. Siege of Jerusalem 4:1–22

V. Prayer for Restoration 5:1–22

Life Lessons

Lamentations 1:1–22

SITUATION
Lamentations was read publicly each year to remind the Jews that their sin had caused the destruction of Jerusalem. The book recorded both the faithfulness of God and the repentance of the people.

OBSERVATION
Sin brings punishment. But sorrow, confession, and repentance bring healing and wholeness.

INSPIRATION
When Christ speaks to the dead, the dead listen. Indeed, had Jesus not addressed Lazarus by name, the tenant of every tomb on earth would have stepped forth.

Lazarus jolts up in the coffin, blinks, and looks around the room as if someone carted him there during a nap. A woman screams. Another faints. Everyone shouts. And you? You learned something. You learned what to say at funerals.

You learned there is a time to say nothing. Your words can't dispel a fog, but your presence can warm it. And your words can't give a Lazarus back to his sisters. But God's can. And it's just a matter of time before He speaks. "The Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout. . . . All the Christians who have died will rise from their graves" (1 Thessalonians 4:16 NLT).

Till then, we grieve, but not like those who have no hope.

And we listen. We listen for His voice. For we know who has the final say about

Jerusalem in Affliction

How lonely sits the city
That was full of people!
How like a widow is she,
Who *was* great among the nations!
The princess among the provinces
Has become a slave!

2 She weeps bitterly in the night,
Her tears *are* on her cheeks;
Among all her lovers
She has none to comfort *her.*
All her friends have dealt treacherously with her;
They have become her enemies.

3 Judah has gone into captivity,
Under affliction and hard servitude;
She dwells among the nations,
She finds no rest;
All her persecutors overtake her in dire straits.

4 The roads to Zion mourn
Because no one comes to the set feasts.
All her gates are desolate;
Her priests sigh,
Her virgins are afflicted,
And she *is* in bitterness.

5 Her adversaries have become the master,
Her enemies prosper;
For the Lord has afflicted her
Because of the multitude of her transgressions.
Her children have gone into captivity before the enemy.

6 And from the daughter of Zion
All her splendor has departed.
Her princes have become like deer
That find no pasture,
That flee without strength
Before the pursuer.

7 In the days of her affliction and roaming,
Jerusalem remembers all her pleasant things
That she had in the days of old.
When her people fell into the hand of the enemy,
With no one to help her,
The adversaries saw her
And mocked at her downfall.[a]

1:7 [a]Vulgate reads *her Sabbaths.*

8 Jerusalem has sinned gravely,
Therefore she has become vile.[a]
All who honored her despise her
Because they have seen her nakedness;
Yes, she sighs and turns away.

9 Her uncleanness *is* in her skirts;
She did not consider her destiny;
Therefore her collapse was awesome;
She had no comforter.
"O Lord, behold my affliction,
For *the* enemy is exalted!"

10 The adversary has spread his hand
Over all her pleasant things;
For she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary,
Those whom You commanded
Not to enter Your assembly.

11 All her people sigh,
They seek bread;
They have given their valuables for food to restore life.
"See, O Lord, and consider,
For I am scorned."

12 "*Is it* nothing to you, all you who pass by?
Behold and see
If there is any sorrow like my sorrow,
Which has been brought on me,
Which the Lord has inflicted
In the day of His fierce anger.

13 "From above He has sent fire into my bones,
And it overpowered them;
He has spread a net for my feet
And turned me back;
He has made me desolate
And faint all the day.

14 "The yoke of my transgressions was bound;[a]
They were woven together by His hands,
And thrust upon my neck.
He made my strength fail;
The Lord delivered me into the hands of *those whom* I am not
able to withstand.

15 "The Lord has trampled underfoot all my mighty *men* in my
midst;
He has called an assembly against me

1:8 [a]Septuagint and Vulgate read *moved* or *removed*. **1:14** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *watched over*.

death. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What sorrows have you known? Have you experienced the death of a loved one, a ruined life, or regrettable mistakes? If your heart is grieving, turn to God for comfort and assurance. He hears your cries, tears, and disappointments.

EXPLORATION
Comfort from God—Psalm 23:1–4; 94:19; 119:50, 52; Isaiah 66:13; 2 Corinthians 1:3–5; Philippians 2:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17.

To crush my young men;
The Lord trampled *as* in a winepress
The virgin daughter of Judah.

16 "For these *things* I weep;
My eye, my eye overflows with water;
Because the comforter, who should
restore my life,
Is far from me.
My children are desolate
Because the enemy prevailed."

17 Zion spreads out her hands,
But no one comforts her;
The Lord has commanded concerning
Jacob
That those around him *become* his
adversaries;
Jerusalem has become an unclean thing
among them.

18 "The Lord is righteous,
For I rebelled against His commandment.
Hear now, all peoples,
And behold my sorrow;
My virgins and my young men
Have gone into captivity.

19 "I called for my lovers,
But they deceived me;
My priests and my elders
Breathed their last in the city,
While they sought food
To restore their life.

20 "See, O Lord, that I *am* in distress;
My soul is troubled;
My heart is overturned within me,
For I have been very rebellious.
Outside the sword bereaves,
At home *it is* like death.

21 "They have heard that I sigh,
But no one comforts me.
All my enemies have heard of my
trouble;
They are glad that You have done *it.*
Bring on the day You have announced,
That they may become like me.

22 "Let all their wickedness come before You,
And do to them as You have done to me
For all my transgressions;
For my sighs *are* many,
And my heart *is* faint."

God's Anger with Jerusalem

2 How the Lord has covered the daughter
of Zion
With a cloud in His anger!
He cast down from heaven to the earth
The beauty of Israel,
And did not remember His footstool
In the day of His anger.

2 The Lord has swallowed up and has not
pitied
All the dwelling places of Jacob.
He has thrown down in His wrath
The strongholds of the daughter of Judah;
He has brought *them* down to the ground;
He has profaned the kingdom and its
princes.

3 He has cut off in fierce anger
Every horn of Israel;
He has drawn back His right hand
From before the enemy.
He has blazed against Jacob like a flaming
fire
Devouring all around.

4 Standing like an enemy, He has bent His
bow;
With His right hand, like an adversary,
He has slain all *who were* pleasing to His
eye;
On the tent of the daughter of Zion,
He has poured out His fury like fire.

5 The Lord was like an enemy.
He has swallowed up Israel,
He has swallowed up all her palaces;
He has destroyed her strongholds,
And has increased mourning and
lamentation
In the daughter of Judah.

6 He has done violence to His tabernacle,
As if it were a garden;
He has destroyed His place of assembly;
The Lord has caused
The appointed feasts and Sabbaths to be
forgotten in Zion.

In His burning indignation He has spurned the king and the
priest.

7 The Lord has spurned His altar,
He has abandoned His sanctuary;
He has given up the walls of her palaces
Into the hand of the enemy.
They have made a noise in the house of the Lord
As on the day of a set feast.

8 The Lord has purposed to destroy
The wall of the daughter of Zion.
He has stretched out a line;
He has not withdrawn His hand from destroying;
Therefore He has caused the rampart and wall to lament;
They languished together.

9 Her gates have sunk into the ground;
He has destroyed and broken her bars.
Her king and her princes *are* among the nations;
The Law *is* no *more,*
And her prophets find no vision from the Lord.

10 The elders of the daughter of Zion
Sit on the ground *and* keep silence;
They throw dust on their heads
And gird themselves with sackcloth.
The virgins of Jerusalem
Bow their heads to the ground.

11 My eyes fail with tears,
My heart is troubled;
My bile is poured on the ground
Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people,
Because the children and the infants
Faint in the streets of the city.

12 They say to their mothers,
"Where *is* grain and wine?"
As they swoon like the wounded
In the streets of the city,
As their life is poured out
In their mothers' bosom.

13 How shall I consume you?
To what shall I liken you,
O daughter of Jerusalem?
What shall I compare with you, that I may comfort you,
O virgin daughter of Zion?
For your ruin *is* spread wide as the sea;
Who can heal you?

Life LESSONS

Lamentations 2:1–22

SITUATION
Jeremiah's second lament spoke of affliction and deliverance. Solomon's temple symbolized God's presence in Israel. Its destruction represented God's rejection of His people because of their stubborn sinfulness.

OBSERVATION
God cares more about how we worship Him than where we worship Him.

INSPIRATION
The fog of the broken heart.

It's a dark fog that slyly imprisons the soul and refuses easy escape. It's a silent mist that eclipses the sun and beckons the darkness. It's a heavy cloud that honors no hour and respects no person. Depression, discouragement, disappointment, doubt . . . all are companions of this dreaded presence.

The fog of the broken heart disorients our life. It makes it hard to see the road. Dim your lights. Wipe off the windshield. Slow down. Do what you wish, nothing helps. When this fog encircles us, our vision is blocked and tomorrow is a forever away. When this billowy blackness envelops us, the most earnest words of help and hope are but vacant phrases.

If you have ever been betrayed by a friend, you know what I mean. If you have ever been dumped by a spouse or abandoned by a parent, you have seen this fog. If you have ever placed a spade of dirt on a loved one's casket or kept vigil at

a dear one's bedside, you, too, recognize this cloud.

If you have been in this fog, or are in it now, you can be sure of one thing—you are not alone. Even the saltiest of sea captains have lost their bearings because of the appearance of this unwanted cloud. . . .

Think back over the last two or three months. How many broken hearts did you encounter? How many wounded spirits did you witness? How many stories of tragedy did you read about? . . .

The list goes on and on, doesn't it? Foggy tragedies. How they blind our vision and destroy our dreams. Forget any great hopes of reaching the world. Forget any plans of changing society. Forget any aspirations of moving mountains. Forget all that. Just help me make it through the night!

The suffering of the broken heart. . . .

Seeing God . . . does wonders for our own suffering. God was never more human than at this hour. God was never nearer to us than when He hurt. The Incarnation was never so fulfilled as in the garden.

As a result, time spent in the fog of pain could be God's greatest gift. It could be the hour that we finally see our Maker. . . . Maybe in our suffering we can see God like never before.

The next time you are called to suffer, pay attention. It may be the closest you'll ever get to God. Watch closely. It could very well be that the hand that extends itself to lead you out of the fog is a pierced one. (From *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Worship God in prayer and song. Find a song that lifts

14 Your prophets have seen for you
False and deceptive visions;
They have not uncovered your iniquity,
To bring back your captives,
But have envisioned for you false prophecies and delusions.

15 All who pass by clap *their* hands at you;
They hiss and shake their heads
At the daughter of Jerusalem:
"*Is* this the city that is called
'The perfection of beauty,
The joy of the whole earth'?"

16 All your enemies have opened their mouth against you;
They hiss and gnash *their* teeth.
They say, "We have swallowed *her* up!
Surely this *is* the day we have waited for;
We have found *it,* we have seen *it!*"

17 The Lord has done what He purposed;
He has fulfilled His word
Which He commanded in days of old.
He has thrown down and has not pitied,
And He has caused an enemy to rejoice over you;
He has exalted the horn of your adversaries.

18 Their heart cried out to the Lord,
"O wall of the daughter of Zion,
Let tears run down like a river day and night;
Give yourself no relief;
Give your eyes no rest.

19 "Arise, cry out in the night,
At the beginning of the watches;
Pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord.
Lift your hands toward Him
For the life of your young children,
Who faint from hunger at the head of every street."

20 "See, O Lord, and consider!
To whom have You done this?
Should the women eat their offspring,
The children they have cuddled?[a]
Should the priest and prophet be slain
In the sanctuary of the Lord?

21 "Young and old lie
On the ground in the streets;
My virgins and my young men
Have fallen by the sword;

2:20 [a]Vulgate reads *a span long.*

You have slain *them* in the day of Your anger,
You have slaughtered *and* not pitied.

22 "You have invited as to a feast day
The terrors that surround me.
In the day of the Lord's anger
There was no refugee or survivor.
Those whom I have borne and brought up
My enemies have destroyed."

The Prophet's Anguish and Hope

3 I *am* the man *who* has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath.
2 He has led me and made *me* walk
In darkness and not *in* light.
3 Surely He has turned His hand against me
Time and time again throughout the day.

4 He has aged my flesh and my skin,
And broken my bones.
5 He has besieged me
And surrounded *me* with bitterness and woe.
6 He has set me in dark places
Like the dead of long ago.

7 He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out;
He has made my chain heavy.
8 Even when I cry and shout,
He shuts out my prayer.
9 He has blocked my ways with hewn stone;
He has made my paths crooked.

10 He *has been* to me a bear lying in wait,
Like a lion in ambush.
11 He has turned aside my ways and torn me in pieces;
He has made me desolate.
12 He has bent His bow
And set me up as a target for the arrow.

13 He has caused the arrows of His quiver
To pierce my loins.[a]
14 I have become the ridicule of all my people—
Their taunting song all the day.
15 He has filled me with bitterness,
He has made me drink wormwood.

16 He has also broken my teeth with gravel,
And covered me with ashes.
17 You have moved my soul far from peace;
I have forgotten prosperity.
18 And I said, "My strength and my hope
Have perished from the Lord."

3:13 [a]Literally *kidneys*

your heart to God; sing it throughout the day. Thank God often for His help and love for you.

EXPLORATION
Worship—Nehemiah 9:2, 3; Psalm 122:1; Isaiah 29:13, 14; Jeremiah 7:2, 3; John 4:21–24; 1 Corinthians 11:2–16.

Life LESSONS

Lamentations 3:1–66

SITUATION
Jeremiah's sorrow and consolation represented the nation's agony. Surrounded by sin and sorrow, Jeremiah saw hope in God's steadfast love and mercy.

OBSERVATION
God renews our lives day by day.

INSPIRATION
Feed your fears, and your faith will starve.

Feed your faith, and your fears will.

Jeremiah did this. Talk about a person caught in a storm! Slide down the timeline to the left about six hundred years, and learn a lesson from this Old Testament prophet. "I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of [God's] wrath. He has led me and made me walk in darkness and not in light. Surely He has turned His hand against me time and time again throughout the day" (Lamentations 3:1–3).

Jeremiah was depressed, as gloomy as a giraffe with a neck ache. Jerusalem was under siege, his nation under duress. His world collapsed like a sand castle in a typhoon. He faulted God for his horrible emotional distress. He also blamed God for his physical ailments. "[God] has aged

my flesh and my skin, and broken my bones" (v. 4).

His body ached. His heart was sick. His faith was puny. "[God] has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and woe" (v. 5). Jeremiah felt trapped like a man on a dead-end street. "He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out; He has made my chain heavy. Even when I cry and shout, He shuts out my prayer. He has blocked my ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked" (vv. 7–9).

Jeremiah could tell you the height of the waves and the speed of the wind. But then he realized how fast he was sinking. So he shifted his gaze. "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him' " (vv. 21–24 RSV).

"But this I call to mind . . ." Depressed, Jeremiah altered his thoughts, shifted his attention. He turned his eyes away from the waves and looked into the wonder of God. He quickly recited a quintet of promises. (I can envision him tapping these out on the five fingers of his hand.)

1. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.
2. His mercies never come to an end.
3. They are new every morning.
4. Great is thy faithfulness.
5. The Lord is my portion.

The storm didn't cease, but his discouragement did. (From Fearless by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Send a note to someone who is overwhelmed by

19 Remember my affliction and roaming,
The wormwood and the gall.
20 My soul still remembers
And sinks within me.
21 This I recall to my mind,
Therefore I have hope.

22 *Through* the LORD's mercies we are not consumed,
Because His compassions fail not.
23 *They are* new every morning;
Great *is* Your faithfulness.
24 "The LORD *is* my portion," says my soul,
"Therefore I hope in Him!"

25 The LORD *is* good to those who wait for Him,
To the soul *who* seeks Him.
26 *It is* good that *one* should hope and wait quietly
For the salvation of the LORD.
27 *It is* good for a man to bear
The yoke in his youth.

28 Let him sit alone and keep silent,
Because *God* has laid *it* on him;
29 Let him put his mouth in the dust—
There may yet be hope.
30 Let him give *his* cheek to the one who strikes him,
And be full of reproach.

31 For the Lord will not cast off forever.
32 Though He causes grief,
Yet He will show compassion
According to the multitude of His mercies.
33 For He does not afflict willingly,
Nor grieve the children of men.

34 To crush under one's feet
All the prisoners of the earth,
35 To turn aside the justice *due* a man
Before the face of the Most High,
36 Or subvert a man in his cause—
The Lord does not approve.

37 Who *is* he *who* speaks and it comes to pass,
When the Lord has not commanded *it?*
38 *Is it* not from the mouth of the Most High
That woe and well-being proceed?
39 Why should a living man complain,
A man for the punishment of his sins?

40 Let us search out and examine our ways,
And turn back to the LORD;
41 Let us lift our hearts and hands

To God in heaven.
42 We have transgressed and rebelled;
You have not pardoned.

43 You have covered *Yourself* with anger
And pursued us;
You have slain *and* not pitied.
44 You have covered Yourself with a cloud,
That prayer should not pass through.
45 You have made us an offscouring and refuse
In the midst of the peoples.

46 All our enemies
Have opened their mouths against us.
47 Fear and a snare have come upon us,
Desolation and destruction.
48 My eyes overflow with rivers of water
For the destruction of the daughter of my people.

49 My eyes flow and do not cease,
Without interruption,
50 Till the Lord from heaven
Looks down and sees.
51 My eyes bring suffering to my soul
Because of all the daughters of my city.

52 My enemies without cause
Hunted me down like a bird.
53 They silenced[a] my life in the pit
And threw stones at me.
54 The waters flowed over my head;
I said, "I am cut off!"

55 I called on Your name, O Lord,
From the lowest pit.
56 You have heard my voice:
"Do not hide Your ear
From my sighing, from my cry for help."
57 You drew near on the day I called on You,
And said, "Do not fear!"

58 O Lord, You have pleaded the case for my soul;
You have redeemed my life.
59 O Lord, You have seen *how* I am wronged;
Judge my case.
60 You have seen all their vengeance,
All their schemes against me.

61 You have heard their reproach, O Lord,
All their schemes against me,

3:53 [a]Septuagint reads *put to death.*

his or her lot in life. Assure that friend of your prayers. Include a Scripture verse that tells of God's love.

EXPLORATION
God's Love—Proverbs 13:24; Luke 12:7; Romans 8:35–39; Ephesians 3:17–19; 1 John 4:9, 10.

If you are overdrawn at a bank, a fine must be paid. If you are overdrawn with God, a penalty must be paid as well. The fine at the bank is a hassle. But the penalty from God is hell.

—Max Lucado (The Great House of God)

62 The lips of my enemies
And their whispering against me all the day.
63 Look at their sitting down and their rising up;
I *am* their taunting song.

64 Repay them, O Lord,
According to the work of their hands.
65 Give them a veiled[a] heart;
Your curse *be* upon them!
66 In Your anger,
Pursue and destroy them
From under the heavens of the Lord.

The Degradation of Zion

4 How the gold has become dim!
How changed the fine gold!
The stones of the sanctuary are scattered
At the head of every street.

2 The precious sons of Zion,
Valuable as fine gold,
How they are regarded as clay pots,
The work of the hands of the potter!

3 Even the jackals present their breasts
To nurse their young;
But the daughter of my people *is* cruel,
Like ostriches in the wilderness.

4 The tongue of the infant clings
To the roof of its mouth for thirst;
The young children ask for bread,
But no one breaks *it* for them.

5 Those who ate delicacies
Are desolate in the streets;
Those who were brought up in scarlet
Embrace ash heaps.

6 The punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people
Is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom,
Which was overthrown in a moment,
With no hand to help her!

7 Her Nazirites[a] were brighter than snow
And whiter than milk;
They were more ruddy in body than rubies,
Like sapphire in their appearance.

3:65 [a]A Jewish tradition reads *sorrow of.* **4:7** [a]Or *nobles*

Life Lessons

Lamentations 4:1—5:22

SITUATION
Jeremiah described the people's fate. He also told what they had done to deserve such punishment. The sins of the prophets, priests, and people had brought about the city's destruction.

OBSERVATION
God does not leave His people in destruction and judgment. God will restore.

INSPIRATION
You messed up yesterday. You said the wrong words, took the wrong turn, loved the wrong person, reacted the wrong way. You spoke when you should have listened, walked when you should have waited, judged when you should have trusted, indulged when you should have resisted.

You messed up yesterday. But you'll mess up more if you let yesterday's mistakes sabotage today's attitude. God's mercies are new every morning. Receive them. Learn a lesson from the Cascade forests of Washington State. Some of its trees are hundreds of years old, far surpassing the typical life span of fifty to sixty years. One leaf-laden patriarch dates back seven centuries! What makes the difference? Daily drenching rains. . . .

Lightning strikes you as well. Thunderbolts of regret can ignite and consume you. Counteract them with downpours of God's grace, daily washings of forgiveness. Once a year won't do. Once a month is insufficient. Weekly showers leave you dry. Sporadic mistings leave

8 *Now* their appearance is blacker than soot;
They go unrecognized in the streets;
Their skin clings to their bones,
It has become as dry as wood.

9 *Those* slain by the sword are better off
Than *those* who die of hunger;
For these pine away,
Stricken *for lack* of the fruits of the field.

10 The hands of the compassionate women
Have cooked their own children;
They became food for them
In the destruction of the daughter of my people.

11 The Lord has fulfilled His fury,
He has poured out His fierce anger.
He kindled a fire in Zion,
And it has devoured its foundations.

12 The kings of the earth,
And all inhabitants of the world,
Would not have believed
That the adversary and the enemy
Could enter the gates of Jerusalem—

13 Because of the sins of her prophets
And the iniquities of her priests,
Who shed in her midst
The blood of the just.

14 They wandered blind in the streets;
They have defiled themselves with blood,
So that no one would touch their garments.

15 They cried out to them,
"Go away, unclean!
Go away, go away,
Do not touch us!"
When they fled and wandered,
Those among the nations said,
"They shall no longer dwell *here*."

16 The face[a] of the Lord scattered them;
He no longer regards them.
The people do not respect the priests
Nor show favor to the elders.

17 Still our eyes failed us,
Watching vainly for our help;

4:16 [a]Targum reads *anger.*

you combustible. You need a solid soaking every day. "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22, 23). (From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What tempts you to neglect or ignore God? Take a walk in a quiet place. Fellowship with God. Spend time in His presence every day.

EXPLORATION

Carnal Life—Judges 3:5–7; Psalm 49; 119:9; Romans 13:12–14; 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; 1 John 2:15, 16; Revelation 9:20, 21.

In our watching we watched
For a nation *that* could not save *us*.

18 They tracked our steps
So that we could not walk in our streets.
Our end was near;
Our days were over,
For our end had come.

19 Our pursuers were swifter
Than the eagles of the heavens.
They pursued us on the mountains
And lay in wait for us in the wilderness.

20 The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord,
Was caught in their pits,
Of whom we said, "Under his shadow
We shall live among the nations."

21 Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom,
You who dwell in the land of Uz!
The cup shall also pass over to you
And you shall become drunk and make yourself naked.

22 *The punishment of* your iniquity is accomplished,
O daughter of Zion;
He will no longer send you into captivity.
He will punish your iniquity,
O daughter of Edom;
He will uncover your sins!

A Prayer for Restoration

5 Remember, O Lord, what has come upon us;
Look, and behold our reproach!
2 Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens,
And our houses to foreigners.
3 We have become orphans and waifs,
Our mothers *are* like widows.

4 We pay for the water we drink,
And our wood comes at a price.

5 *They* pursue at our heels;[a]
We labor *and* have no rest.
6 We have given our hand *to* the Egyptians
And the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread.

7 Our fathers sinned *and are* no more,
But we bear their iniquities.
8 Servants rule over us;
There is none to deliver *us* from their hand.
9 We get our bread *at the risk* of our lives,
Because of the sword in the wilderness.

10 Our skin is hot as an oven,
Because of the fever of famine.
11 They ravished the women in Zion,
The maidens in the cities of Judah.
12 Princes were hung up by their hands,
And elders were not respected.
13 Young men ground at the millstones;
Boys staggered under *loads of* wood.
14 The elders have ceased *gathering at* the gate,
And the young men from their music.

15 The joy of our heart has ceased;
Our dance has turned into mourning.
16 The crown has fallen *from* our head.
Woe to us, for we have sinned!
17 Because of this our heart is faint;
Because of these *things* our eyes grow dim;
18 Because of Mount Zion which is desolate,
With foxes walking about on it.

19 You, O Lord, remain forever;
Your throne from generation to generation.
20 Why do You forget us forever,
And forsake us for so long a time?
21 Turn us back to You, O Lord, and we will be restored;
Renew our days as of old,
22 Unless You have utterly rejected us,
And are very angry with us!

5:5 [a]Literally *necks*

THE BOOK OF

EZEKIEL

INTRODUCTION

Out of the ruins of Jerusalem came a gutsy preacher named Ezekiel. He was among the Jews taken to Babylon after the fall of his country. He left behind his city. He left behind his temple. He left behind his home.

But he didn't leave his faith.

He announced it to everyone who would listen. For twenty-two years he paced the streets proclaiming both sides of the faith.

The bad side? Turn or burn. Forgive me for being so direct, but Ezekiel was.

The good side? Turn and learn. God has a great plan for His people. A great city. Justice will reign and worship will be restored. Unlike Jerusalem, God's city is eternal. Who will be in God's city? Ezekiel answers that with the final words of the book—*The Lord Is There.*

Out of the ruins came Ezekiel. Out of the ruins came the promise. Out of the ruins came the new hope.

Is your life in ruins? Look ahead to God's city: *The Lord Is There.*

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Ezekiel

Date Written: c. 571 B.C.

Key Themes:

- The righteousness of nations becomes compromised by prosperity, pride, and inactivity.
- Prayer is a necessity in a nation's restoration.
- The righteous must be the watchmen of their people.
- There is a heavenly kingdom beyond our imaginations.

Key Verses:

"'So I will make My holy name known in the midst of My people Israel, and I will not let them profane My holy name anymore. Then the nations shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel. Surely it is coming, and it shall be done,' says the Lord GOD. 'This is the day of which I have spoken'" (Ezekiel 39:7, 8).

Contents:

I. Ezekiel's Call to Prophesy 1:1—3:27

II. God's Judgment on Judah 4:1—24:27

III. God's Judgment on the Gentiles 25:1—32:32

IV. Restoration of Israel 33:1—48:35

Life LESSONS

Ezekiel 1:1—3:27

SITUATION
Ezekiel, a priest who had favor in God's eyes, suffered because of the sin of the whole nation. In exile, he preached to fellow Jewish captives.

OBSERVATION
God ordains our position so that we can show God's love to those around us.

INSPIRATION
God, who is never downcast, never tires of your down days.

David neglected good advice. Learn from his mistake. Next time you lack the will to go on, *seek healthy counsel.*

You won't want to. Slumping people love slumping people. Hurting people hang with hurting people. We love those who commiserate and avoid those who correct. Yet correction and direction are what we need.

I discovered the importance of healthy counsel in a half-Ironman triathlon. After the 1.2 mile swim and the 56-mile bike ride, I didn't have much energy left for the 13.1 mile run. Neither did the fellow jogging next to me. I asked him how he was doing and soon regretted posing the question.

"This stinks. This race is the dumbest decision I've ever made." He had more complaints than a taxpayer at the IRS. My response to him? "Good-bye." I knew if I listened too long, I'd start agreeing with him.

I caught up with a sixty-six-year-old grandmother. Her tone was just the opposite. "You'll finish

Ezekiel's Vision of God

Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth *month,* on the fifth *day* of the month, as I *was* among the captives by the River Chebar, *that* the heavens were opened and I saw visions[a] of God. 2 On the fifth *day* of the month, which *was* in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, 3 the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans[a] by the River Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was upon him there.

4 Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness *was* all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire. 5 Also from within it *came* the likeness of four living creatures. And this *was* their appearance: they had the likeness of a man. 6 Each one had four faces, and each one had four wings. 7 Their legs *were* straight, and the soles of their feet *were* like the soles of calves' feet. They sparkled like the color of burnished bronze. 8 The hands of a man *were* under their wings on their four sides; and each of the four had faces and wings. 9 Their wings touched one another. *The creatures* did not turn when they went, but each one went straight forward.

10 As for the likeness of their faces, *each* had the face of a man; each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle. 11 Thus *were* their faces. Their wings stretched upward; two *wings* of each one touched one another, and two covered their bodies. 12 And each one went straight forward; they went wherever the spirit wanted to go, and they did not turn when they went.

13 As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance *was* like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches going back and forth among the living creatures. The fire was bright, and out of the fire went lightning. 14 And the living creatures ran back and forth, in appearance like a flash of lightning.

15 Now as I looked at the living creatures, behold, a wheel *was* on the earth beside each living creature with its four faces. 16 The appearance of the wheels and their workings *was* like the color of beryl, and all four had the same likeness. The appearance of their workings *was,* as it were, a wheel in the middle of a wheel. 17 When they moved, they went toward any one of four directions; they did not turn aside when they went. 18 As for their rims, they were so high they were awesome; and their rims *were* full of eyes, all around the four of them. 19 When the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. 20 Wherever the spirit wanted to go, they went, *because* there the spirit went; and the wheels were lifted together with them, for the spirit of the living creatures[a] *was* in the wheels. 21 When those went, *these* went; when those stood, *these* stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up together with them, for the spirit of the living creatures[a] *was* in the wheels.

1:1 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Septuagint, and Vulgate; Syriac and Targum read *a vision.* **1:3** [a]Or *Babylonians,* and so elsewhere in this book **1:20** [a]Literally *living creature;* Septuagint and Vulgate read *spirit of life;* Targum reads *creatures.* **1:21** [a]Literally *living creature;* Septuagint and Vulgate read *spirit of life;* Targum reads *creatures.*

22 The likeness of the firmament above the heads of the living
creatures[a] *was* like the color of an awesome crystal, stretched out
over their heads. 23 And under the firmament their wings *spread out*
straight, one toward another. Each one had two which covered one
side, and each one had two which covered the other side of the body.
24 When they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of
many waters, like the voice of the Almighty, a tumult like the noise
of an army; and when they stood still, they let down their wings. 25 A
voice came from above the firmament that *was* over their heads;
whenever they stood, they let down their wings.

26 And above the firmament over their heads *was* the likeness of
a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the
throne *was* a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it.
27 Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were,
the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it;
and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were,
the appearance of fire with brightness all around. 28 Like the appear-
ance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so *was* the appearance of
the brightness all around it. This *was* the appearance of the likeness
of the glory of the Lord.

Ezekiel Sent to Rebellious Israel

So when I saw *it,* I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of One speaking.

2 And He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will
speak to you." 2 Then the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me,
and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me. 3 And He
said to me: "Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to
a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers
have transgressed against Me to this very day. 4 For *they are* impudent
and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall say
to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.' 5 As for them, whether they hear or
whether they refuse—for they *are* a rebellious house—yet they will
know that a prophet has been among them.

6 "And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them nor be afraid of
their words, though briers and thorns *are* with you and you dwell
among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by
their looks, though they *are* a rebellious house. 7 You shall speak My
words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse, for they *are*
rebellious. 8 But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Do not be
rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what
I give you."

9 Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and
behold, a scroll of a book *was* in it. 10 Then He spread it before me; and
there was writing on the inside and on the outside, and written on it
were lamentations and mourning and woe.

3 Moreover He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this
scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." 2 So I opened my
mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll.

1:22 [a]Following Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text reads *living creature.*

this," she encouraged. "It's hot, but at least it's not raining. One step at a time. . . . Don't forget to hydrate. . . . Stay in there." I ran next to her until my heart was lifted and my legs were aching. I finally had to slow down. "No problem," she said, waving as she kept going.

Which of the two describes the counsel you seek? "Refuse good advice and watch your plans fail; take good counsel and watch them succeed" (Proverbs 15:22 MSG).

Be quick to pray, seek healthy counsel, and don't give up. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Is your life discouraging? Is the difficulty unavoidable? God has placed you where you can help others. Encourage others who have the same illness you have. Share Christ with those who have also experienced the loss of a loved one. Get to know others who are recovering from a problem you have faced and share with them what has helped you.

EXPLORATION

Preaching Without a Response—Isaiah 6:9–12; Jeremiah 1:17–19.

3 And He said to me, "Son of man, feed your
belly, and fill your stomach with this scroll that
I give you." So I ate, and it was in my mouth
like honey in sweetness.

4 Then He said to me: "Son of man, go to
the house of Israel and speak with My words
to them. 5 For you *are* not sent to a people of
unfamiliar speech and of hard language, *but*
to the house of Israel, 6 not to many people
of unfamiliar speech and of hard language,
whose words you cannot understand. Surely,
had I sent you to them, they would have
listened to you. 7 But the house of Israel will
not listen to you, because they will not listen
to Me; for all the house of Israel *are* impu-
dent and hard-hearted. 8 Behold, I have made
your face strong against their faces, and your
forehead strong against their foreheads. 9 Like
adamant stone, harder than flint, I have made
your forehead; do not be afraid of them, nor
be dismayed at their looks, though they *are* a
rebellious house."

10 Moreover He said to me: "Son of man,
receive into your heart all My words that I
speak to you, and hear with your ears. 11 And
go, get to the captives, to the children of your
people, and speak to them and tell them,
'Thus says the Lord God,' whether they hear,
or whether they refuse."

12 Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard
behind me a great thunderous voice: "Blessed
is the glory of the Lord from His place!" 13 *I* also
heard the noise of the wings of the living crea-
tures that touched one another, and the noise
of the wheels beside them, and a great thun-
derous noise. 14 So the Spirit lifted me up and
took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the
heat of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was
strong upon me. 15 Then I came to the captives
at Tel Abib, who dwelt by the River Chebar;
and I sat where they sat, and remained there
astonished among them seven days.

Ezekiel Is a Watchman

16 Now it came to pass at the end of seven
days that the word of the Lord came to me,
saying, 17 "Son of man, I have made you a
watchman for the house of Israel; therefore
hear a word from My mouth, and give them
warning from Me: 18 When I say to the wicked,
'You shall surely die,' and you give him no
warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from
his wicked way, to save his life, that same
wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his
blood I will require at your hand. 19 Yet, if you
warn the wicked, and he does not turn from
his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he
shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered
your soul.

20 "Again, when a righteous *man* turns from
his righteousness and commits iniquity, and
I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall
die; because you did not give him warning,
he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness
which he has done shall not be remembered;
but his blood I will require at your hand.
21 Nevertheless if you warn the righteous *man*
that the righteous should not sin, and he does
not sin, he shall surely live because he took
warning; also you will have delivered your
soul."

22 Then the hand of the Lord was upon me
there, and He said to me, "Arise, go out into the
plain, and there I shall talk with you."

23 So I arose and went out into the plain,
and behold, the glory of the Lord stood there,
like the glory which I saw by the River Chebar;
and I fell on my face. 24 Then the Spirit entered
me and set me on my feet, and spoke with me
and said to me: "Go, shut yourself inside your
house. 25 And you, O son of man, surely they
will put ropes on you and bind you with them,
so that you cannot go out among them. 26 I
will make your tongue cling to the roof of your
mouth, so that you shall be mute and not be
one to rebuke them, for they *are* a rebellious
house. 27 But when I speak with you, I will
open your mouth, and you shall say to them,
'Thus says the Lord God.' He who hears, let
him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse;
for they *are* a rebellious house.

The Siege of Jerusalem Portrayed

4 "You also, son of man, take a clay tablet
and lay it before you, and portray on it a
city, Jerusalem. 2 Lay siege against it, build a
siege wall against it, and heap up a mound
against it; set camps against it also, and place
battering rams against it all around. 3 More-
over take for yourself an iron plate, and set it
as an iron wall between you and the city. Set
your face against it, and it shall be besieged,
and you shall lay siege against it. This *will be* a
sign to the house of Israel.

4 "Lie also on your left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of
Israel upon it. *According* to the number of the days that you lie on it,
you shall bear their iniquity. 5 For I have laid on you the years of their
iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and
ninety days; so you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. 6 And
when you have completed them, lie again on your right side; then you
shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days. I have laid on
you a day for each year.

7 "Therefore you shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem;
your arm *shall be* uncovered, and you shall prophesy against it. 8 And
surely I will restrain you so that you cannot turn from one side to
another till you have ended the days of your siege.

9 "Also take for yourself wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and
spelt; put them into one vessel, and make bread of them for yourself.
During the number of days that you lie on your side, three hundred
and ninety days, you shall eat it. 10 And your food which you eat *shall
be* by weight, twenty shekels a day; from time to time you shall eat it.
11 You shall also drink water by measure, one-sixth of a hin; from time
to time you shall drink. 12 And you shall eat it *as* barley cakes; and bake
it using fuel of human waste in their sight."

13 Then the Lord said, "So shall the children of Israel eat their
defiled bread among the Gentiles, where I will drive them."

14 So I said, "Ah, Lord God! Indeed I have never defiled myself from
my youth till now; I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by
beasts, nor has abominable flesh ever come into my mouth."

15 Then He said to me, "See, I am giving you cow dung instead of
human waste, and you shall prepare your bread over it."

16 Moreover He said to me, "Son of man, surely I will cut off the
supply of bread in Jerusalem; they shall eat bread by weight and with
anxiety, and shall drink water by measure and with dread, 17 that they
may lack bread and water, and be dismayed with one another, and
waste away because of their iniquity.

A Sword Against Jerusalem

5 "And you, son of man, take a sharp sword, take it as a barber's
razor, and pass *it* over your head and your beard; then take scales
to weigh and divide the *hair.* 2 You shall burn with fire one-third in
the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are finished; then
you shall take one-third and strike around *it* with the sword, and
one-third you shall scatter in the wind: I will draw out a sword after
them. 3 You shall also take a small number of them and bind them in
the edge of your *garment.* 4 Then take some of them again and throw
them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire. From there
a fire will go out into all the house of Israel.

5 "Thus says the Lord God: 'This *is* Jerusalem; I have set her in
the midst of the nations and the countries all around her. 6 She has
rebelled against My judgments by doing wickedness more than the
nations, and against My statutes more than the countries that *are* all
around her; for they have refused My judgments, and they have not
walked in My statutes.' 7 Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Because
you have multiplied *disobedience* more than the nations that *are* all
around you, have not walked in My statutes nor kept My judgments,

Life LESSONS

Ezekiel 4:1—7:27

SITUATION
Before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., God told Ezekiel about the impending judgment.

OBSERVATION
Suffering comes, but the purpose is always to bring glory to God.

INSPIRATION
Why do people struggle? God answers, "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do it" (Isaiah 48:10, 11). "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me" (Psalm 50:15).

He spoke of "this people I have formed for Myself; they shall declare My praise" (Isaiah 43:21).

The prophet Isaiah proclaimed, "You lead Your people, to make Yourself a glorious name" (Isaiah 63:14).

Christ taught us to make God's reputation our priority in prayer: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name" (Matthew 6:9).

Every act of heaven reveals God's glory. Every act of Jesus did the same. Indeed, "The Son reflects the glory of God" (Hebrews 1:3 NCV). The night before His crucifixion, Jesus declared, "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" (John 12:27, 28 NIV). Paul explains that "Christ has become a servant of the Jews… so that the Gentiles may glorify

God for his mercy" (Romans 15:8, 9 NIV).

And Jesus declared His mission a success by saying, "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4). (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Suffering is a part of our daily experience. People suffer whether or not they know Jesus. Those who know Jesus, however, can rest assured that God cares for them through suffering, God has a purpose for any suffering, and He will ultimately gain glory through our suffering.

EXPLORATION

Idolatry/Sin—Exodus 20:1–6; Joshua 24:23; Job 31:24–28; Jeremiah 1:16; Luke 16:10–13; Revelation 21:8.

nor even done[a] according to the judgments of the nations that *are* all around you'— [8] therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Indeed I, even I, *am* against you and will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations. [9] And I will do among you what I have never done, and the like of which I will never do again, because of all your abominations. [10] Therefore fathers shall eat *their* sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments among you, and all of you who remain I will scatter to all the winds.

[11] 'Therefore, *as* I live,' says the Lord God, 'surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will also diminish *you;* My eye will not spare, nor will I have any pity. [12] One-third of you shall die of the pestilence, and be consumed with famine in your midst; and one-third shall fall by the sword all around you; and I will scatter another third to all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them.

[13] 'Thus shall My anger be spent, and I will cause My fury to rest upon them, and I will be avenged; and they shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken *it* in My zeal, when I have spent My fury upon them. [14] Moreover I will make you a waste and a reproach among the nations that *are* all around you, in the sight of all who pass by.

[15] 'So it[a] shall be a reproach, a taunt, a lesson, and an astonishment to the nations that *are* all around you, when I execute judgments among you in anger and in fury and in furious rebukes. I, the Lord, have spoken. [16] When I send against them the terrible arrows of famine which shall be for destruction, which I will send to destroy you, I will increase the famine upon you and cut off your supply of bread. [17] So I will send against you famine and wild beasts, and they will bereave you. Pestilence and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring the sword against you. I, the Lord, have spoken.' "

Judgment on Idolatrous Israel

6 Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying: [2] "Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them, [3] and say, 'O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God! Thus says the Lord God to the mountains, to the hills, to the ravines, and to the valleys: "Indeed I, *even* I, will bring a sword against you, and I will destroy your high places. [4] Then your altars shall be desolate, your incense altars shall be broken, and I will cast down your slain *men* before your idols. [5] And I will lay the corpses of the children of Israel before their idols, and I will scatter your bones all around your altars. [6] In all your dwelling places the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate, so that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, your idols may be broken and made to cease, your incense altars may be cut down, and your works may be abolished. [7] The slain shall fall in your midst, and you shall know that I *am* the Lord.

[8] "Yet I will leave a remnant, so that you may have *some* who escape the sword among the nations, when you are scattered through the

5:7 [a] Following Masoretic Text, Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate; many Hebrew manuscripts and Syriac read *but have done* (compare 11:12). **5:15** [a] Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate read *you*.

countries. 9 Then those of you who escape will
remember Me among the nations where they
are carried captive, because I was crushed by
their adulterous heart which has departed
from Me, and by their eyes which play the
harlot after their idols; they will loathe them-
selves for the evils which they committed in
all their abominations. 10 And they shall know
that I *am* the Lord; I have not said in vain that
I would bring this calamity upon them."

11 'Thus says the Lord God: "Pound your
fists and stamp your feet, and say, 'Alas, for all
the evil abominations of the house of Israel!
For they shall fall by the sword, by famine, and
by pestilence. 12 He who is far off shall die by
the pestilence, he who is near shall fall by the
sword, and he who remains and is besieged
shall die by the famine. Thus will I spend My
fury upon them. 13 Then you shall know that I
am the Lord, when their slain are among their
idols all around their altars, on every high hill,
on all the mountaintops, under every green
tree, and under every thick oak, wherever they
offered sweet incense to all their idols. 14 So
I will stretch out My hand against them and
make the land desolate, yes, more desolate
than the wilderness toward Diblah, in all their
dwelling places. Then they shall know that I
am the Lord.'" '"

Judgment on Israel Is Near

7 Moreover the word of the Lord came to
me, saying, 2 "And you, son of man, thus
says the Lord God to the land of Israel:

'An end! The end has come upon the four
corners of the land.
3 Now the end *has come* upon you,
And I will send My anger against you;
I will judge you according to your
ways,
And I will repay you for all your
abominations.
4 My eye will not spare you,
Nor will I have pity;
But I will repay your ways,
And your abominations will be in your
midst;
Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord!'

5 "Thus says the Lord God:

'A disaster, a singular disaster;
Behold, it has come!
6 An end has come,
The end has come;
It has dawned for you;
Behold, it has come!
7 Doom has come to you, you who dwell in
the land;
The time has come,
A day of trouble *is* near,
And not of rejoicing in the mountains.
8 Now upon you I will soon pour out My
fury,
And spend My anger upon you;
I will judge you according to your ways,
And I will repay you for all your
abominations.

9 'My eye will not spare,
Nor will I have pity;
I will repay you according to your ways,
And your abominations will be in your
midst.
Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord
who strikes.

10 'Behold, the day!
Behold, it has come!
Doom has gone out;
The rod has blossomed,
Pride has budded.
11 Violence has risen up into a rod of
wickedness;
None of them *shall remain,*
None of their multitude,
None of them;
Nor *shall there be* wailing for them.
12 The time has come,
The day draws near.

'Let not the buyer rejoice,
Nor the seller mourn,
For wrath *is* on their whole multitude.
13 For the seller shall not return to what has
been sold,
Though he may still be alive;
For the vision concerns the whole
multitude,
And it shall not turn back;
No one will strengthen himself
Who lives in iniquity.

14 ‘They have blown the trumpet and made
everyone ready,
But no one goes to battle;
For My wrath *is* on all their multitude.
15 The sword *is* outside,
And the pestilence and famine within.
Whoever *is* in the field
Will die by the sword;
And whoever *is* in the city,
Famine and pestilence will devour him.

16 ‘Those who survive will escape and be on
the mountains
Like doves of the valleys,
All of them mourning,
Each for his iniquity.
17 Every hand will be feeble,
And every knee will be *as* weak *as* water.
18 They will also be girded with sackcloth;
Horror will cover them;
Shame *will be* on every face,
Baldness on all their heads.

19 ‘They will throw their silver into the
streets,
And their gold will be like refuse;
Their silver and their gold will not be able
to deliver them
In the day of the wrath of the Lord;
They will not satisfy their souls,
Nor fill their stomachs,
Because it became their stumbling block
of iniquity.

20 ‘As for the beauty of his ornaments,
He set it in majesty;
But they made from it
The images of their abominations—
Their detestable things;
Therefore I have made it
Like refuse to them.
21 I will give it as plunder
Into the hands of strangers,
And to the wicked of the earth as spoil;
And they shall defile it.
22 I will turn My face from them,
And they will defile My secret place;
For robbers shall enter it and defile it.

23 ‘Make a chain,
For the land is filled with crimes of blood,
And the city is full of violence.

24 Therefore I will bring the worst of the
Gentiles,
And they will possess their houses;
I will cause the pomp of the strong to
cease,
And their holy places shall be defiled.
25 Destruction comes;
They will seek peace, but *there shall be*
none.
26 Disaster will come upon disaster,
And rumor will be upon rumor.
Then they will seek a vision from a
prophet;
But the law will perish from the priest,
And counsel from the elders.

27 ‘The king will mourn,
The prince will be clothed with
desolation,
And the hands of the common people
will tremble.
I will do to them according to their way,
And according to what they deserve I will
judge them;
Then they shall know that I *am* the
Lord!’ ”

Abominations in the Temple

8 And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth *month,* on the fifth *day* of the month, as I sat in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the hand of the Lord God fell upon me there. 2 Then I looked, and there was a likeness, like the appearance of fire—from the appearance of His waist and downward, fire; and from His waist and upward, like the appearance of brightness, like the color of amber. 3 He stretched out the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my hair; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the north gate of the inner *court,* where the seat of the image of jealousy *was,* which provokes to jealousy. 4 And behold, the glory of the God of Israel *was* there, like the vision that I saw in the plain.

5 Then He said to me, “Son of man, lift your eyes now toward the north.” So I lifted my eyes toward the north, and there, north of the altar gate, was this image of jealousy in the entrance.

6 Furthermore He said to me, “Son of man,

do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel commits here, to make Me go far away from My sanctuary? Now turn again, you will see greater abominations." 7So He brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, there was a hole in the wall. 8Then He said to me, "Son of man, dig into the wall"; and when I dug into the wall, there was a door.

9And He said to me, "Go in, and see the wicked abominations which they are doing there." 10So I went in and saw, and there—every sort of creeping thing, abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed all around on the walls. 11And there stood before them seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, and in their midst stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan. Each man had a censer in his hand, and a thick cloud of incense went up. 12Then He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the room of his idols? For they say, 'The Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land.'"

13And He said to me, "Turn again, *and* you will see greater abominations that they are doing." 14So He brought me to the door of the north gate of the Lord's house; and to my dismay, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz.

15Then He said to me, "Have you seen *this,* O son of man? Turn again, you will see greater abominations than these." 16So He brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house; and there, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, *were* about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, and they were worshiping the sun toward the east.

17And He said to me, "Have you seen *this,* O son of man? Is it a trivial thing to the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence; then they have returned to provoke Me to anger. Indeed they put the branch to their nose. 18Therefore I also will act in fury. My eye will not spare nor will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them."

The Wicked Are Slain

9 Then He called out in my hearing with a loud voice, saying, "Let those who have charge over the city draw near, each *with* a deadly weapon in his hand." 2And suddenly six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his battle-ax in his hand. One man among them *was* clothed with linen and had a writer's inkhorn at his side. They went in and stood beside the bronze altar.

3Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple.[a]And He called to the man clothed with linen, who *had* the writer's inkhorn at his side; 4and the Lord said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it."

5To the others He said in my hearing, "Go after him through the

9:3 [a]Literally *house*

Life Lessons

Ezekiel 8:1—11:25

SITUATION
God spoke through his servant Ezekiel. He showed the Israelites the reason for their exile.

OBSERVATION
God hates idolatry. He hates anything that gets in the way of a relationship with Him. And self-centeredness, at its root, is idolatry.

INSPIRATION
The self-centered see everything through self. Their motto? "It's all about me!" The flight schedule. The traffic. The dress styles. The worship styles. The weather, the work, whether or not one works—everything is filtered through the mini-me in the eye.

Selfishness.

Such a condition can be fatal.

Listen to the words of James. "For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there" (James 3:16).

Need proof?

Let's examine one newspaper. Today's edition. How many examples of selfishness will we find in the first few pages?

A teenage girl died in a car wreck. Her boyfriend was challenged to a race on a city street. He took the dare and wrapped the car around a telephone pole.

The largest petroleum company in the world has filed for bankruptcy. Executives allegedly knew the ship had leaks but told no one until they had time to make huge profits.

A prominent citizen is put in jail for child pornography.

Selfishness is to society

what the Exxon *Valdez* was to scallops and sea otters—deadly. Is it any wonder that Paul writes: "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3, 4).

At first glance the standard in the passage seems impossible to meet. Nothing? We shouldn't do *anything* for ourselves? No new dress or suit. What about going to school or saving money—couldn't all of these things be considered selfish?

They could, unless we are careful to understand what Paul is saying. The word the apostle uses for *selfishness* shares a root form with the words *strife* and *contentious.* It suggests a self-preoccupation that hurts others. A divisive arrogance. In fact, first-century writers used the word to describe a politician who procured office by illegal manipulation or a harlot who seduced the client, demeaning both herself and him. *Selfishness is an obsession with self that excludes others, hurting everyone.*

Looking after your personal interests is proper life management. Doing so to the exclusion of the rest of the world is selfishness. (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Idols come in attractive packages today. You can identify them when they keep you from worship, consume your tithe, or become what you are most proud of. What can you do? Take time to evaluate what may be idols in your life.

city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. 6 Utterly slay old *and* young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom *is* the mark; and begin at My sanctuary." So they began with the elders who *were* before the temple. 7 Then He said to them, "Defile the temple, and fill the courts with the slain. Go out!" And they went out and killed in the city.

8 So it was, that while they were killing them, I was left *alone;* and I fell on my face and cried out, and said, "Ah, Lord God! Will You destroy all the remnant of Israel in pouring out Your fury on Jerusalem?"

9 Then He said to me, "The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah *is* exceedingly great, and the land is full of bloodshed, and the city full of perversity; for they say, 'The Lord has forsaken the land, and the Lord does not see!' 10 And as for Me also, My eye will neither spare, nor will I have pity, *but* I will recompense their deeds on their own head."

11 Just then, the man clothed with linen, who *had* the inkhorn at his side, reported back and said, "I have done as You commanded me."

The Glory Departs from the Temple

10 And I looked, and there in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubim, there appeared something like a sapphire stone, having the appearance of the likeness of a throne. 2 Then He spoke to the man clothed with linen, and said, "Go in among the wheels, under the cherub, fill your hands with coals of fire from among the cherubim, and scatter *them* over the city." And he went in as I watched.

3 Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the temple[a] when the man went in, and the cloud filled the inner court. 4 Then the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub, *and paused* over the threshold of the temple; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the Lord's glory. 5 And the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard *even* in the outer court, like the voice of Almighty God when He speaks.

6 Then it happened, when He commanded the man clothed in linen, saying, "Take fire from among the wheels, from among the cherubim," that he went in and stood beside the wheels. 7 And the cherub stretched out his hand from among the cherubim to the fire that *was* among the cherubim, and took *some of it* and put *it* into the hands of the *man* clothed with linen, who took *it* and went out. 8 The cherubim appeared to have the form of a man's hand under their wings.

9 And when I looked, there were four wheels by the cherubim, one wheel by one cherub and another wheel by each other cherub; the wheels appeared *to have* the color of a beryl stone. 10 *As for* their appearance, all four looked alike—as it were, a wheel in the middle of a wheel. 11 When they went, they went toward *any of* their four directions; they did not turn aside when they went, but followed in the direction the head was facing. They did not turn aside when they went. 12 And their whole body, with their back, their hands, their wings, and the wheels that the four had, *were* full of eyes all around. 13 As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing, "Wheel."

10:3 [a] Literally *house,* also in verses 4 and 18

14 Each one had four faces: the first face *was* the face of a cherub,
the second face the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the
fourth the face of an eagle. 15 And the cherubim were lifted up. This
was the living creature I saw by the River Chebar. 16 When the cheru-
bim went, the wheels went beside them; and when the cherubim
lifted their wings to mount up from the earth, the same wheels also
did not turn from beside them. 17 When *the cherubim*[a] stood still, *the*
wheels stood still, and when *one*[b] was lifted up, *the other*[c] lifted itself
up, for the spirit of the living creature *was* in them.

18 Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the
temple and stood over the cherubim. 19 And the cherubim lifted their
wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight. When they went
out, the wheels *were* beside them; and they stood at the door of the
east gate of the Lord's house, and the glory of the God of Israel *was*
above them.

20 This *is* the living creature I saw under the God of Israel by the
River Chebar, and I knew they *were* cherubim. 21 Each one had four
faces and each one four wings, and the likeness of the hands of a man
was under their wings. 22 And the likeness of their faces *was* the same
as the faces which I had seen by the River Chebar, their appearance
and their persons. They each went straight forward.

Judgment on Wicked Counselors

11 Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the East Gate of
the Lord's house, which faces eastward; and there at the door
of the gate were twenty-five men, among whom I saw Jaazaniah the
son of Azzur, and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, princes of the people.
2 And He said to me: "Son of man, these *are* the men who devise iniq-
uity and give wicked counsel in this city, 3 who say, '*The time is* not
near to build houses; this *city is* the caldron, and we *are* the meat.'
4 Therefore prophesy against them, prophesy, O son of man!"

5 Then the Spirit of the Lord fell upon me, and said to me, "Speak!
'Thus says the Lord: "Thus you have said, O house of Israel; for I know
the things that come into your mind. 6 You have multiplied your slain
in this city, and you have filled its streets with the slain." 7 Therefore
thus says the Lord God: "Your slain whom you have laid in its midst,
they *are* the meat, and this *city is* the caldron; but I shall bring you out
of the midst of it. 8 You have feared the sword; and I will bring a sword
upon you," says the Lord God. 9 "And I will bring you out of its midst,
and deliver you into the hands of strangers, and execute judgments
on you. 10 You shall fall by the sword. I will judge you at the border of
Israel. Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord. 11 This *city* shall not
be your caldron, nor shall you be the meat in its midst. I will judge
you at the border of Israel. 12 And you shall know that I *am* the Lord;
for you have not walked in My statutes nor executed My judgments,
but have done according to the customs of the Gentiles which *are* all
around you."' "

13 Now it happened, while I was prophesying, that Pelatiah the son
of Benaiah died. Then I fell on my face and cried with a loud voice,

10:17 [a]Literally *they* [b]Literally *they* [c]Literally *they*

Pray that God will help you remove them from your life.

EXPLORATION
Idolatry—Leviticus 26:1; Isaiah 42:8; 1 John 5:21.

God examines hearts. When He finds one set on Him, He calls it and claims it.

—Max Lucado (Facing Your Giants)

Life LESSONS

Ezekiel 12:1–28

SITUATION
Although Jerusalem was about to be destroyed, the Jews remained blind to their own disobedience and rebellion.

OBSERVATION
The Israelites refused to obey God. They would not believe that God's warnings of destruction applied to them, and they resented Ezekiel's message of judgment against them.

INSPIRATION
Resentment is allowing your hurts to turn into hates. When those hates simmer in your heart, they create bitterness, and you are the one who suffers. Forget those hurts!

When you have a relationship in need of repair, the first key to improvement is to examine your own heart. Look at your own heart—remember who you are and who God called you to be. Did the Father call you to be angry? to be bitter? Or did He call you to be loving and forgiving?

An itinerant preacher from Nazareth can do something for the hurt that is in your heart. Maybe you're trying to rebuild an estranged relationship. . . . Maybe you've been trying to find God for longer than you can remember. There was something about this Nazarene preacher that made people cluster around Him like He was God's gift to humanity. He is your gift as well. (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "Resentment")

APPLICATION
Isn't it amazing how blind

and said, "Ah, Lord God! Will You make a complete end of the remnant of Israel?"

God Will Restore Israel

14 Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 15 "Son of man, your brethren, your relatives, your countrymen, and all the house of Israel in its entirety, *are* those about whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, 'Get far away from the Lord; this land has been given to us as a possession.' 16 Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Although I have cast them far off among the Gentiles, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet I shall be a little sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone." ' 17 Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel." ' 18 And they will go there, and they will take away all its detestable things and all its abominations from there. 19 Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them,[a] and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, 20 that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God. 21 But *as for those* whose hearts follow the desire for their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord God.

22 So the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel *was* high above them. 23 And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain, which *is* on the east side of the city.

24 Then the Spirit took me up and brought me in a vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea,[a] to those in captivity. And the vision that I had seen went up from me. 25 So I spoke to those in captivity of all the things the Lord had shown me.

Judah's Captivity Portrayed

12 Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 2 "Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, which has eyes to see but does not see, and ears to hear but does not hear; for they *are* a rebellious house.

3 "Therefore, son of man, prepare your belongings for captivity, and go into captivity by day in their sight. You shall go from your place into captivity to another place in their sight. It may be that they will consider, though they *are* a rebellious house. 4 By day you shall bring out your belongings in their sight, as though going into captivity; and at evening you shall go in their sight, like those who go into captivity. 5 Dig through the wall in their sight, and carry *your belongings* out through it. 6 In their sight you shall bear *them* on *your* shoulders *and* carry *them* out at twilight; you shall cover your face, so that you cannot see the ground, for I have made you a sign to the house of Israel."

7 So I did as I was commanded. I brought out my belongings by day, as though going into captivity, and at evening I dug through the wall

11:19 [a]Literally *you* **11:24** [a]Or *Babylon,* and so elsewhere in this book

with my hand. I brought *them* out at twilight, *and* I bore *them* on *my* shoulder in their sight.

8 And in the morning the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 9 "Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, 'What are you doing?' 10 Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "This burden *concerns* the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel who are among them."' 11 Say, 'I *am* a sign to you. As I have done, so shall it be done to them; they shall be carried away into captivity.' 12 And the prince who *is* among them shall bear *his belongings* on *his* shoulder at twilight and go out. They shall dig through the wall to carry *them* out through it. He shall cover his face, so that he cannot see the ground with *his* eyes. 13 I will also spread My net over him, and he shall be caught in My snare. I will bring him to Babylon, *to* the land of the Chaldeans; yet he shall not see it, though he shall die there. 14 I will scatter to every wind all who *are* around him to help him, and all his troops; and I will draw out the sword after them.

15 "Then they shall know that I *am* the Lord, when I scatter them among the nations and disperse them throughout the countries. 16 But I will spare a few of their men from the sword, from famine, and from pestilence, that they may declare all their abominations among the Gentiles wherever they go. Then they shall know that I *am* the Lord."

Judgment Not Postponed

17 Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 18 "Son of man, eat your bread with quaking, and drink your water with trembling and anxiety. 19 And say to the people of the land, 'Thus says the Lord God to the inhabitants of Jerusalem *and* to the land of Israel: "They shall eat their bread with anxiety, and drink their water with dread, so that her land may be emptied of all who are in it, because of the violence of all those who dwell in it. 20 Then the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and the land shall become desolate; and you shall know that I *am* the Lord."' "

21 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 22 "Son of man, what *is* this proverb *that* you *people* have about the land of Israel, which says, 'The days are prolonged, and every vision fails'? 23 Tell them therefore, 'Thus says the Lord God: "I will lay this proverb to rest, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel."' But say to them, '"The days are at hand, and the fulfillment of every vision. 24 For no more shall there be any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel. 25 For I *am* the Lord. I speak, and the word which I speak will come to pass; it will no more be postponed; for in your days, O rebellious house, I will say the word and perform it," says the Lord God.' "

26 Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 27 "Son of man, look, the house of Israel is saying, 'The vision that he sees *is* for many days *from now,* and he prophesies of times far off.' 28 Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "None of My words will be postponed any more, but the word which I speak will be done," says the Lord God.' "

Woe to Foolish Prophets

13 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say

we are to the truth of God's Word? God requires repentance from our sins and obedience to His will. Anger and resentment loom. Yet, like the Israelites, we are prone to think that judgment or discipline won't happen to us. Ask God to give you a clean slate in service and obedience to Him.

EXPLORATION

Obedience to God—
1 Samuel 15:22; Psalm 1; John 14:15; Romans 3:21–26; 2 Corinthians 5:18–21; Hebrews 12:4–29.

Life LESSONS

Ezekiel 13:1—14:23

SITUATION
Ezekiel continued to prophesy about the destruction of Israel. He warned the people not to listen to false prophets or to worship idols.

OBSERVATION
Israel abandoned God's covenant.

INSPIRATION
I once had a conversation with a rabbi on an airplane. He illustrated for me the third commandment—explaining how we should live our lives as we represent our God.

He proceeded to create a story involving a Manhattan skyscraper. Everyone in the building works for the CEO, who offices on the top floor. Most have not seen him, but they have seen his daughter. She works in the building for her father. She exploits her family position to her benefit. . . .

Making demands. Calling shots. Interrupting schedules. Never invoking the name of her dad. Never leveraging her comments with, "My dad said . . ."

No need to.

Isn't she the boss's child? Doesn't the child speak for the father? . . . The girl dishonored the name of her father, not with vulgar language, but with insensitive living. Keep this up and the whole building will be second-guessing the CEO.

But my traveling partner wasn't finished. He scratched his bearded chin and lifted both eyebrows as he proposed, "But what if the daughter acted differently?" and then

to those who prophesy out of their own heart, 'Hear the word of the Lord!' "

3 Thus says the Lord God: "Woe to the foolish prophets, who follow
their own spirit and have seen nothing! 4 O Israel, your prophets are
like foxes in the deserts. 5 You have not gone up into the gaps to build
a wall for the house of Israel to stand in battle on the day of the Lord.
6 They have envisioned futility and false divination, saying, 'Thus says
the Lord!' But the Lord has not sent them; yet they hope that the word
may be confirmed. 7 Have you not seen a futile vision, and have you
not spoken false divination? You say, 'The Lord says,' but I have not
spoken."

8 Therefore thus says the Lord God: "Because you have spoken non-
sense and envisioned lies, therefore I *am* indeed against you," says
the Lord God. 9 "My hand will be against the prophets who envision
futility and who divine lies; they shall not be in the assembly of My
people, nor be written in the record of the house of Israel, nor shall
they enter into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I *am* the
Lord God.

10 "Because, indeed, because they have seduced My people, say-
ing, 'Peace!' when *there is* no peace—and one builds a wall, and they
plaster it with untempered *mortar*— 11 say to those who plaster *it*
with untempered *mortar,* that it will fall. There will be flooding rain,
and you, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall tear
it down. 12 Surely, when the wall has fallen, will it not be said to you,
'Where *is* the mortar with which you plastered *it*?' "

13 Therefore thus says the Lord God: "I will cause a stormy wind to
break forth in My fury; and there shall be a flooding rain in My anger,
and great hailstones in fury to consume *it.* 14 So I will break down the
wall you have plastered with untempered *mortar,* and bring it down
to the ground, so that its foundation will be uncovered; it will fall, and
you shall be consumed in the midst of it. Then you shall know that I
am the Lord.

15 "Thus will I accomplish My wrath on the wall and on those who
have plastered it with untempered *mortar;* and I will say to you, 'The
wall *is* no *more,* nor those who plastered it, 16 *that is,* the prophets of
Israel who prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and who see visions of
peace for her when *there is* no peace,' " says the Lord God.

17 "Likewise, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your
people, who prophesy out of their own heart; prophesy against them,
18 and say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Woe to the *women* who sew
magic charms on their sleeves[a] and make veils for the heads of people
of every height to hunt souls! Will you hunt the souls of My people,
and keep yourselves alive? 19 And will you profane Me among My
people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, killing people
who should not die, and keeping people alive who should not live, by
your lying to My people who listen to lies?"

20 'Therefore thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I *am* against your
magic charms by which you hunt souls there like birds. I will tear
them from your arms, and let the souls go, the souls you hunt like

13:18 [a] Literally *over all the joints of My hands;* Vulgate reads *under every elbow;* Septuagint and Targum read *on all elbows of the hands.*

birds. 21 I will also tear off your veils and deliver My people out of your hand, and they shall no longer be as prey in your hand. Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord.

22 "Because with lies you have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and you have strengthened the hands of the wicked, so that he does not turn from his wicked way to save his life. 23 Therefore you shall no longer envision futility nor practice divination; for I will deliver My people out of your hand, and you shall know that I *am* the Lord." ' "

Idolatry Will Be Punished

14 Now some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. 2 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 3 "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity. Should I let Myself be inquired of at all by them?

4 "Therefore speak to them, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Everyone of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him who comes, according to the multitude of his idols, 5 that I may seize the house of Israel by their heart, because they are all estranged from Me by their idols." '

6 "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Repent, turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations. 7 For anyone of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who separates himself from Me and sets up his idols in his heart and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, then comes to a prophet to inquire of him concerning Me, I the Lord will answer him by Myself. 8 I will set My face against that man and make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of My people. Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord.

9 "And if the prophet is induced to speak anything, I the Lord have induced that prophet, and I will stretch out My hand against him and destroy him from among My people Israel. 10 And they shall bear their iniquity; the punishment of the prophet shall be the same as the punishment of the one who inquired, 11 that the house of Israel may no longer stray from Me, nor be profaned anymore with all their transgressions, but that they may be My people and I may be their God," says the Lord God.' "

Judgment on Persistent Unfaithfulness

12 The word of the Lord came again to me, saying: 13 "Son of man, when a land sins against Me by persistent unfaithfulness, I will stretch out My hand against it; I will cut off its supply of bread, send famine on it, and cut off man and beast from it. 14 Even *if* these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver *only* themselves by their righteousness," says the Lord God.

15 "If I cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they empty it, and make it so desolate that no man may pass through because of the beasts, 16 *even though* these three men *were* in it, *as* I live," says the

proceeded to recast the story. . . .

The daughter engages the people. She asks about their families, offers to bring them coffee. New workers are welcomed, and hard workers are applauded. She, through kindness and concern, raises the happiness level of the entire company.

She does so not even mentioning her father's name. Never does she declare, "My father says . . ." There is no need to. Is she not his child? Does she not speak on his behalf ? Reflect his heart? When she speaks, they assume she speaks for him. And because they think highly of her, they think highly of her father.

They've not seen him.

They've not met him.

But they know his child, so they know his heart. . . .

"You know how the story ends?" the rabbi asked as we were taxiing to a stop. Apparently he had a punch line.

"No, I don't. How?"

"The daughter takes the elevator to the top floor to see her father. When she arrives, he is waiting in the doorway. He's aware of her good works and has seen her kind acts. People think more highly of him because of her. And he knows it. As she approaches, he greets her with six words."

The rabbi paused and smiled.

"What are they?" I urged, never expecting to hear an orthodox Jew quote Jesus.

"Well done, good and faithful servant."

May God sustain you until you hear the same. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you demonstrate your right relationship with God even in small areas? Be diligent to obey God even in

small areas. Remember that you are representing Him to your world.

EXPLORATION
Judgment—Matthew 11:20–24; Acts 17: 30, 31; 2 Peter 2.

God still groans for his people. He groans for the day when all sighs will cease, when what was intended to be will be.

—Max Lucado (3:16)

Lord God, "they would deliver neither sons nor daughters; only they would be delivered, and the land would be desolate.

17 "Or *if* I bring a sword on that land, and say, 'Sword, go through the land,' and I cut off man and beast from it, 18 even *though* these three men *were* in it, *as* I live," says the Lord God, "they would deliver neither sons nor daughters, but only they themselves would be delivered.

19 "Or *if* I send a pestilence into that land and pour out My fury on it in blood, and cut off from it man and beast, 20 even *though* Noah, Daniel, and Job *were* in it, *as* I live," says the Lord God, "they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver *only* themselves by their righteousness."

21 For thus says the Lord God: "How much more it shall be when I send My four severe judgments on Jerusalem—the sword and famine and wild beasts and pestilence—to cut off man and beast from it? 22 Yet behold, there shall be left in it a remnant who will be brought out, *both* sons and daughters; surely they will come out to you, and you will see their ways and their doings. Then you will be comforted concerning the disaster that I have brought upon Jerusalem, all that I have brought upon it. 23 And they will comfort you, when you see their ways and their doings; and you shall know that I have done nothing without cause that I have done in it," says the Lord God.

The Outcast Vine

15 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 2 "Son of man, how is the wood of the vine *better* than any other wood, the vine branch which is among the trees of the forest? 3 Is wood taken from it to make any object? Or can *men* make a peg from it to hang any vessel on? 4 Instead, it is thrown into the fire for fuel; the fire devours both ends of it, and its middle is burned. Is it useful for *any* work? 5 Indeed, when it was whole, no object could be made from it. How much less will it be useful for *any* work when the fire has devoured it, and it is burned?

6 "Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so I will give up the inhabitants of Jerusalem; 7 and I will set My face against them. They will go out from *one* fire, but *another* fire shall devour them. Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord, when I set My face against them. 8 Thus I will make the land desolate, because they have persisted in unfaithfulness,' says the Lord God."

God's Love for Jerusalem

16 Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations, 3 and say, 'Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem: "Your birth and your nativity *are* from the land of Canaan; your father *was* an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. 4 *As for* your nativity, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed in water to cleanse *you;* you were not rubbed with salt nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. 5 No eye pitied you, to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you; but you were thrown out into the open field, when you yourself were loathed on the day you were born.

6 "And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own
blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you in your
blood, 'Live!' 7 I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew,
matured, and became very beautiful. *Your* breasts were formed, your
hair grew, but you *were* naked and bare.
8 "When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your
time *was* the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered
your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a cov-
enant with you, and you became Mine," says the Lord God.
9 "Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your
blood, and I anointed you with oil. 10 I clothed you in embroidered
cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine
linen and covered you with silk. 11 I adorned you with ornaments,
put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. 12 And I put
a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on
your head. 13 Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your
clothing *was of* fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate *pastry
of* fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and suc-
ceeded to royalty. 14 Your fame went out among the nations because
of your beauty, for it *was* perfect through My splendor which I had
bestowed on you," says the Lord God.

Jerusalem's Harlotry

15 "But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because
of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by
who *would have* it. 16 You took some of your garments and adorned
multicolored high places for yourself, and played the harlot on them.
Such things should not happen, nor be. 17 You have also taken your
beautiful jewelry from My gold and My silver, which I had given you,
and made for yourself male images and played the harlot with them.
18 You took your embroidered garments and covered them, and you
set My oil and My incense before them. 19 Also My food which I gave
you—the pastry of fine flour, oil, and honey *which* I fed you—you set
it before them as sweet incense; and *so* it was," says the Lord God.
20 "Moreover you took your sons and your daughters, whom you
bore to Me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. *Were*
your *acts* of harlotry a small matter, 21 that you have slain My children
and offered them up to them by causing them to pass through *the*
fire? 22 And in all your abominations and acts of harlotry you did not
remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare,
struggling in your blood.
23 "Then it was so, after all your wickedness—'Woe, woe to you!'
says the Lord God— 24 *that* you also built for yourself a shrine, and
made a high place for yourself in every street. 25 You built your
high places at the head of every road, and made your beauty to be
abhorred. You offered yourself to everyone who passed by, and mul-
tiplied your acts of harlotry. 26 You also committed harlotry with the
Egyptians, your very fleshly neighbors, and increased your acts of
harlotry to provoke Me to anger.
27 "Behold, therefore, I stretched out My hand against you, dimin-
ished your allotment, and gave you up to the will of those who hate
you, the daughters of the Philistines, who were ashamed of your lewd

Life LESSONS

Ezekiel 15:1—20:44

SITUATION
God intended to destroy Jerusalem for its idolatry and rebellion. He compared the idol-worshiping city to a useless vine. God told Ezekiel that He would burn the city into a charred stalk.

OBSERVATION
Lack of faith leads to disaster.

INSPIRATION
God has made it clear. The plague of sin will not cross his shores. Infected souls never walk his streets. "Unjust people who don't care about God will not be joining in his kingdom. Those who use and abuse each other, use and abuse sex, use and abuse the earth and everything in it, don't qualify as citizens in God's kingdom" (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 MSG). God refuses to compromise the spiritual purity of heaven.

Herein lies the awful fruit of sin. Lead a godless life, and expect a godless eternity. Spend a life telling God to leave you alone, and He will. He'll grant you an existence "having no hope and without God" (Ephesians 2:12). Jesus will take "vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 1:8, 9).

Christ keeps no secrets about hell. His description purposely chills the soul:

- A place of darkness (Matthew 8:12)
- A fiery furnace (Matthew 13:42)
- A place where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48)

Citizens of hell long to die, but cannot. Beg for water, but receive none. They pass into a dawnless night.

So what can we do? If all have been infected and the world is corrupted, to whom do we turn? Or, to re-ask the great question of Scripture: "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). The answer offered then is the answer offered still: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

If you were melted down to your essence, what impurities would you find? Think of one area of weakness and work this week to become faithful where once you were faithless. Trust God to supply your needs.

EXPLORATION

Following Christ—Mark 8:34–38; John 8:12; 10:27; Romans 15:5.

behavior. 28 You also played the harlot with the Assyrians, because you were insatiable; indeed you played the harlot with them and still were not satisfied. 29 Moreover you multiplied your acts of harlotry as far as the land of the trader, Chaldea; and even then you were not satisfied.

30 "How degenerate is your heart!" says the Lord God, "seeing you do all these *things,* the deeds of a brazen harlot.

Jerusalem's Adultery

31 "You erected your shrine at the head of every road, and built your high place in every street. Yet you were not like a harlot, because you scorned payment. 32 *You are* an adulterous wife, *who* takes strangers instead of her husband. 33 Men make payment to all harlots, but you made your payments to all your lovers, and hired them to come to you from all around for your harlotry. 34 You are the opposite of *other* women in your harlotry, because no one solicited you to be a harlot. In that you gave payment but no payment was given you, therefore you are the opposite."

Jerusalem's Lovers Will Abuse Her

35 'Now then, O harlot, hear the word of the Lord! 36 Thus says the Lord God: "Because your filthiness was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your harlotry with your lovers, and with all your abominable idols, and because of the blood of your children which you gave to them, 37 surely, therefore, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved, *and* all those you hated; I will gather them from all around against you and will uncover your nakedness to them, that they may see all your nakedness. 38 And I will judge you as women who break wedlock or shed blood are judged; I will bring blood upon you in fury and jealousy. 39 I will also give you into their hand, and they shall throw down your shrines and break down your high places. They shall also strip you of your clothes, take your beautiful jewelry, and leave you naked and bare.

40 "They shall also bring up an assembly against you, and they shall stone you with stones and thrust you through with their swords. 41 They shall burn your houses with fire, and execute judgments on you in the sight of many women; and I will make you cease playing the harlot, and you shall no longer hire lovers. 42 So I will lay to rest My fury toward you, and My jealousy shall depart from you. I will be quiet, and be angry no more. 43 Because you did not remember the days of your youth, but agitated Me[a] with all these *things,* surely I will also recompense your deeds on *your own* head," says the Lord God. "And you shall not commit lewdness in addition to all your abominations.

More Wicked than Samaria and Sodom

44 "Indeed everyone who quotes proverbs will use *this* proverb against you: 'Like mother, like daughter!' 45 You *are* your mother's daughter, loathing husband and children; and you *are* the sister of

16:43 [a] Following Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text reads *were agitated with Me.*

your sisters, who loathed their husbands and children; your mother *was* a Hittite and your father an Amorite.

46 "Your elder sister *is* Samaria, who dwells with her daughters to the north of you; and your younger sister, who dwells to the south of you, *is* Sodom and her daughters. 47 You did not walk in their ways nor act according to their abominations; but, as *if that were* too little, you became more corrupt than they in all your ways.

48 "*As* I live," says the Lord God, "neither your sister Sodom nor her daughters have done as you and your daughters have done. 49 Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. 50 And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw *fit.*[a]

51 "Samaria did not commit half of your sins; but you have multiplied your abominations more than they, and have justified your sisters by all the abominations which you have done. 52 You who judged your sisters, bear your own shame also, because the sins which you committed were more abominable than theirs; they are more righteous than you. Yes, be disgraced also, and bear your own shame, because you justified your sisters.

53 "When I bring back their captives, the captives of Sodom and her daughters, and the captives of Samaria and her daughters, then *I will also bring back* the captives of your captivity among them, 54 that you may bear your own shame and be disgraced by all that you did when you comforted them. 55 When your sisters, Sodom and her daughters, return to their former state, and Samaria and her daughters return to their former state, then you and your daughters will return to your former state. 56 For your sister Sodom was not a byword in your mouth in the days of your pride, 57 before your wickedness was uncovered. It was like the time of the reproach of the daughters of Syria[a] and all *those* around her, and of the daughters of the Philistines, who despise you everywhere. 58 You have paid for your lewdness and your abominations," says the Lord. 59 For thus says the Lord God: "I will deal with you as you have done, who despised the oath by breaking the covenant.

An Everlasting Covenant

60 "Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. 61 Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed, when you receive your older and your younger sisters; for I will give them to you for daughters, but not because of My covenant with you. 62 And I will establish My covenant with you. Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord, 63 that you may remember and be ashamed, and never open your mouth anymore because of your shame, when I provide you an atonement for all you have done," says the Lord God.' "

The Eagles and the Vine

17 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, pose a riddle, and speak a parable to the house of Israel, 3 and say, 'Thus says the Lord God:

"A great eagle with large wings and long pinions,
Full of feathers of various colors,
Came to Lebanon
And took from the cedar the highest branch.
4 He cropped off its topmost young twig
And carried it to a land of trade;
He set it in a city of merchants.
5 Then he took some of the seed of the land
And planted it in a fertile field;
He placed *it* by abundant waters
And set it like a willow tree.
6 And it grew and became a spreading vine of low stature;
Its branches turned toward him,
But its roots were under it.
So it became a vine,
Brought forth branches,
And put forth shoots.

16:50 [a]Vulgate reads *you saw;* Septuagint reads *he saw;* Targum reads *as was revealed to Me.* **16:57** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate; many Hebrew manuscripts and Syriac read *Edom.*

7 "But there was another[a] great eagle with
large wings and many feathers;
And behold, this vine bent its roots
toward him,
And stretched its branches toward him,
From the garden terrace where it had
been planted,
That he might water it.
8 It was planted in good soil by many
waters,
To bring forth branches, bear fruit,
And become a majestic vine."'

9 "Say, 'Thus says the Lord God:

"Will it thrive?
Will he not pull up its roots,
Cut off its fruit,
And leave it to wither?
All of its spring leaves will wither,
And no great power or many people
Will be needed to pluck it up by its roots.
10 Behold, *it is* planted,
Will it thrive?
Will it not utterly wither when the east
wind touches it?
It will wither in the garden terrace where
it grew."'"

11 Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 12 "Say now to the rebellious house: 'Do you not know what these *things mean?*' Tell *them,* 'Indeed the king of Babylon went to Jerusalem and took its king and princes, and led them with him to Babylon. 13 And he took the king's offspring, made a covenant with him, and put him under oath. He also took away the mighty of the land, 14 that the kingdom might be brought low and not lift itself up, *but* that by keeping his covenant it might stand. 15 But he rebelled against him by sending his ambassadors to Egypt, that they might give him horses and many people. Will he prosper? Will he who does such *things* escape? Can he break a covenant and still be delivered?

16 '*As* I live,' says the Lord God, 'surely in the place *where* the king *dwells* who made him king, whose oath he despised and whose covenant he broke—with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die. 17 Nor will Pharaoh with *his* mighty army and great company do anything in the war, when they heap up a siege mound and build a wall to cut off many persons. 18 Since he despised the oath by breaking the covenant, and in fact gave his hand and still did all these *things,* he shall not escape.'"

19 Therefore thus says the Lord God: "*As* I live, surely My oath which he despised, and My covenant which he broke, I will recompense on his own head. 20 I will spread My net over him, and he shall be taken in My snare. I will bring him to Babylon and try him there for the treason which he committed against Me. 21 All his fugitives[a] with all his troops shall fall by the sword, and those who remain shall be scattered to every wind; and you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken."

Israel Exalted at Last

22 Thus says the Lord God: "I will take also *one* of the highest branches of the high cedar and set *it* out. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and will plant *it* on a high and prominent mountain. 23 On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it; and it will bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a majestic cedar. Under it will dwell birds of every sort; in the shadow of its branches they will dwell. 24 And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the Lord, have brought down the high tree and exalted the low tree, dried up the green tree and made the dry tree flourish; I, the Lord, have spoken and have done *it.*"

A False Proverb Refuted

18 The word of the Lord came to me again, saying, 2 "What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying:

'The fathers have eaten sour grapes,
And the children's teeth are set on edge'?

3 "*As* I live," says the Lord God, "you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel.

17:7 [a]Following Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text and Targum read *one.* **17:21** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; many Hebrew manuscripts and Syriac read *choice men;* Targum reads *mighty men;* Septuagint omits *All his fugitives.*

4 "Behold, all souls are Mine;
The soul of the father
As well as the soul of the son is Mine;
The soul who sins shall die.
5 But if a man is just
And does what is lawful and right;
6 If he has not eaten on the mountains,
Nor lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel,
Nor defiled his neighbor's wife,
Nor approached a woman during her impurity;
7 If he has not oppressed anyone,
But has restored to the debtor his pledge;
Has robbed no one by violence,
But has given his bread to the hungry
And covered the naked with clothing;
8 If he has not exacted usury
Nor taken any increase,
But has withdrawn his hand from iniquity
And executed true judgment between man and man;
9 *If* he has walked in My statutes
And kept My judgments faithfully—
He *is* just;
He shall surely live!"
Says the Lord God.

10 "If he begets a son *who is* a robber
Or a shedder of blood,
Who does any of these *things*
11 And does none of those *duties,*
But has eaten on the mountains
Or defiled his neighbor's wife;
12 If he has oppressed the poor and needy,
Robbed by violence,
Not restored the pledge,
Lifted his eyes to the idols,
Or committed abomination;
13 If he has exacted usury
Or taken increase—
Shall he then live?
He shall not live!
If he has done any of these abominations,
He shall surely die;
His blood shall be upon him.

14 "*If,* however, he begets a son
Who sees all the sins which his father has done,
And considers but does not do likewise;
15 *Who* has not eaten on the mountains,
Nor lifted his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel,
Nor defiled his neighbor's wife;
16 Has not oppressed anyone,
Nor withheld a pledge,
Nor robbed by violence,
But has given his bread to the hungry
And covered the naked with clothing;
17 *Who* has withdrawn his hand from the poor[a]
And not received usury or increase,
But has executed My judgments
And walked in My statutes—
He shall not die for the iniquity of his father;
He shall surely live!

18 "*As for* his father,
Because he cruelly oppressed,
Robbed his brother by violence,
And did what *is* not good among his people,
Behold, he shall die for his iniquity.

Turn and Live

19 "Yet you say, 'Why should the son not bear the guilt of the father?' Because the son has done what is lawful and right, and has kept all My statutes and observed them, he shall surely live. 20 The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

21 "But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. 22 None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live. 23 Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?" says the Lord God, "*and* not that he should turn from his ways and live?

24 "But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations

18:17 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *iniquity* (compare verse 8).

that the wicked *man* does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die.

25 "Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' Hear now, O house of Israel, is it not My way which is fair, and your ways which are not fair? 26 When a righteous *man* turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity, and dies in it, it is because of the iniquity which he has done that he dies. 27 Again, when a wicked *man* turns away from the wickedness which he committed, and does what is lawful and right, he preserves himself alive. 28 Because he considers and turns away from all the transgressions which he committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die. 29 Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' O house of Israel, is it not My ways which are fair, and your ways which are not fair?

30 "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways," says the Lord God. "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. 31 Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? 32 For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord God. "Therefore turn and live!"

Israel Degraded

19 "Moreover take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel, 2 and say:

'What *is* your mother? A lioness:
She lay down among the lions;
Among the young lions she nourished her cubs.
3 She brought up one of her cubs,
And he became a young lion;
He learned to catch prey,
And he devoured men.
4 The nations also heard of him;
He was trapped in their pit,
And they brought him with chains to the land of Egypt.
5 'When she saw that she waited, *that* her hope was lost,
She took another of her cubs *and* made him a young lion.
6 He roved among the lions,
And became a young lion;
He learned to catch prey;
He devoured men.
7 He knew their desolate places,[a]
And laid waste their cities;
The land with its fullness was desolated
By the noise of his roaring.
8 Then the nations set against him from the provinces on every side,
And spread their net over him;
He was trapped in their pit.
9 They put him in a cage with chains,
And brought him to the king of Babylon;
They brought him in nets,
That his voice should no longer be heard on the mountains of Israel.

10 'Your mother *was* like a vine in your bloodline,[a]
Planted by the waters,
Fruitful and full of branches
Because of many waters.
11 She had strong branches for scepters of rulers.
She towered in stature above the thick branches,
And was seen in her height amid the dense foliage.
12 But she was plucked up in fury,
She was cast down to the ground,
And the east wind dried her fruit.
Her strong branches were broken and withered;
The fire consumed them.
13 And now she *is* planted in the wilderness,
In a dry and thirsty land.
14 Fire has come out from a rod of her branches
And devoured her fruit,
So that she has no strong branch— a scepter for ruling.'"

19:7 [a]Septuagint reads *He stood in insolence;* Targum reads *He destroyed its palaces;* Vulgate reads *He learned to make widows.* **19:10** [a]Literally *blood,* following Masoretic Text, Syriac, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *like a flower on a pomegranate tree;* Targum reads *in your likeness.*

This *is* a lamentation, and has become a lamentation.

The Rebellions of Israel

20 It came to pass in the seventh year, in the fifth *month,* on the tenth *day* of the month, *that* certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the Lord, and sat before me. 2 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 3 "Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Have you come to inquire of Me? *As* I live," says the Lord God, "I will not be inquired of by you." ' 4 Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge *them?* Then make known to them the abominations of their fathers.

5 "Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "On the day when I chose Israel and raised My hand in an oath to the descendants of the house of Jacob, and made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, I raised My hand in an oath to them, saying, 'I *am* the Lord your God.' 6 On that day I raised My hand in an oath to them, to bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them, 'flowing with milk and honey,'[a] the glory of all lands. 7 Then I said to them, 'Each of you, throw away the abominations which are before his eyes, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I *am* the Lord your God.' 8 But they rebelled against Me and would not obey Me. They did not all cast away the abominations which were before their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I said, 'I will pour out My fury on them and fulfill My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.' 9 But I acted for My name's sake, that it should not be profaned before the Gentiles among whom they *were,* in whose sight I had made Myself known to them, to bring them out of the land of Egypt.

10 "Therefore I made them go out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. 11 And I gave them My statutes and showed them My judgments, 'which, *if* a man does, he shall live by them.'[a] 12 Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I *am* the Lord who sanctifies them. 13 Yet the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they did not walk in My statutes; they despised My judgments, 'which, *if* a man does, he shall live by them';[a] and they greatly defiled My Sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out My fury on them in the wilderness, to consume them. 14 But I acted for My name's sake, that it should not be profaned before the Gentiles, in whose sight I had brought them out. 15 So I also raised My hand in an oath to them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given *them,* 'flowing with milk and honey,'[a] the glory of all lands, 16 because they despised My judgments and did not walk in My statutes, but profaned My Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols. 17 Nevertheless My eye spared them from destruction. I did not make an end of them in the wilderness.

18 "But I said to their children in the wilderness, 'Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols. 19 I *am* the Lord your God: Walk in My statutes, keep My judgments, and do them; 20 hallow My Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I *am* the Lord your God.'

21 "Notwithstanding, the children rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, and were not careful to observe My judgments, 'which, *if* a man does, he shall live by them';[a] but they profaned My Sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out My fury on them and fulfill My anger against them in the wilderness. 22 Nevertheless I withdrew My hand and acted for My name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the Gentiles, in whose sight I had brought them out. 23 Also I raised My hand in an oath to those in the wilderness, that I would scatter them among the Gentiles and disperse them throughout the countries, 24 because they had not executed My judgments, but had despised My statutes, profaned My Sabbaths, and their eyes were fixed on their fathers' idols.

25 "Therefore I also gave them up to statutes *that were* not good, and judgments by which they could not live; 26 and I pronounced them unclean because of their ritual gifts, in that they caused all their firstborn to pass through

20:6 [a]Exodus 3:8 **20:11** [a]Leviticus 18:5 **20:13** [a]Leviticus 18:5 **20:15** [a]Exodus 3:8 **20:21** [a]Leviticus 18:5

the fire, that I might make them desolate and that they might know that I am the Lord.” ’

27 “Therefore, son of man, speak to the house of Israel, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “In this too your fathers have blasphemed Me, by being unfaithful to Me. 28 When I brought them into the land *concerning* which I had raised My hand in an oath to give them, and they saw all the high hills and all the thick trees, there they offered their sacrifices and provoked Me with their offerings. There they also sent up their sweet aroma and poured out their drink offerings. 29 Then I said to them, ‘What *is* this high place to which you go?’ So its name is called Bamah[a] to this day.” ’ 30 Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Are you defiling yourselves in the manner of your fathers, and committing harlotry according to their abominations? 31 For when you offer your gifts and make your sons pass through the fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols, even to this day. So shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? *As* I live,” says the Lord God, “I will not be inquired of by you. 32 What you have in your mind shall never be, when you say, ‘We will be like the Gentiles, like the families in other countries, serving wood and stone.’

God Will Restore Israel

33 “*As* I live,” says the Lord God, “surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you. 34 I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out. 35 And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face. 36 Just as I pleaded My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will plead My case with you,” says the Lord God.

37 “I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; 38 I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they dwell, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I *am* the Lord.

39 “As for you, O house of Israel,” thus says the Lord God: “Go, serve every one of you his idols—and hereafter—if you will not obey Me; but profane My holy name no more with your gifts and your idols. 40 For on My holy mountain, on the mountain height of Israel,” says the Lord God, “there all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, shall serve Me; there I will accept them, and there I will require your offerings and the firstfruits of your sacrifices, together with all your holy things. 41 I will accept you as a sweet aroma when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered; and I will be hallowed in you before the Gentiles. 42 Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the country *for* which I raised My hand in an oath to give to your fathers. 43 And there you shall remember your ways and all your doings with which you were defiled; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight because of all the evils that you have committed. 44 Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord, when I have dealt with you for My name’s sake, not according to your wicked ways nor according to your corrupt doings, O house of Israel,” says the Lord God.’ ”

Fire in the Forest

45 Furthermore the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 46 “Son of man, set your face toward the south; preach against the south and prophesy against the forest land, the South,[a] 47 and say to the forest of the South, ‘Hear the word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I will kindle a fire in you, and it shall devour every green tree and every dry tree in you; the blazing flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be scorched by it. 48 All flesh shall see that I, the Lord, have kindled it; it shall not be quenched.” ’ ”

49 Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! They say of me, ‘Does he not speak parables?’ ”

Babylon, the Sword of God

21 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 “Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem, preach against the holy places, and prophesy against the land

20:29 [a]Literally *High Place* **20:46** [a]Hebrew *Negev*

of Israel; 3 and say to the land of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord: "Behold, I *am* against you, and I will draw My sword out of its sheath and cut off both righteous and wicked from you. 4 Because I will cut off both righteous and wicked from you, therefore My sword shall go out of its sheath against all flesh from south *to* north, 5 that all flesh may know that I, the Lord, have drawn My sword out of its sheath; it shall not return anymore."' 6 Sigh therefore, son of man, with a breaking heart, and sigh with bitterness before their eyes. 7 And it shall be when they say to you, 'Why are you sighing?' that you shall answer, 'Because of the news; when it comes, every heart will melt, all hands will be feeble, every spirit will faint, and all knees will be weak *as* water. Behold, it is coming and shall be brought to pass,' says the Lord God."

8 Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 9 "Son of man, prophesy and say, 'Thus says the Lord!' Say:

'A sword, a sword is sharpened
And also polished!
10 Sharpened to make a dreadful slaughter,
Polished to flash like lightning!
Should we then make mirth?
It despises the scepter of My son,
As it does all wood.
11 And He has given it to be polished,
That it may be handled;
This sword is sharpened, and it is polished
To be given into the hand of the slayer.'

12 "Cry and wail, son of man;
For it will be against My people,
Against all the princes of Israel.
Terrors including the sword will be against My people;
Therefore strike *your* thigh.

13 "Because *it is* a testing,
And what if *the sword* despises even the scepter?
The scepter shall be no *more,*"

says the Lord God.

14 "You therefore, son of man, prophesy,
And strike *your* hands together.
The third time let the sword do double *damage.*
It *is* the sword *that* slays,
The sword that slays the great *men,*
That enters their private chambers.
15 I have set the point of the sword against all their gates,
That the heart may melt and many may stumble.
Ah! *It is* made bright;
It is grasped for slaughter:

16 "Swords at the ready!
Thrust right!

Life Lessons

Ezekiel 20:45—24:27

SITUATION

God told Ezekiel of Jerusalem's impending judgment. He compared Jerusalem to a woman who has prostituted herself for pleasure and money. As punishment, Jerusalem would suffer greatly from foreign invaders. Despite the punishment brought upon Jerusalem, some righteous Israelites would survive and honor God.

OBSERVATION

God planned severe judgment for the Israelites because of their godless and immoral lifestyles. This was their last chance to repent.

INSPIRATION

When it seems that everyone has turned away, a crook places himself between Jesus and the accusers and speaks on his behalf.

"We receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong" [Luke 23:41].

The soldiers look up. The priests cease chattering. Mary wipes her tears and raises her eyes. No one had even noticed the fellow, but now everyone looks at him.

Perhaps even Jesus looks at him. Perhaps he turns to see the one who had spoken when all others had remained silent. Perhaps he fights to focus his eyes on the one who offered this final gesture of love he'd receive while alive. I wonder, did he smile as this sheep straggled into the fold?

For that, in effect, is exactly what the criminal is doing. He is stumbling to safety just as the gate is closing. . . .

Set your blade!
Thrust left—
Wherever your edge is ordered!

17 "I also will beat My fists together,
And I will cause My fury to rest;
I, the Lord, have spoken."

18 The word of the Lord came to me again, saying: 19 "And son of man, appoint for yourself two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to go; both of them shall go from the same land. Make a sign; put *it* at the head of the road to the city. 20 Appoint a road for the sword to go to Rabbah of the Ammonites, and to Judah, into fortified Jerusalem. 21 For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the road, at the fork of the two roads, to use divination: he shakes the arrows, he consults the images, he looks at the liver. 22 In his right hand is the divination for Jerusalem: to set up battering rams, to call for a slaughter, to lift the voice with shouting, to set battering rams against the gates, to heap up a *siege* mound, and to build a wall. 23 And it will be to them like a false divination in the eyes of those who have sworn oaths with them; but he will bring their iniquity to remembrance, that they may be taken.

24 "Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Because you have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered, so that in all your doings your sins appear—because you have come to remembrance, you shall be taken in hand.

25 'Now to you, O profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose iniquity *shall* end, 26 thus says the Lord God:

"Remove the turban, and take off the crown;
Nothing *shall remain* the same.
Exalt the humble, and humble the exalted.
27 Overthrown, overthrown,
I will make it overthrown!
It shall be no *longer,*
Until He comes whose right it is,
And I will give it *to* Him." '

A Sword Against the Ammonites

28 "And you, son of man, prophesy and say, 'Thus says the Lord God concerning the Ammonites and concerning their reproach,' and say:

'A sword, a sword *is* drawn,
Polished for slaughter,
For consuming, for flashing—
29 While they see false visions for you,
While they divine a lie to you,
To bring you on the necks of the wicked, the slain
Whose day has come,
Whose iniquity *shall* end.

30 'Return *it* to its sheath.
I will judge you

As he looks into the eyes of his last hope, he made the same request any Christian has made.

"Remember me when You come into Your kingdom" [Luke 23:42].

No stained-glass homilies. No excuses. Just a desperate plea for help.

At this point Jesus performs the greatest miracle of the Cross. Greater than the earthquake. Greater than the tearing of the temple curtain. Greater than the darkness. Greater than the resurrected saints appearing on the streets.

He performs the miracle of forgiveness. A sin-soaked criminal is received by a blood-stained Savior.

"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" [Luke 23:43].

Wow. Only seconds before the thief was a beggar nervously squeezing his hat at the castle door, wondering if the King might spare a few crumbs. Suddenly he's holding the whole pantry. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

If secret sins mar your relationship with God, deal with them immediately. Confess your sin, get it out of your life, seek help, and ask God to free your spirit from guilt.

EXPLORATION

Judgment—Deuteronomy 7:2; 1 Samuel 2:25; Isaiah 1:2–4; Matthew 3:10; Romans 2:12–15.

In the place where you were created,
In the land of your nativity.
31 I will pour out My indignation on you;
I will blow against you with the fire of My wrath,
And deliver you into the hands of brutal men *who are* skillful to destroy.
32 You shall be fuel for the fire;
Your blood shall be in the midst of the land.
You shall not be remembered,
For I the Lord have spoken.'"

Sins of Jerusalem

22 Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Now, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the bloody city? Yes, show her all her abominations! 3 Then say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "The city sheds blood in her own midst, that her time may come; and she makes idols within herself to defile herself. 4 You have become guilty by the blood which you have shed, and have defiled yourself with the idols which you have made. You have caused your days to draw near, and have come to *the end of* your years; therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations, and a mockery to all countries. 5 *Those* near and *those* far from you will mock you as infamous *and* full of tumult.

6 "Look, the princes of Israel: each one has used his power to shed blood in you. 7 In you they have made light of father and mother; in your midst they have oppressed the stranger; in you they have mistreated the fatherless and the widow. 8 You have despised My holy things and profaned My Sabbaths. 9 In you are men who slander to cause bloodshed; in you are those who eat on the mountains; in your midst they commit lewdness. 10 In you men uncover their fathers' nakedness; in you they violate women who are set apart during their impurity. 11 One commits abomination with his neighbor's wife; another lewdly defiles his daughter-in-law; and another in you violates his sister, his father's daughter. 12 In you they take bribes to shed blood; you take usury and increase; you have made profit from your neighbors by extortion, and have forgotten Me," says the Lord God.

13 "Behold, therefore, I beat My fists at the dishonest profit which you have made, and at the bloodshed which has been in your midst. 14 Can your heart endure, or can your hands remain strong, in the days when I shall deal with you? I, the Lord, have spoken, and will do *it.* 15 I will scatter you among the nations, disperse you throughout the countries, and remove your filthiness completely from you. 16 You shall defile yourself in the sight of the nations; then you shall know that I *am* the Lord."'"

Israel in the Furnace

17 The word of the Lord came to me, saying, 18 "Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to Me; they *are* all bronze, tin, iron, and lead, in the midst of a furnace; they have become dross from silver. 19 Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Because you have all become dross, therefore behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. 20 *As men* gather silver, bronze, iron, lead, and tin into the midst of a furnace, to blow fire on it, to melt *it;* so I will gather *you* in My anger and in My fury, and I will leave *you there* and melt you. 21 Yes, I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you shall be melted in its midst. 22 As silver is melted in the midst of a furnace, so shall you be melted in its midst; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have poured out My fury on you.'"

Israel's Wicked Leaders

23 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 24 "Son of man, say to her: 'You *are* a land that is not cleansed[a] or rained on in the day of indignation.' 25 The conspiracy of her prophets[a] in her midst is like a roaring lion tearing the prey; they have devoured people; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in her midst. 26 Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known *the difference* between the unclean and the clean; and they have hid-

22:24 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Syriac, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *showered upon*. **22:25** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *princes;* Targum reads *scribes*.

den their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. 27 Her princes in her midst *are* like wolves tearing the prey, to shed blood, to destroy people, and to get dishonest gain. 28 Her prophets plastered them with untempered *mortar,* seeing false visions, and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord God,' when the Lord had not spoken. 29 The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger. 30 So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. 31 Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord God.

Two Harlot Sisters

23 The word of the Lord came again to me, saying:

2 "Son of man, there were two women,
The daughters of one mother.
3 They committed harlotry in Egypt,
They committed harlotry in their youth;
Their breasts were there embraced,
Their virgin bosom was there pressed.
4 Their names: Oholah[a] the elder and
Oholibah[b] her sister;
They were Mine,
And they bore sons and daughters.
As for their names,
Samaria *is* Oholah, and Jerusalem *is*
Oholibah.

The Older Sister, Samaria

5 "Oholah played the harlot even though
she was Mine;
And she lusted for her lovers, the
neighboring Assyrians,
6 *Who were* clothed in purple,
Captains and rulers,
All of them desirable young men,
Horsemen riding on horses.
7 Thus she committed her harlotry with
them,
All of them choice men of Assyria;
And with all for whom she lusted,
With all their idols, she defiled herself.
8 She has never given up her harlotry
brought from Egypt,
For in her youth they had lain with her,
Pressed her virgin bosom,
And poured out their immorality upon
her.

9 "Therefore I have delivered her
Into the hand of her lovers,
Into the hand of the Assyrians,
For whom she lusted.
10 They uncovered her nakedness,
Took away her sons and daughters,
And slew her with the sword;
She became a byword among women,
For they had executed judgment on her.

The Younger Sister, Jerusalem

11 "Now although her sister Oholibah saw *this,* she became more corrupt in her lust than she, and in her harlotry more corrupt than her sister's harlotry.

12 "She lusted for the neighboring Assyrians,
Captains and rulers,
Clothed most gorgeously,
Horsemen riding on horses,
All of them desirable young men.
13 Then I saw that she was defiled;
Both *took* the same way.
14 But she increased her harlotry;
She looked at men portrayed on the
wall,
Images of Chaldeans portrayed in
vermilion,
15 Girded with belts around their waists,
Flowing turbans on their heads,
All of them looking like captains,
In the manner of the Babylonians of
Chaldea,
The land of their nativity.
16 As soon as her eyes saw them,
She lusted for them
And sent messengers to them in Chaldea.

17 "Then the Babylonians came to her, into
the bed of love,

23:4 [a] Literally *Her Own Tabernacle* [b] Literally *My Tabernacle Is in Her*

And they defiled her with their
immorality;
So she was defiled by them, and alienated
herself from them.
18 She revealed her harlotry and uncovered
her nakedness.
Then I alienated Myself from her,
As I had alienated Myself from her sister.

19 "Yet she multiplied her harlotry
In calling to remembrance the days of her
youth,
When she had played the harlot in the
land of Egypt.
20 For she lusted for her paramours,
Whose flesh *is like* the flesh of donkeys,
And whose issue *is like* the issue of
horses.
21 Thus you called to remembrance the
lewdness of your youth,
When the Egyptians pressed your bosom
Because of your youthful breasts.

Judgment on Jerusalem

22 "Therefore, Oholibah, thus says the Lord
God:

'Behold, I will stir up your lovers against
you,
From whom you have alienated yourself,
And I will bring them against you from
every side:
23 The Babylonians,
All the Chaldeans,
Pekod, Shoa, Koa,
All the Assyrians with them,
All of them desirable young men,
Governors and rulers,
Captains and men of renown,
All of them riding on horses.
24 And they shall come against you
With chariots, wagons, and war-horses,
With a horde of people.
They shall array against you
Buckler, shield, and helmet all around.

'I will delegate judgment to them,
And they shall judge you according to
their judgments.
25 I will set My jealousy against you,
And they shall deal furiously with you;
They shall remove your nose and your
ears,
And your remnant shall fall by the sword;
They shall take your sons and your
daughters,
And your remnant shall be devoured by
fire.
26 They shall also strip you of your clothes
And take away your beautiful jewelry.

27 'Thus I will make you cease your lewdness
and your harlotry
Brought from the land of Egypt,
So that you will not lift your eyes to
them,
Nor remember Egypt anymore.'

28 "For thus says the Lord God: 'Surely I will
deliver you into the hand of those you hate,
into the hand *of those* from whom you alien-
ated yourself. 29 They will deal hatefully with
you, take away all you have worked for, and
leave you naked and bare. The nakedness of
your harlotry shall be uncovered, both your
lewdness and your harlotry. 30 I will do these
things to you because you have gone as a
harlot after the Gentiles, because you have
become defiled by their idols. 31 You have
walked in the way of your sister; therefore I
will put her cup in your hand.'
32 "Thus says the Lord God:

'You shall drink of your sister's cup,
The deep and wide one;
You shall be laughed to scorn
And held in derision;
It contains much.
33 You will be filled with drunkenness and
sorrow,
The cup of horror and desolation,
The cup of your sister Samaria.
34 You shall drink and drain it,
You shall break its shards,
And tear at your own breasts;
For I have spoken,'
Says the Lord God.

35 "Therefore thus says the Lord God:

'Because you have forgotten Me and cast
Me behind your back,

Therefore you shall bear the *penalty*
Of your lewdness and your harlotry.'"

Both Sisters Judged

36 The Lord also said to me: "Son of man,
will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then
declare to them their abominations. 37 For
they have committed adultery, and blood *is*
on their hands. They have committed adul-
tery with their idols, and even *sacrificed* their
sons whom they bore to Me, passing them
through *the fire,* to devour *them.* 38 Moreover
they have done this to Me: They have defiled
My sanctuary on the same day and profaned
My Sabbaths. 39 For after they had slain their
children for their idols, on the same day they
came into My sanctuary to profane it; and
indeed thus they have done in the midst of
My house.

40 "Furthermore you sent for men to come
from afar, to whom a messenger *was* sent; and
there they came. And you washed yourself for
them, painted your eyes, and adorned yourself
with ornaments. 41 You sat on a stately couch,
with a table prepared before it, on which you
had set My incense and My oil. 42 The sound of
a carefree multitude *was* with her, and Sabeans
were brought from the wilderness with men of
the common sort, who put bracelets on their
wrists and beautiful crowns on their heads.
43 Then I said concerning *her who had grown*
old in adulteries, 'Will they commit harlotry
with her now, and she *with them?*' 44 Yet they
went in to her, as men go in to a woman who
plays the harlot; thus they went in to Oholah
and Oholibah, the lewd women. 45 But right-
eous men will judge them after the manner of
adulteresses, and after the manner of women
who shed blood, because they *are* adulter-
esses, and blood *is* on their hands.

46 "For thus says the Lord God: 'Bring up an
assembly against them, give them up to trou-
ble and plunder. 47 The assembly shall stone
them with stones and execute them with their
swords; they shall slay their sons and their
daughters, and burn their houses with fire.
48 Thus I will cause lewdness to cease from
the land, that all women may be taught not to
practice your lewdness. 49 They shall repay you
for your lewdness, and you shall pay for your
idolatrous sins. Then you shall know that I *am*
the Lord God.'"

Symbol of the Cooking Pot

24 Again, in the ninth year, in the tenth
month, on the tenth *day* of the month,
the word of the Lord came to me, saying,
2 "Son of man, write down the name of the
day, this very day—the king of Babylon started
his siege against Jerusalem this very day. 3 And
utter a parable to the rebellious house, and say
to them, 'Thus says the Lord God:

"Put on a pot, set *it* on,
And also pour water into it.
4 Gather pieces *of meat* in it,
Every good piece,
The thigh and the shoulder.
Fill *it* with choice cuts;
5 Take the choice of the flock.
Also pile *fuel* bones under it,
Make it boil well,
And let the cuts simmer in it."

6 'Therefore thus says the Lord God:

"Woe to the bloody city,
To the pot whose scum *is* in it,
And whose scum is not gone from it!
Bring it out piece by piece,
On which no lot has fallen.
7 For her blood is in her midst;
She set it on top of a rock;
She did not pour it on the ground,
To cover it with dust.
8 That it may raise up fury and take
vengeance,
I have set her blood on top of a rock,
That it may not be covered."

9 'Therefore thus says the Lord God:

"Woe to the bloody city!
I too will make the pyre great.
10 Heap on the wood,
Kindle the fire;
Cook the meat well,
Mix in the spices,
And let the cuts be burned up.

11 "Then set the pot empty on the coals,
That it may become hot and its bronze
may burn,
That its filthiness may be melted in it,
That its scum may be consumed.

12 She has grown weary with lies,
And her great scum has not gone from her.
Let her scum *be* in the fire!
13 In your filthiness *is* lewdness.
Because I have cleansed you, and you were not cleansed,
You will not be cleansed of your filthiness anymore,
Till I have caused My fury to rest upon you.
14 I, the Lord, have spoken *it;*
It shall come to pass, and I will do *it;*
I will not hold back,
Nor will I spare,
Nor will I relent;
According to your ways
And according to your deeds
They[a] will judge you,"
Says the Lord God.' "

The Prophet's Wife Dies

15 Also the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 16 "Son of man, behold, I take away from you the desire of your eyes with one stroke; yet you shall neither mourn nor weep, nor shall your tears run down. 17 Sigh in silence, make no mourning for the dead; bind your turban on your head, and put your sandals on your feet; do not cover *your* lips, and do not eat man's bread *of sorrow.*"

18 So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died; and the next morning I did as I was commanded.

19 And the people said to me, "Will you not tell us what these *things signify* to us, that you behave so?"

20 Then I answered them, "The word of the Lord came to me, saying, 21 'Speak to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord God: 'Behold, I will profane My sanctuary, your arrogant boast, the desire of your eyes, the delight of your soul; and your sons and daughters whom you left behind shall fall by the sword. 22 And you shall do as I have done; you shall not cover *your* lips nor eat man's bread *of sorrow.* 23 Your turbans shall be on your heads and your sandals on your feet; you shall neither mourn nor weep, but you shall pine away in your iniquities and mourn with one another. 24 Thus Ezekiel is a sign to you; according to all that he has done you shall do; and when this comes, you shall know that I *am* the Lord God.' "

25 'And you, son of man—*will it* not *be* in the day when I take from them their stronghold, their joy and their glory, the desire of their eyes, and that on which they set their minds, their sons and their daughters: 26 *that* on that day one who escapes will come to you to let *you* hear *it* with *your* ears? 27 On that day your mouth will be opened to him who has escaped; you shall speak and no longer be mute. Thus you will be a sign to them, and they shall know that I *am* the Lord.' "

Proclamation Against Ammon

25 The word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, set your face against the Ammonites, and prophesy against them. 3 Say to the Ammonites, 'Hear the word of the Lord God! Thus says the Lord God: "Because you said, 'Aha!' against My sanctuary when it was profaned, and against the land of Israel when it was desolate, and against the house of Judah when they went into captivity, 4 indeed, therefore, I will deliver you as a possession to the men of the East, and they shall set their encampments among you and make their dwellings among you; they shall eat your fruit, and they shall drink your milk. 5 And I will make Rabbah a stable for camels and Ammon a resting place for flocks. Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord."

6 'For thus says the Lord God: "Because you clapped *your* hands, stamped your feet, and rejoiced in heart with all your disdain for the land of Israel, 7 indeed, therefore, I will stretch out My hand against you, and give you as plunder to the nations; I will cut you off from the peoples, and I will cause you to perish from the countries; I will destroy you, and you shall know that I *am* the Lord."

Proclamation Against Moab

8 'Thus says the Lord God: "Because Moab and Seir say, 'Look! The house of Judah *is* like all the nations,' 9 therefore, behold, I will clear the territory of Moab of cities, of the cities on its frontier, the glory of the country, Beth

24:14 [a] Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate read *I.*

Life LESSONS

Ezekiel 25:1—32:32

SITUATION
The prophets knew that God reigned over all the world. When these seven nations failed to acknowledge God as their king, they were punished.

OBSERVATION
We are never beyond the reach of God's judgment. God condemns pride and arrogance wherever it appears.

INSPIRATION
Pursue humility. Humility doesn't mean you think less of yourself but that you think of yourself less. "I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith" (Romans 12:3).

Embrace your poverty. We're all equally broke and blessed. "People come into this world with nothing, and when they die they leave with nothing" (Ecclesiastes 5:15 NCV).

Resist the place of celebrity. "Go sit in a seat that is not important. When the host comes to you, he may say, 'Friend, move up here to a more important place.' Then all the other guests will respect you" (Luke 14:10 NCV).

Wouldn't you rather be invited up than put down?

God has a cure for the high and mighty: come down from the mountain. You'll be amazed what you hear and who you see. And you'll breathe a whole lot easier. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

Jeshimoth, Baal Meon, and Kirjathaim. 10 To the men of the East I will give it as a possession, together with the Ammonites, that the Ammonites may not be remembered among the nations. 11 And I will execute judgments upon Moab, and they shall know that I *am* the Lord."

Proclamation Against Edom

12 "Thus says the Lord God: "Because of what Edom did against the house of Judah by taking vengeance, and has greatly offended by avenging itself on them," 13 therefore thus says the Lord God: "I will also stretch out My hand against Edom, cut off man and beast from it, and make it desolate from Teman; Dedan shall fall by the sword. 14 I will lay My vengeance on Edom by the hand of My people Israel, that they may do in Edom according to My anger and according to My fury; and they shall know My vengeance," says the Lord God.

Proclamation Against Philistia

15 "Thus says the Lord God: "Because the Philistines dealt vengefully and took vengeance with a spiteful heart, to destroy because of the old hatred," 16 therefore thus says the Lord God: "I will stretch out My hand against the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethites and destroy the remnant of the seacoast. 17 I will execute great vengeance on them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I *am* the Lord, when I lay My vengeance upon them." ' "

Proclamation Against Tyre

26 And it came to pass in the eleventh year, on the first *day* of the month, *that* the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, because Tyre has said against Jerusalem, 'Aha! She is broken who *was* the gateway of the peoples; now she is turned over to me; I shall be filled; she is laid waste.'

3 "Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Behold, I *am* against you, O Tyre, and will cause many nations to come up against you, as the sea causes its waves to come up. 4 And they shall destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers; I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock. 5 It shall be *a place for* spreading nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken,' says the Lord God; 'it shall become plunder for the nations. 6 Also her daughter *villages* which *are* in the fields shall be slain by the sword. Then they shall know that I am the Lord.'

7 "For thus says the Lord God: 'Behold, I will bring against Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar[a] king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses, with chariots, and with horsemen, and an army with many people. 8 He will slay with the sword your daughter *villages* in the fields; he will heap up a siege mound against you, build a wall against you, and raise a defense against you. 9 He will direct his battering rams against your walls, and with his axes he will break down your towers. 10 Because of the abundance of his horses, their dust will cover you; your walls will shake at the noise of the horsemen, the wagons, and the chariots, when he enters your gates, as men enter a city that has

26:7 [a] Hebrew *Nebuchadrezzar,* and so elsewhere in this book

been breached. 11 With the hooves of his horses he will trample all your streets; he will slay your people by the sword, and your strong pillars will fall to the ground. 12 They will plunder your riches and pillage your merchandise; they will break down your walls and destroy your pleasant houses; they will lay your stones, your timber, and your soil in the midst of the water. 13 I will put an end to the sound of your songs, and the sound of your harps shall be heard no more. 14 I will make you like the top of a rock; you shall be *a place for* spreading nets, and you shall never be rebuilt, for I the Lord have spoken,' says the Lord God.

15 "Thus says the Lord God to Tyre: 'Will the coastlands not shake at the sound of your fall, when the wounded cry, when slaughter is made in the midst of you? 16 Then all the princes of the sea will come down from their thrones, lay aside their robes, and take off their embroidered garments; they will clothe themselves with trembling; they will sit on the ground, tremble *every* moment, and be astonished at you. 17 And they will take up a lamentation for you, and say to you:

"How you have perished,
O one inhabited by seafaring men,
O renowned city,
Who was strong at sea,
She and her inhabitants,
Who caused their terror *to be* on all her inhabitants!
18 Now the coastlands tremble on the day of your fall;
Yes, the coastlands by the sea are troubled at your departure."'

19 "For thus says the Lord God: 'When I make you a desolate city, like cities that are not inhabited, when I bring the deep upon you, and great waters cover you, 20 then I will bring you down with those who descend into the Pit, to the people of old, and I will make you dwell in the lowest part of the earth, in places desolate from antiquity, with those who go down to the Pit, so that you may never be inhabited; and I shall establish glory in the land of the living. 21 I will make you a terror, and you *shall be* no *more;* though you are sought for, you will never be found again,' says the Lord God."

Lamentation for Tyre

27 The word of the Lord came again to me, saying, 2 "Now, son of man, take up a lamentation for Tyre, 3 and say to Tyre, 'You who are situated at the entrance of the sea, merchant of the peoples on many coastlands, thus says the Lord God:

"O Tyre, you have said,
'I *am* perfect in beauty.'
4 Your borders *are* in the midst of the seas.
Your builders have perfected your beauty.
5 They made all *your* planks of fir trees from Senir;
They took a cedar from Lebanon to make you a mast.
6 *Of* oaks from Bashan they made your oars;
The company of Ashurites have inlaid your planks

APPLICATION
Have you been successful? Do people praise your achievements? Give credit to God in thankful prayer for each gift He has given you.

EXPLORATION
Pride—Mark 9:34; Luke 18:11–14; 1 Peter 5:5, 6.

With ivory from the coasts of Cyprus.[a]
7 Fine embroidered linen from Egypt was
what you spread for your sail;
Blue and purple from the coasts of
Elishah was what covered you.

8 "Inhabitants of Sidon and Arvad were your
oarsmen;
Your wise men, O Tyre, were in you;
They became your pilots.
9 Elders of Gebal and its wise men
Were in you to caulk your seams;
All the ships of the sea
And their oarsmen were in you
To market your merchandise.

10 "Those from Persia, Lydia,[a] and Libya[b]
Were in your army as men of war;
They hung shield and helmet in you;
They gave splendor to you.
11 Men of Arvad with your army *were* on
your walls *all* around,
And the men of Gammad were in your
towers;
They hung their shields on your walls *all*
around;
They made your beauty perfect.

12 "Tarshish *was* your merchant because of your many luxury goods. They gave you silver, iron, tin, and lead for your goods. 13 Javan, Tubal, and Meshech *were* your traders. They bartered human lives and vessels of bronze for your merchandise. 14 Those from the house of Togarmah traded for your wares with horses, steeds, and mules. 15 The men of Dedan *were* your traders; many isles *were* the market of your hand. They brought you ivory tusks and ebony as payment. 16 Syria *was* your merchant because of the abundance of goods you made. They gave you for your wares emeralds, purple, embroidery, fine linen, corals, and rubies. 17 Judah and the land of Israel *were* your traders. They traded for your merchandise wheat of Minnith, millet, honey, oil, and balm. 18 Damascus *was* your merchant because of the abundance of goods you made, because of your many luxury items, with the wine of Helbon and with white wool. 19 Dan and Javan paid for your wares, traversing back and forth. Wrought iron, cassia, and cane were among your merchandise. 20 Dedan *was* your merchant in saddlecloths for riding. 21 Arabia and all the princes of Kedar *were* your regular merchants. They traded with you in lambs, rams, and goats. 22 The merchants of Sheba and Raamah *were* your merchants. They traded for your wares the choicest spices, all kinds of precious stones, and gold. 23 Haran, Canneh, Eden, the merchants of Sheba, Assyria, *and* Chilmad *were* your merchants. 24 These *were* your merchants in choice items—in purple clothes, in embroidered garments, in chests of multicolored apparel, in sturdy woven cords, which were in your marketplace.

25 "The ships of Tarshish were carriers of
your merchandise.
You were filled and very glorious in the
midst of the seas.
26 Your oarsmen brought you into many
waters,
But the east wind broke you in the midst
of the seas.

27 "Your riches, wares, and merchandise,
Your mariners and pilots,
Your caulkers and merchandisers,
All your men of war who *are* in you,
And the entire company which *is* in your
midst,
Will fall into the midst of the seas on the
day of your ruin.
28 The common-land will shake at the
sound of the cry of your pilots.

29 "All who handle the oar,
The mariners,
All the pilots of the sea
Will come down from their ships *and*
stand on the shore.
30 They will make their voice heard because
of you;
They will cry bitterly and cast dust on
their heads;
They will roll about in ashes;
31 They will shave themselves completely
bald because of you,
Gird themselves with sackcloth,
And weep for you

27:6 [a]Hebrew *Kittim,* western lands, especially Cyprus **27:10** [a]Hebrew *Lud* [b]Hebrew *Put*

With bitterness of heart *and* bitter
wailing.
32 In their wailing for you
They will take up a lamentation,
And lament for you:
'What *city is* like Tyre,
Destroyed in the midst of the sea?

33 'When your wares went out by sea,
You satisfied many people;
You enriched the kings of the earth
With your many luxury goods and your
merchandise.
34 But you are broken by the seas in the
depths of the waters;
Your merchandise and the entire
company will fall in your midst.
35 All the inhabitants of the isles will be
astonished at you;
Their kings will be greatly afraid,
And *their* countenance will be troubled.
36 The merchants among the peoples will
hiss at you;
You will become a horror, and *be* no more
forever.'" '"

Proclamation Against the King of Tyre

28 The word of the Lord came to me again, saying, 2 "Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, 'Thus says the Lord God:

"Because your heart *is* lifted up,
And you say, 'I *am* a god,
I sit *in* the seat of gods,
In the midst of the seas,'
Yet you *are* a man, and not a god,
Though you set your heart as the heart of
a god
3 (Behold, you *are* wiser than Daniel!
There is no secret that can be hidden
from you!
4 With your wisdom and your
understanding
You have gained riches for yourself,
And gathered gold and silver into your
treasuries;
5 By your great wisdom in trade you have
increased your riches,
And your heart is lifted up because of
your riches),"

6 'Therefore thus says the Lord God:

"Because you have set your heart as the
heart of a god,
7 Behold, therefore, I will bring strangers
against you,
The most terrible of the nations;
And they shall draw their swords against
the beauty of your wisdom,
And defile your splendor.
8 They shall throw you down into the Pit,
And you shall die the death of the slain
In the midst of the seas.

9 "Will you still say before him who slays
you,
'I *am* a god'?
But you *shall be* a man, and not a god,
In the hand of him who slays you.
10 You shall die the death of the
uncircumcised
By the hand of aliens;
For I have spoken," says the Lord God.' "

Lamentation for the King of Tyre

11 Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 12 "Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord God:

"You *were* the seal of perfection,
Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.
13 You were in Eden, the garden of God;
Every precious stone *was* your covering:
The sardius, topaz, and diamond,
Beryl, onyx, and jasper,
Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with
gold.
The workmanship of your timbrels and
pipes
Was prepared for you on the day you
were created.

14 "You *were* the anointed cherub who
covers;
I established you;
You were on the holy mountain of God;
You walked back and forth in the midst of
fiery stones.
15 You *were* perfect in your ways from the
day you were created,
Till iniquity was found in you.

16 "By the abundance of your trading
You became filled with violence within,
And you sinned;
Therefore I cast you as a profane thing
Out of the mountain of God;
And I destroyed you, O covering cherub,
From the midst of the fiery stones.

17 "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;
You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor;
I cast you to the ground,
I laid you before kings,
That they might gaze at you.

18 "You defiled your sanctuaries
By the multitude of your iniquities,
By the iniquity of your trading;
Therefore I brought fire from your midst;
It devoured you,
And I turned you to ashes upon the earth
In the sight of all who saw you.
19 All who knew you among the peoples are astonished at you;
You have become a horror,
And *shall be* no more forever."' "

Proclamation Against Sidon

20 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 21 "Son of man, set your face toward Sidon, and prophesy against her, 22 and say, 'Thus says the Lord God:

"Behold, I *am* against you, O Sidon;
I will be glorified in your midst;
And they shall know that I *am* the Lord,
When I execute judgments in her and am hallowed in her.
23 For I will send pestilence upon her,
And blood in her streets;
The wounded shall be judged in her midst
By the sword against her on every side;
Then they shall know that I *am* the Lord.

24 "And there shall no longer be a pricking brier or a painful thorn for the house of Israel from among all *who are* around them, who despise them. Then they shall know that I *am* the Lord God."

Israel's Future Blessing

25 'Thus says the Lord God: "When I have gathered the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and am hallowed in them in the sight of the Gentiles, then they will dwell in their own land which I gave to My servant Jacob. 26 And they will dwell safely there, build houses, and plant vineyards; yes, they will dwell securely, when I execute judgments on all those around them who despise them. Then they shall know that I *am* the Lord their God."' "

Proclamation Against Egypt

29 In the tenth year, in the tenth *month,* on the twelfth *day* of the month, the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him, and against all Egypt. 3 Speak, and say, 'Thus says the Lord God:

"Behold, I *am* against you,
O Pharaoh king of Egypt,
O great monster who lies in the midst of his rivers,
Who has said, 'My River[a] *is* my own;
I have made *it* for myself.'
4 But I will put hooks in your jaws,
And cause the fish of your rivers to stick to your scales;
I will bring you up out of the midst of your rivers,
And all the fish in your rivers will stick to your scales.
5 I will leave you in the wilderness,
You and all the fish of your rivers;
You shall fall on the open field;
You shall not be picked up or gathered.[a]
I have given you as food
To the beasts of the field
And to the birds of the heavens.

6 "Then all the inhabitants of Egypt
Shall know that I *am* the Lord,

29:3 [a]That is, the Nile **29:5** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Septuagint, and Vulgate; some Hebrew manuscripts and Targum read *buried.*

Because they have been a staff of reed to
the house of Israel.
7 When they took hold of you with the
hand,
You broke and tore all their shoulders;[a]
When they leaned on you,
You broke and made all their backs
quiver."

8 'Therefore thus says the Lord God: "Surely
I will bring a sword upon you and cut off
from you man and beast. 9 And the land of
Egypt shall become desolate and waste; then
they will know that I *am* the Lord, because
he said, 'The River *is* mine, and I have made
it.' 10 Indeed, therefore, I *am* against you and
against your rivers, and I will make the land
of Egypt utterly waste and desolate, from
Migdol[a] *to* Syene, as far as the border of Ethi-
opia. 11 Neither foot of man shall pass through
it nor foot of beast pass through it, and it
shall be uninhabited forty years. 12 I will make
the land of Egypt desolate in the midst of
the countries *that are* desolate; and among
the cities *that are* laid waste, her cities shall
be desolate forty years; and I will scatter the
Egyptians among the nations and disperse
them throughout the countries."

13 'Yet, thus says the Lord God: "At the end
of forty years I will gather the Egyptians from
the peoples among whom they were scattered.
14 I will bring back the captives of Egypt and
cause them to return to the land of Pathros,
to the land of their origin, and there they shall
be a lowly kingdom. 15 It shall be the lowliest
of kingdoms; it shall never again exalt itself
above the nations, for I will diminish them so
that they will not rule over the nations any-
more. 16 No longer shall it be the confidence
of the house of Israel, but will remind them
of *their* iniquity when they turned to follow
them. Then they shall know that I *am* the Lord
God."' "

Babylonia Will Plunder Egypt

17 And it came to pass in the twenty-seventh
year, in the first *month,* on the first *day* of the
month, *that* the word of the Lord came to me,
saying, 18 "Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king
of Babylon caused his army to labor strenu-
ously against Tyre; every head *was* made bald,
and every shoulder rubbed raw; yet neither
he nor his army received wages from Tyre, for
the labor which they expended on it. 19 There-
fore thus says the Lord God: 'Surely I will give
the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of
Babylon; he shall take away her wealth, carry
off her spoil, and remove her pillage; and that
will be the wages for his army. 20 I have given
him the land of Egypt *for* his labor, because
they worked for Me,' says the Lord God.

21 'In that day I will cause the horn of the
house of Israel to spring forth, and I will open
your mouth to speak in their midst. Then they
shall know that I *am* the Lord.' "

Egypt and Her Allies Will Fall

30 The word of the Lord came to me
again, saying, 2 "Son of man, prophesy
and say, 'Thus says the Lord God:

"Wail, 'Woe to the day!'
3 For the day *is* near,
Even the day of the Lord *is* near;
It will be a day of clouds, the time of the
Gentiles.
4 The sword shall come upon Egypt,
And great anguish shall be in Ethiopia,
When the slain fall in Egypt,
And they take away her wealth,
And her foundations are broken down.

5 "Ethiopia, Libya,[a] Lydia,[b] all the mingled
people, Chub, and the men of the lands who
are allied, shall fall with them by the sword."

6 'Thus says the Lord:

"Those who uphold Egypt shall fall,
And the pride of her power shall come
down.
From Migdol *to* Syene
Those within her shall fall by the sword,"
Says the Lord God.

7 "They shall be desolate in the midst of the
desolate countries,
And her cities shall be in the midst of the
cities *that are* laid waste.

29:7 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Septuagint and Syriac read *hand.* **29:10** [a]Or *tower* **30:5** [a]Hebrew *Put* [b]Hebrew *Lud*

8 Then they will know that I *am* the Lord,
When I have set a fire in Egypt
And all her helpers are destroyed.
9 On that day messengers shall go forth
from Me in ships
To make the careless Ethiopians afraid,
And great anguish shall come upon
them,
As on the day of Egypt;
For indeed it is coming!"

10 'Thus says the Lord God:

"I will also make a multitude of Egypt to
cease
By the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of
Babylon.
11 He and his people with him, the most
terrible of the nations,
Shall be brought to destroy the land;
They shall draw their swords against
Egypt,
And fill the land with the slain.
12 I will make the rivers dry,
And sell the land into the hand of the
wicked;
I will make the land waste, and all that is
in it,
By the hand of aliens.
I, the Lord, have spoken."

13 'Thus says the Lord God:

"I will also destroy the idols,
And cause the images to cease from
Noph;[a]
There shall no longer be princes from the
land of Egypt;
I will put fear in the land of Egypt.
14 I will make Pathros desolate,
Set fire to Zoan,
And execute judgments in No.[a]
15 I will pour My fury on Sin,[a] the strength of
Egypt;
I will cut off the multitude of No,
16 And set a fire in Egypt;
Sin shall have great pain,
No shall be split open,
And Noph *shall be in* distress daily.
17 The young men of Aven[a] and Pi Beseth
shall fall by the sword,
And these *cities* shall go into captivity.
18 At Tehaphnehes[a] the day shall also be
darkened,[b]
When I break the yokes of Egypt there.
And her arrogant strength shall cease in
her;
As for her, a cloud shall cover her,
And her daughters shall go into
captivity.
19 Thus I will execute judgments on Egypt,
Then they shall know that I *am* the
Lord.'"

Proclamation Against Pharaoh

20 And it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the first *month,* on the seventh *day* of the month, *that* the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 21 "Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and see, it has not been bandaged for healing, nor a splint put on to bind it, to make it strong enough to hold a sword. 22 Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Surely I *am* against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and will break his arms, both the strong one and the one that was broken; and I will make the sword fall out of his hand. 23 I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them throughout the countries. 24 I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put My sword in his hand; but I will break Pharaoh's arms, and he will groan before him with the groanings of a mortally wounded *man.* 25 Thus I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, but the arms of Pharaoh shall fall down; they shall know that I *am* the Lord, when I put My sword into the hand of the king of Babylon and he stretches it out against the land of Egypt. 26 I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them throughout the countries. Then they shall know that I *am* the Lord.'"

Egypt Cut Down Like a Great Tree

31 Now it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the third *month,* on the first

30:13 [a]That is, ancient Memphis **30:14** [a]That is, ancient Thebes **30:15** [a]That is, ancient Pelusium **30:17** [a]That is, ancient On (Heliopolis) **30:18** [a]Spelled *Tahpanhes* in Jeremiah 43:7 and elsewhere [b]Following many Hebrew manuscripts, Bomberg, Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text reads *refrained.*

day of the month, *that* the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, say to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his multitude:

'Whom are you like in your greatness?
3 Indeed Assyria *was* a cedar in Lebanon,
With fine branches that shaded the forest,
And of high stature;
And its top was among the thick boughs.
4 The waters made it grow;
Underground waters gave it height,
With their rivers running around the place where it was planted,
And sent out rivulets to all the trees of the field.

5 'Therefore its height was exalted above all the trees of the field;
Its boughs were multiplied,
And its branches became long because of the abundance of water,
As it sent them out.
6 All the birds of the heavens made their nests in its boughs;
Under its branches all the beasts of the field brought forth their young;
And in its shadow all great nations made their home.

7 'Thus it was beautiful in greatness and in the length of its branches,
Because its roots reached to abundant waters.
8 The cedars in the garden of God could not hide it;
The fir trees were not like its boughs,
And the chestnut[a] trees were not like its branches;
No tree in the garden of God was like it in beauty.
9 I made it beautiful with a multitude of branches,
So that all the trees of Eden envied it,
That *were* in the garden of God.'

10 "Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Because you have increased in height, and it set its top among the thick boughs, and its heart was lifted up in its height, 11 therefore I will deliver it into the hand of the mighty one of the nations, and he shall surely deal with it; I have driven it out for its wickedness. 12 And aliens, the most terrible of the nations, have cut it down and left it; its branches have fallen on the mountains and in all the valleys; its boughs lie broken by all the rivers of the land; and all the peoples of the earth have gone from under its shadow and left it.

13 'On its ruin will remain all the birds of the heavens,
And all the beasts of the field will come to its branches—

14 'So that no trees by the waters may ever again exalt themselves for their height, nor set their tops among the thick boughs, that no tree which drinks water may ever be high enough to reach up to them.

'For they have all been delivered to death,
To the depths of the earth,
Among the children of men who go down to the Pit.'

15 "Thus says the Lord God: 'In the day when it went down to hell, I caused mourning. I covered the deep because of it. I restrained its rivers, and the great waters were held back. I caused Lebanon to mourn for it, and all the trees of the field wilted because of it. 16 I made the nations shake at the sound of its fall, when I cast it down to hell together with those who descend into the Pit; and all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that drink water, were comforted in the depths of the earth. 17 They also went down to hell with it, with those slain by the sword; and *those who were* its *strong* arm dwelt in its shadows among the nations.

18 'To which of the trees in Eden will you then be likened in glory and greatness? Yet you shall be brought down with the trees of Eden to the depths of the earth; you shall lie in the midst of the uncircumcised, with *those* slain by the sword. This *is* Pharaoh and all his multitude,' says the Lord God."

31:8 [a]Hebrew *armon*

Lamentation for Pharaoh and Egypt

32 And it came to pass in the twelfth year,
in the twelfth *month,* on the first *day* of
the month, *that* the word of the Lord came to
me, saying, 2 "Son of man, take up a lamenta-
tion for Pharaoh king of Egypt, and say to him:

'You are like a young lion among the
nations,
And you *are* like a monster in the seas,
Bursting forth in your rivers,
Troubling the waters with your feet,
And fouling their rivers.

3 'Thus says the Lord God:

"I will therefore spread My net over you
with a company of many people,
And they will draw you up in My net.
4 Then I will leave you on the land;
I will cast you out on the open fields,
And cause to settle on you all the birds of
the heavens.
And with you I will fill the beasts of the
whole earth.
5 I will lay your flesh on the mountains,
And fill the valleys with your carcass.

6 "I will also water the land with the flow of
your blood,
Even to the mountains;
And the riverbeds will be full of you.
7 When *I* put out your light,
I will cover the heavens, and make its
stars dark;
I will cover the sun with a cloud,
And the moon shall not give her light.
8 All the bright lights of the heavens I will
make dark over you,
And bring darkness upon your land,"
Says the Lord God.

9 'I will also trouble the hearts of many
peoples, when I bring your destruction among
the nations, into the countries which you have
not known. 10 Yes, I will make many peoples
astonished at you, and their kings shall be
horribly afraid of you when I brandish My
sword before them; and they shall tremble
every moment, every man for his own life, in
the day of your fall.

11 'For thus says the Lord God: "The sword
of the king of Babylon shall come upon you.
12 By the swords of the mighty warriors, all of
them the most terrible of the nations, I will
cause your multitude to fall.

"They shall plunder the pomp of Egypt,
And all its multitude shall be destroyed.
13 Also I will destroy all its animals
From beside its great waters;
The foot of man shall muddy them no
more,
Nor shall the hooves of animals muddy
them.
14 Then I will make their waters clear,
And make their rivers run like oil,"
Says the Lord God.

15 "When I make the land of Egypt desolate,
And the country is destitute of all that
once filled it,
When I strike all who dwell in it,
Then they shall know that I *am* the Lord.

16 "This *is* the lamentation
With which they shall lament her;
The daughters of the nations shall lament
her;
They shall lament for her, for Egypt,
And for all her multitude,"
Says the Lord God.'"

Egypt and Others Consigned to the Pit

17 It came to pass also in the twelfth year, on
the fifteenth *day* of the month, *that* the word
of the Lord came to me, saying:

18 "Son of man, wail over the multitude of
Egypt,
And cast them down to the depths of the
earth,
Her and the daughters of the famous
nations,
With those who go down to the Pit:
19 'Whom do you surpass in beauty?
Go down, be placed with the
uncircumcised.'

20 "They shall fall in the midst of *those* slain
by the sword;
She is delivered to the sword,

Drawing her and all her multitudes.
21 The strong among the mighty
Shall speak to him out of the midst of hell
With those who help him:
'They have gone down,
They lie with the uncircumcised, slain by the sword.'

22 "Assyria *is* there, and all her company,
With their graves all around her,
All of them slain, fallen by the sword.
23 Her graves are set in the recesses of the Pit,
And her company is all around her grave,
All of them slain, fallen by the sword,
Who caused terror in the land of the living.

24 "There *is* Elam and all her multitude,
All around her grave,
All of them slain, fallen by the sword,
Who have gone down uncircumcised to the lower parts of the earth,
Who caused their terror in the land of the living;
Now they bear their shame with those who go down to the Pit.
25 They have set her bed in the midst of the slain,
With all her multitude,
With her graves all around it,
All of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword;
Though their terror was caused
In the land of the living,
Yet they bear their shame
With those who go down to the Pit;
It was put in the midst of the slain.

26 "There *are* Meshech and Tubal and all their multitudes,
With all their graves around it,
All of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword,
Though they caused their terror in the land of the living.
27 They do not lie with the mighty
Who are fallen of the uncircumcised,
Who have gone down to hell with their weapons of war;
They have laid their swords under their heads,
But their iniquities will be on their bones,
Because of the terror of the mighty in the land of the living.
28 Yes, you shall be broken in the midst of the uncircumcised,
And lie with *those* slain by the sword.

29 "There *is* Edom,
Her kings and all her princes,
Who despite their might
Are laid beside *those* slain by the sword;
They shall lie with the uncircumcised,
And with those who go down to the Pit.
30 There *are* the princes of the north,
All of them, and all the Sidonians,
Who have gone down with the slain
In shame at the terror which they caused by their might;
They lie uncircumcised with *those* slain by the sword,
And bear their shame with those who go down to the Pit.

31 "Pharaoh will see them
And be comforted over all his multitude,
Pharaoh and all his army,
Slain by the sword,"
Says the Lord God.

32 "For I have caused My terror in the land of the living;
And he shall be placed in the midst of the uncircumcised
With *those* slain by the sword,
Pharaoh and all his multitude,"
Says the Lord God.

The Watchman and His Message

33 Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, speak to the children of your people, and say to them: 'When I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from their territory and make him their watchman, 3 when he sees the sword coming upon the land, if he blows the trumpet and warns the people, 4 then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his *own* head. 5 He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But he who takes warning will save

his life. 6But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes *any* person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.'

7"So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me. 8When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked *man,* you shall surely die!' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. 9Nevertheless if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.

10"Therefore you, O son of man, say to the house of Israel: 'Thus you say, "If our transgressions and our sins *lie* upon us, and we pine away in them, how can we then live?" ' 11Say to them: '*As* I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'

The Fairness of God's Judgment

12"Therefore you, O son of man, say to the children of your people: 'The righteousness of the righteous man shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression; as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall because of it in the day that he turns from his wickedness; nor shall the righteous be able to live because of *his righteousness* in the day that he sins.' 13When I say to the righteous *that* he shall surely live, but he trusts in his own righteousness and commits iniquity, none of his righteous works shall be remembered; but because of the iniquity that he has committed, he shall die. 14Again, when I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' if he turns from his sin and does what is lawful and right, 15*if* the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has stolen, and walks in the statutes of life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live; he shall not die. 16None of his sins which he has committed shall be remembered against him; he has done what is lawful and right; he shall surely live.

17"Yet the children of your people say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' But it is their way which is not fair! 18When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall die because of it. 19But when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is lawful and right, he shall live because of it. 20Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' O house of Israel, I will judge every one of you according to his own ways."

The Fall of Jerusalem

21And it came to pass in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth *month,* on the fifth *day* of the month, *that* one who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, "The city has been captured!"

22Now the hand of the Lord had been upon me the evening before the man came who had escaped. And He had opened my mouth; so when he came to me in the morning, my mouth was opened, and I was no longer mute.

Life Lessons

Ezekiel 33:1—36:38

SITUATION

Ezekiel acted as a watchman and preached about hope, comfort, and restoration. The people felt bad about their sins but refused to quit sinning. They treated Ezekiel's message as entertainment.

OBSERVATION

God promises to forgive and restore if we turn to Him in repentance. He promises to change our hearts.

INSPIRATION

My dog Molly and I aren't getting along. The problem is not her personality. A sweeter mutt you will not find. She sees every person as a friend and every day as a holiday. I have no problem with Molly's attitude. I have a problem with her habits.

Eating scraps out of the trash. Licking dirty plates in the dishwasher. Dropping dead birds on our sidewalk and stealing bones from the neighbor's dog. Shameful! Molly rolls in the grass, chews on her paw, does her business in the wrong places, and, I'm embarrassed to admit, quenches her thirst in the toilet.

Now what kind of behavior is that?

Dog behavior, you reply.

You are right. So right. Molly's problem is not a Molly problem. Molly has a dog problem. It is a dog's nature to do such things. And it is her nature that I wish to change. Not just her behavior, mind you. A canine obedience school can change what she does; I want to go deeper. I want to change who she is.

Here is my idea: a me-

The Cause of Judah's Ruin

23 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 24 "Son of man, they who inhabit those ruins in the land of Israel are saying, 'Abraham was only one, and he inherited the land. But we *are* many; the land has been given to us as a possession.'

25 "Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "You eat *meat* with blood, you lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood. Should you then possess the land? 26 You rely on your sword, you commit abominations, and you defile one another's wives. Should you then possess the land?" '

27 "Say thus to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "*As* I live, surely those who *are* in the ruins shall fall by the sword, and the one who *is* in the open field I will give to the beasts to be devoured, and those who *are* in the strongholds and caves shall die of the pestilence. 28 For I will make the land most desolate, her arrogant strength shall cease, and the mountains of Israel shall be so desolate that no one will pass through. 29 Then they shall know that I *am* the Lord, when I have made the land most desolate because of all their abominations which they have committed." '

Hearing and Not Doing

30 "As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses; and they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, 'Please come and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord.' 31 So they come to you as people do, they sit before you *as* My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, *but* their hearts pursue their *own* gain. 32 Indeed you *are* to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them. 33 And when this comes to pass—surely it will come—then they will know that a prophet has been among them."

Irresponsible Shepherds

34 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? 3 You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, *but* you do not feed the flock. 4 The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. 5 So they were scattered because *there was* no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. 6 My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching *for them*."

7 'Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: 8 "*As* I live," says the Lord God, "surely because My flock became a prey, and My flock became food for every beast of the field, because *there was* no shepherd, nor did My shepherds search for My flock, but the

to-her transfusion. The deposit of a Max seed in Molly. I want to give her a kernel of human character. As it grew, would she not change? Her human nature would develop, and her dog nature would diminish. We would witness, not just a change of habits, but a change of essence. In time Molly would be less like Molly and more like me, sharing my disgust for trash snacking, potty slurping, and dish licking. She would have a new nature. Why, Denalyn might even let her eat at the table.

You think the plan is crazy? Then take it up with God. The idea is His. What I would like to do with Molly, God does with us. He changes our nature from the inside out! "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them" (Ezekiel 36:26, 27). (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God promises to change you from the inside out and to give you a new heart. It's what He does; it's what He came (and died) to do. Take Him up on the offer.

EXPLORATION

Forgiveness—Leviticus 26:13; 1 Chronicles 21:8; Matthew 6:14, 15; John 20:23; Romans 12:17–21.

shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock"— 9 therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the Lord! 10 Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I *am* against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them."

God, the True Shepherd

11 'For thus says the Lord God: "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. 12 As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. 13 And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14 I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. 15 I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down," says the Lord God. 16 "I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment."

17 'And *as for* you, O My flock, thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats. 18 *Is it* too little for you to have eaten up the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the residue of your pasture—and to have drunk of the clear waters, that you must foul the residue with your feet? 19 And *as for* My flock, they eat what you have trampled with your feet, and they drink what you have fouled with your feet."

20 'Therefore thus says the Lord God to them: "Behold, I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. 21 Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad, 22 therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. 23 I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them—My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. 24 And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.

25 "I will make a covenant of peace with them, and cause wild beasts to cease from the land; and they will dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. 26 I will make them and the places all around My hill a blessing; and I will cause showers to come down in their season; there shall be showers of blessing. 27 Then the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase. They shall be safe in their land; and they shall know that I *am* the Lord, when I have broken the bands of their yoke and delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them. 28 And they shall no longer be a prey for the nations, nor shall beasts of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and no one shall make *them* afraid. 29 I will raise up for them a garden of renown, and they shall no longer be consumed with hunger in the land, nor bear the shame of the Gentiles anymore. 30 Thus they shall know that I, the Lord their God, *am* with them, and they, the house of Israel, *are* My people," says the Lord God.'

31 "You are My flock, the flock of My pasture; you *are* men, *and* I *am* your God," says the Lord God.

Judgment on Mount Seir

35 Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir and prophesy against it, 3 and say to it, 'Thus says the Lord God:

" Behold, O Mount Seir, I *am* against you;
I will stretch out My hand against you,
And make you most desolate;
4 I shall lay your cities waste,
And you shall be desolate.
Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord.

5 "Because you have had an ancient hatred, and have shed *the blood of* the children of Israel by the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, when their iniquity *came to an* end, 6 therefore, *as* I live," says the Lord God, "I will prepare you for blood, and blood shall

pursue you; since you have not hated blood,
therefore blood shall pursue you. 7Thus I will
make Mount Seir most desolate, and cut off
from it the one who leaves and the one who
returns. 8And I will fill its mountains with the
slain; on your hills and in your valleys and
in all your ravines those who are slain by the
sword shall fall. 9I will make you perpetually
desolate, and your cities shall be uninhabited;
then you shall know that I *am* the Lord.

10"Because you have said, 'These two
nations and these two countries shall be mine,
and we will possess them,' although the Lord
was there, 11therefore, *as* I live," says the Lord
God, "I will do according to your anger and
according to the envy which you showed in
your hatred against them; and I will make
Myself known among them when I judge you.
12Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord. I
have heard all your blasphemies which you
have spoken against the mountains of Israel,
saying, 'They are desolate; they are given to
us to consume.' 13Thus with your mouth you
have boasted against Me and multiplied your
words against Me; I have heard *them.*"

14'Thus says the Lord God: "The whole
earth will rejoice when I make you desolate.
15As you rejoiced because the inheritance of
the house of Israel was desolate, so I will do
to you; you shall be desolate, O Mount Seir, as
well as all of Edom—all of it! Then they shall
know that I *am* the Lord."'

Blessing on Israel

36 "And you, son of man, prophesy to
the mountains of Israel, and say, 'O
mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord!
2Thus says the Lord God: "Because the enemy
has said of you, 'Aha! The ancient heights have
become our possession,'"' 3therefore proph-
esy, and say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Because
they made *you* desolate and swallowed you up
on every side, so that you became the pos-
session of the rest of the nations, and you are
taken up by the lips of talkers and slandered
by the people"— 4therefore, O mountains
of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God!
Thus says the Lord God to the mountains,
the hills, the rivers, the valleys, the desolate
wastes, and the cities that have been forsaken,
which became plunder and mockery to the
rest of the nations all around— 5therefore
thus says the Lord God: "Surely I have spoken
in My burning jealousy against the rest of
the nations and against all Edom, who gave
My land to themselves as a possession, with
wholehearted joy *and* spiteful minds, in order
to plunder its open country."'

6"Therefore prophesy concerning the land
of Israel, and say to the mountains, the hills,
the rivers, and the valleys, 'Thus says the Lord
God: "Behold, I have spoken in My jealousy
and My fury, because you have borne the
shame of the nations." 7Therefore thus says
the Lord God: "I have raised My hand in an
oath that surely the nations that *are* around
you shall bear their own shame. 8But you, O
mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your
branches and yield your fruit to My people
Israel, for they are about to come. 9For indeed
I *am* for you, and I will turn to you, and you
shall be tilled and sown. 10I will multiply men
upon you, all the house of Israel, all of it; and
the cities shall be inhabited and the ruins
rebuilt. 11I will multiply upon you man and
beast; and they shall increase and bear young;
I will make you inhabited as in former times,
and do better *for you* than at your beginnings.
Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord. 12Yes,
I will cause men to walk on you, My people
Israel; they shall take possession of you, and
you shall be their inheritance; no more shall
you bereave them *of children.*"

13'Thus says the Lord God: "Because they
say to you, 'You devour men and bereave
your nation *of children,*' 14therefore you shall
devour men no more, nor bereave your nation
anymore," says the Lord God. 15"Nor will I let
you hear the taunts of the nations anymore,
nor bear the reproach of the peoples anymore,
nor shall you cause your nation to stumble
anymore," says the Lord God.'"

The Renewal of Israel

16Moreover the word of the Lord came to
me, saying: 17"Son of man, when the house
of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled
it by their own ways and deeds; to Me their
way was like the uncleanness of a woman in
her customary impurity. 18Therefore I poured
out My fury on them for the blood they had
shed on the land, and for their idols *with
which* they had defiled it. 19So I scattered
them among the nations, and they were dis-

persed throughout the countries; I judged them according to their ways and their deeds. 20 When they came to the nations, wherever they went, they profaned My holy name—when they said of them, 'These *are* the people of the Lord, *and* yet they have gone out of His land.' 21 But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations wherever they went.

22 "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God: "I do not do *this* for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. 23 And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I *am* the Lord," says the Lord God, "when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. 24 For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. 25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*. 28 Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. 29 I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. I will call for the grain and multiply it, and bring no famine upon you. 30 And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields, so that you need never again bear the reproach of famine among the nations. 31 Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that *were* not good; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations. 32 Not for your sake do I do *this*," says the Lord God, "let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel!"

33 'Thus says the Lord God: "On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable *you* to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt. 34 The desolate land shall be tilled instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass by. 35 So they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities *are now* fortified *and* inhabited.' 36 Then the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, the Lord, have rebuilt the ruined places *and* planted what was desolate. I, the Lord, have spoken *it,* and I will do *it.*"

37 'Thus says the Lord God: "I will also let the house of Israel inquire of Me to do this for them: I will increase their men like a flock. 38 Like a flock *offered as* holy *sacrifices,* like the flock at Jerusalem on its feast days, so shall the ruined cities be filled with flocks of men. Then they shall know that I *am* the Lord."' "

The Dry Bones Live

37 The hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it *was* full of bones. 2 Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, *there were* very many in the open valley; and indeed *they were* very dry. 3 And He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

So I answered, "O Lord God, You know."

4 Again He said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! 5 Thus says the Lord God to these bones: "Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. 6 I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord."' "

7 So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. 8 Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but *there was* no breath in them.

9 Also He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live."' " 10 So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.

11 Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!' 12 Therefore

prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. 13 Then you shall know that I *am* the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. 14 I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken *it* and performed *it*," says the Lord.' "

One Kingdom, One King

15 Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 16 "As for you, son of man, take a stick for yourself and write on it: 'For Judah and for the children of Israel, his companions.' Then take another stick and write on it, 'For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and *for* all the house of Israel, his companions.' 17 Then join them one to another for yourself into one stick, and they will become one in your hand.

18 "And when the children of your people speak to you, saying, 'Will you not show us what you *mean* by these?'— 19 say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Surely I will take the stick of Joseph, which *is* in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will join them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand." ' 20 And the sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes.

21 "Then say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; 22 and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again. 23 They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. Then they shall be My people, and I will be their God.

24 "David My servant *shall be* king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. 25 Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David *shall be* their prince forever. 26 Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. 27 My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 28 The nations also will know that I, the Lord, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore." ' "

Gog and Allies Attack Israel

38 Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh,[a] Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, 3 and say,

38:2 [a] Targum, Vulgate, and Aquila read *chief prince of* (also verse 3).

Life Lessons

Ezekiel 37:1—39:29

SITUATION
Ezekiel preached a message of hope to the exiles in Babylon. Yet, they were as unresponsive as dead bones.

OBSERVATION
God miraculously restores and reunites His people. He shows ultimate triumph over the evils of world powers. His might always prevails in world affairs.

INSPIRATION
I wonder if Jesus doesn't muster up a slight smile as He sees His lost sheep come straggling into the fold—the beaten, broken, dirty sheep who stands at the door looking up at the Shepherd asking, "Can I come in? I don't deserve it, but is there room in your kingdom for one more?" The Shepherd looks down at the sheep and says, "Come in, this is your home."

Salvation is the process that's done, that's secure, that no one can take away from you. Sanctification is the lifelong process of being changed from one degree of glory to the next, growing in Christ, putting away the old, taking on the new.

The psalmist David would tell us that those who have been redeemed will say so! If we're not saying so, perhaps it's because we've forgotten what it is like to be redeemed. Let the redeemed of the earth say so! (From *Walking with the Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
God can breathe new life into the driest lives—the driest "bones." He can restore you. He can help you find again the joy of

your salvation. Are you redeemed? Then say so! That's the place to start.

EXPLORATION
Rebirth—Jeremiah 24:7; 31:31–34; Ezekiel 11:19, 20; John 3:3–8, 16–21; 1 Peter 1:23.

The longer we live in Christ, the greater he becomes in us. It's not that he changes but that we do; we see more of him.

—Max Lucado (Fearless)

'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I *am* against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. 4 I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out, with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all splendidly clothed, a great company *with* bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords. 5 Persia, Ethiopia,[a] and Libya[b] are with them, all of them *with* shield and helmet; 6 Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah *from* the far north and all its troops—many people *are* with you.

7 "Prepare yourself and be ready, you and all your companies that are gathered about you; and be a guard for them. 8 After many days you will be visited. In the latter years you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword *and* gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely. 9 You will ascend, coming like a storm, covering the land like a cloud, you and all your troops and many peoples with you."

10 'Thus says the Lord God: "On that day it shall come to pass *that* thoughts will arise in your mind, and you will make an evil plan: 11 You will say, 'I will go up against a land of unwalled villages; I will go to a peaceful people, who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates'— 12 to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out your hand against the waste places *that are again* inhabited, and against a people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell in the midst of the land. 13 Sheba, Dedan, the merchants of Tarshish, and all their young lions will say to you, 'Have you come to take plunder? Have you gathered your army to take booty, to carry away silver and gold, to take away livestock and goods, to take great plunder?' " '

14 "Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say to Gog, 'Thus says the Lord God: "On that day when My people Israel dwell safely, will you not know *it?* 15 Then you will come from your place out of the far north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great company and a mighty army. 16 You will come up against My people Israel like a cloud, to cover the land. It will be in the latter days that I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me, when I am hallowed in you, O Gog, before their eyes." 17 Thus says the Lord God: "Are *you* he of whom I have spoken in former days by My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied for years in those days that I would bring you against them?

Judgment on Gog

18 "And it will come to pass at the same time, when Gog comes against the land of Israel," says the Lord God, "*that* My fury will show in My face. 19 For in My jealousy *and* in the fire of My wrath I have spoken: 'Surely in that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel, 20 so that the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all creeping things that creep on the earth, and all men who *are* on the face of the earth shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground.' 21 I will call for a sword

38:5 [a]Hebrew *Cush* [b]Hebrew *Put*

against Gog throughout all My mountains," says the Lord God. "Every man's sword will be against his brother. 22 And I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who *are* with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. 23 Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I *am* the Lord.' '

Gog's Armies Destroyed

39 "And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I *am* against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh,[a] Meshech, and Tubal; 2 and I will turn you around and lead you on, bringing you up from the far north, and bring you against the mountains of Israel. 3 Then I will knock the bow out of your left hand, and cause the arrows to fall out of your right hand. 4 You shall fall upon the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who *are* with you; I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and *to* the beasts of the field to be devoured. 5 You shall fall on the open field; for I have spoken," says the Lord God. 6 "And I will send fire on Magog and on those who live in security in the coastlands. Then they shall know that I *am* the Lord. 7 So I will make My holy name known in the midst of My people Israel, and I will not *let them* profane My holy name anymore. Then the nations shall know that *I am* the Lord, the Holy One in Israel. 8 Surely it is coming, and it shall be done," says the Lord God. "This *is* the day of which I have spoken.

9 "Then those who dwell in the cities of Israel will go out and set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and bucklers, the bows and arrows, the javelins and spears; and they will make fires with them for seven years. 10 They will not take wood from the field nor cut down *any* from the forests, because they will make fires with the weapons; and they will plunder those who plundered them, and pillage those who pillaged them," says the Lord God.

The Burial of Gog

11 "It will come to pass in that day *that* I will give Gog a burial place there in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the sea; and it will obstruct travelers, because there they will bury Gog and all his multitude. Therefore they will call *it* the Valley of Hamon Gog.[a] 12 For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them, in order to cleanse the land. 13 Indeed all the people of the land will be burying, and they will gain renown for it on the day that I am glorified," says the Lord God. 14 "They will set apart men regularly employed, with the help of a search party,[a] to pass through the land and bury those bodies remaining on the ground, in order to cleanse it. At the end of seven months they will make a search. 15 The search party will pass through the land; and *when anyone* sees a man's bone, he shall set up a marker by it, till the buriers have buried it in the Valley of Hamon Gog. 16 *The* name of *the* city *will* also *be* Hamonah. Thus they shall cleanse the land." '

A Triumphant Festival

17 "And as for you, son of man, thus says the Lord God, 'Speak to every sort of bird and to every beast of the field:

"Assemble yourselves and come;
Gather together from all sides to My sacrificial meal
Which I am sacrificing for you,
A great sacrificial meal on the mountains of Israel,
That you may eat flesh and drink blood.
18 You shall eat the flesh of the mighty,
Drink the blood of the princes of the earth,
Of rams and lambs,
Of goats and bulls,
All of them fatlings of Bashan.
19 You shall eat fat till you are full,
And drink blood till you are drunk,
At My sacrificial meal
Which I am sacrificing for you.
20 You shall be filled at My table
With horses and riders,

39:1 [a]Targum, Vulgate and Aquila read *chief prince of.* **39:11** [a]Literally *The Multitude of Gog* **39:14** [a]Literally *those who pass through*

With mighty men
And with all the men of war," says the Lord God.

Israel Restored to the Land

21 "I will set My glory among the nations; all the nations shall see
My judgment which I have executed, and My hand which I have laid
on them. 22 So the house of Israel shall know that I *am* the Lord their
God from that day forward. 23 The Gentiles shall know that the house
of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity; because they were
unfaithful to Me, therefore I hid My face from them. I gave them into
the hand of their enemies, and they all fell by the sword. 24 Accord-
ing to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions I have
dealt with them, and hidden My face from them." '

25 "Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Now I will bring back the
captives of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and
I will be jealous for My holy name— 26 after they have borne their
shame, and all their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to
Me, when they dwelt safely in their *own* land and no one made *them*
afraid. 27 When I have brought them back from the peoples and gath-
ered them out of their enemies' lands, and I am hallowed in them in
the sight of many nations, 28 then they shall know that I *am* the Lord
their God, who sent them into captivity among the nations, but also
brought them back to their land, and left none of them captive any
longer. 29 And I will not hide My face from them anymore; for I shall
have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel,' says the Lord God."

A New City, a New Temple

40 In the twenty-fifth year of our captivity, at the beginning of
the year, on the tenth *day* of the month, in the fourteenth year
after the city was captured, on the very same day the hand of the Lord
was upon me; and He took me there. 2 In the visions of God He took
me into the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain; on it
toward the south *was* something like the structure of a city. 3 He took
me there, and behold, *there was* a man whose appearance *was* like the
appearance of bronze. He had a line of flax and a measuring rod in his
hand, and he stood in the gateway.

4 And the man said to me, "Son of man, look with your eyes and
hear with your ears, and fix your mind on everything I show you;
for you *were* brought here so that I might show *them* to you. Declare
to the house of Israel everything you see." 5 Now there was a wall all
around the outside of the temple.[a] In the man's hand was a measur-
ing rod six cubits *long, each being a* cubit and a handbreadth; and he
measured the width of the wall structure, one rod; and the height,
one rod.

The Eastern Gateway of the Temple

6 Then he went to the gateway which faced east; and he went up its
stairs and measured the threshold of the gateway, *which was* one rod
wide, and the other threshold *was* one rod wide. 7 Each gate chamber
was one rod long and one rod wide; between the gate chambers *was a*

40:5 [a] Literally *house,* and so elsewhere in this book

Life Lessons

Ezekiel 40:1—42:20

SITUATION
God gave Ezekiel, a priest, the measurements of Solomon's temple. The temple had been destroyed at the beginning of the captivity.

OBSERVATION
God reveals His perfect kingdom. The details of His vision gave the Jews hope for a restored worship and show us the importance of true God-centered worship.

INSPIRATION
The Holy of Holies, you'll remember, was a part of the Temple no one could enter. Jewish worshipers could enter the outer court, but only the priests could enter the Holy Place. And no one, except the high priest on one day a year, entered the Holy of Holies. No one. Why? Because the shekinah glory—the glory of God—was present there.

If you were told you were free to enter the Oval Office of the White House, you would likely shake your head and chuckle, "You're one brick short of a load, buddy." Multiply your disbelief by a thousand, and you'll have an idea how a Jew would feel if someone told him he could enter the Holy of Holies. "Yeah, right. You're one bagel short of a dozen."

No one but the high priest entered the Holy of Holies. No one. To do so meant death. Two of Aaron's sons died when they entered the Holy of Holies in order to offer sacrifices to the Lord (Leviticus 16:1, 2). In no uncertain terms, the curtain declared: "This far and no farther!"

space of five cubits; and the threshold of the gateway by the vestibule of the inside gate *was* one rod. 8 He also measured the vestibule of the inside gate, one rod. 9 Then he measured the vestibule of the gateway, eight cubits; and the gateposts, two cubits. The vestibule of the gate *was* on the inside. 10 In the eastern gateway *were* three gate chambers on one side and three on the other; the three *were* all the same size; also the gateposts were of the same size on this side and that side.

11 He measured the width of the entrance to the gateway, ten cubits; *and* the length of the gate, thirteen cubits. 12 *There was* a space in front of the gate chambers, one cubit *on this side* and one cubit on that side; the gate chambers *were* six cubits on this side and six cubits on that side. 13 Then he measured the gateway from the roof of *one* gate chamber to the roof of the other; the width *was* twenty-five cubits, as door faces door. 14 He measured the gateposts, sixty cubits high, and the court all around the gateway *extended* to the gatepost. 15 *From* the front of the entrance gate to the front of the vestibule of the inner gate *was* fifty cubits. 16 *There were* beveled window *frames* in the gate chambers and in their intervening archways on the inside of the gateway all around, and likewise in the vestibules. *There were* windows all around on the inside. And on each gatepost *were* palm trees.

The Outer Court

17 Then he brought me into the outer court; and *there were* chambers and a pavement made all around the court; thirty chambers faced the pavement. 18 The pavement was by the side of the gateways, corresponding to the length of the gateways; *this was* the lower pavement. 19 Then he measured the width from the front of the lower gateway to the front of the inner court exterior, one hundred cubits toward the east and the north.

The Northern Gateway

20 On the outer court was also a gateway facing north, and he measured its length and its width. 21 Its gate chambers, three on this side and three on that side, its gateposts and its archways, had the same measurements as the first gate; its length *was* fifty cubits and its width twenty-five cubits. 22 Its windows and those of its archways, and also its palm trees, *had* the same measurements as the gateway facing east; it was ascended by seven steps, and its archway *was* in front of it. 23 A gate of the inner court was opposite the northern gateway, just as the eastern *gateway;* and he measured from gateway to gateway, one hundred cubits.

The Southern Gateway

24 After that he brought me toward the south, and there a gateway was facing south; and he measured its gateposts and archways according to these same measurements. 25 *There were* windows in it and in its archways all around like those windows; its length *was* fifty cubits and its width twenty-five cubits. 26 Seven steps led up to it, and its archway *was* in front of them; and it had palm trees on its gateposts, one on this side and one on that side. 27 *There was* also a gateway on the inner court, facing south; and he measured from gateway to gateway toward the south, one hundred cubits.

What did fifteen hundred years of a curtain-draped Holy of Holies communicate? Simple. God is holy . . . separate from us and unapproachable. Even Moses was told, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live" (Exodus 33:20). God is holy, and we are sinners, and there is a distance between us.

Isn't this our problem? We know God is good. We know we are not, and we feel far from God. The ancient words of Job are ours, "For He is not a man, as I am, that I may answer Him, and that we should go to court together. Nor is there any mediator between us, who may lay his hand on us both" (Job 9:32, 33).

Oh, but there is! Jesus hasn't left us with an unapproachable God. Yes, God is holy. Yes, we are sinful. But, yes, yes, yes, Jesus is our mediator. "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). Is not a mediator one who "goes between"? Wasn't Jesus the curtain between us and God? And wasn't His flesh torn?

What appeared to be the cruelty of man was actually the sovereignty of God. Matthew tells us: "Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (27:50, 51).

It's as if the hands of heaven had been gripping the veil, waiting for this moment. Keep in mind the size of the curtain—sixty feet tall and thirty feet wide. One instant it was whole; the next it was ripped in two from top to bottom. No delay. No hesitation.

What did the torn curtain

mean? For the Jews it meant no more barrier between them and the Holy of Holies. No more priests to go between them and God. No more animal sacrifices to atone for their sins.

And for us? What did the torn curtain signify for us?

We are welcome to enter into God's presence—any day, any time. God has removed the barrier that separates us from Him. The barrier of sin? Down. He has removed the curtain.

But we have a tendency to put the barrier back up. Though there is no curtain in a temple, there is a curtain in the heart. Like the ticks on the clock are the mistakes of the heart. And sometimes, no, oftentimes, we allow those mistakes to keep us from God. Our guilty conscience becomes a curtain that separates us from God.

As a result we hide from our Master. . . .

Somewhere, sometime, somehow you got tangled up in garbage, and you've been avoiding God. You've allowed a veil of guilt to come between you and your Father. You wonder if you could ever feel close to God again. The message of the torn flesh is you can. God welcomes you. God is not avoiding you. God is not resisting you. The curtain is down, the door is open, and God invites you in.

Don't trust your conscience. Trust the Cross. The blood has been spilt and the veil has been split. You are welcome in God's presence. (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Is there anything keeping you from entering God's presence in worship? Make a list of any distractions you encounter. Confess any sins that distract you from your fellowship with Him.

Gateways of the Inner Court

28 Then he brought me to the inner court through the southern
gateway; he measured the southern gateway according to these same
measurements. 29 Also its gate chambers, its gateposts, and its arch-
ways *were* according to these same measurements; *there were* win-
dows in it and in its archways all around; *it was* fifty cubits long and
twenty-five cubits wide. 30 *There were* archways all around, twenty-five
cubits long and five cubits wide. 31 Its archways faced the outer court,
palm trees *were* on its gateposts, and going up to it *were* eight steps.
32 And he brought me into the inner court facing east; he measured
the gateway according to these same measurements. 33 Also its gate
chambers, its gateposts, and its archways *were* according to these
same measurements; and *there were* windows in it and in its archways
all around; *it was* fifty cubits long and twenty-five cubits wide. 34 Its
archways faced the outer court, and palm trees *were* on its gateposts
on this side and on that side; and going up to it *were* eight steps.
35 Then he brought me to the north gateway and measured *it*
according to these same measurements— 36 also its gate chambers, its
gateposts, and its archways. It had windows all around; its length *was*
fifty cubits and its width twenty-five cubits. 37 Its gateposts faced the
outer court, palm trees *were* on its gateposts on this side and on that
side, and going up to it *were* eight steps.

Where Sacrifices Were Prepared

38 *There was* a chamber and its entrance by the gateposts of the
gateway, where they washed the burnt offering. 39 In the vestibule of
the gateway *were* two tables on this side and two tables on that side,
on which to slay the burnt offering, the sin offering, and the trespass
offering. 40 At the outer side of the *vestibule,* as one goes up to the
entrance of the northern gateway, *were* two tables; and on the other
side of the vestibule of the gateway *were* two tables. 41 Four tables *were*
on this side and four tables on that side, by the side of the gateway,
eight tables on which they slaughtered *the sacrifices.* 42 *There were* also
four tables of hewn stone for the burnt offering, one cubit and a half
long, one cubit and a half wide, and one cubit high; on these they laid
the instruments with which they slaughtered the burnt offering and
the sacrifice. 43 Inside *were* hooks, a handbreadth wide, fastened all
around; and the flesh of the sacrifices *was* on the tables.

Chambers for Singers and Priests

44 Outside the inner gate *were* the chambers for the singers in the
inner court, one facing south at the side of the northern gateway, and
the other facing north at the side of the southern[a] gateway. 45 Then he
said to me, "This chamber which faces south *is* for the priests who
have charge of the temple. 46 The chamber which faces north *is* for
the priests who have charge of the altar; these *are* the sons of Zadok,
from the sons of Levi, who come near the Lord to minister to Him."

Dimensions of the Inner Court and Vestibule

47 And he measured the court, one hundred cubits long and one
hundred cubits wide, foursquare. The altar *was* in front of the temple.

40:44 [a] Following Septuagint; Masoretic Text and Vulgate read *eastern.*

48 Then he brought me to the vestibule of the temple and measured
the doorposts of the vestibule, five cubits on this side and five cubits
on that side; and the width of the gateway was three cubits on this
side and three cubits on that side. 49 The length of the vestibule *was*
twenty cubits, and the width eleven cubits; and by the steps which
led up to it *there were* pillars by the doorposts, one on this side and
another on that side.

EXPLORATION
Temple—1 Chronicles 22:19; 29:6–13; 2 Chronicles 7:1–6; Ezra 3:10–13; Luke 1:8–10; Hebrews 4:15, 16.

Dimensions of the Sanctuary

41 Then he brought me into the sanctuary[a] and measured the
doorposts, six cubits wide on one side and six cubits wide on
the other side—the width of the tabernacle. 2 The width of the entry-
way *was* ten cubits, and the side walls of the entrance *were* five cubits
on this side and five cubits on the other side; and he measured its
length, forty cubits, and its width, twenty cubits.

3 Also he went inside and measured the doorposts, two cubits; and
the entrance, six cubits *high;* and the width of the entrance, seven
cubits. 4 He measured the length, twenty cubits; and the width, twenty
cubits, beyond the sanctuary; and he said to me, "This *is* the Most
Holy *Place.*"

The Side Chambers on the Wall

5 Next, he measured the wall of the temple, six cubits. The width
of each side chamber all around the temple *was* four cubits on every
side. 6 The side chambers *were* in three stories, one above the other,
thirty chambers in each story; they rested on ledges which *were* for
the side chambers all around, that they might be supported, but not
fastened to the wall of the temple. 7 As one went up from story to story,
the side chambers became wider all around, because their support-
ing ledges in the wall of the temple ascended like steps; therefore the
width of the structure increased as one went up *from* the lowest *story*
to the highest by way of the middle one. 8 I also saw an elevation all
around the temple; it was the foundation of the side chambers, a full
rod, *that is,* six cubits *high.* 9 The thickness of the outer wall of the side
chambers *was* five cubits, and so also the remaining terrace by the
place of the side chambers of the temple. 10 And between *it and* the
wall chambers was a width of twenty cubits all around the temple on
every side. 11 The doors of the side chambers opened on the terrace,
one door toward the north and another toward the south; and the
width of the terrace *was* five cubits all around.

The Building at the Western End

12 The building that faced the separating courtyard at its western
end *was* seventy cubits wide; the wall of the building *was* five cubits
thick all around, and its length ninety cubits.

Dimensions and Design of the Temple Area

13 So he measured the temple, one hundred cubits long; and the
separating courtyard with the building and its walls *was* one hundred

41:1 [a]Hebrew *heykal,* here the main room of the temple, sometimes called the *holy place* (compare Exodus 26:33)

cubits long; 14 also the width of the eastern face of the temple, including the separating courtyard, *was* one hundred cubits. 15 He measured the length of the building behind it, facing the separating courtyard, with its galleries on the one side and on the other side, one hundred cubits, as well as the inner temple and the porches of the court, 16 their doorposts and the beveled window frames. And the galleries all around their three stories opposite the threshold were paneled with wood from the ground to the windows—the windows were covered— 17 from the space above the door, even to the inner room,[a] as well as outside, and on every wall all around, inside and outside, by measure.

18 And *it was* made with cherubim and palm trees, a palm tree between cherub and cherub. *Each* cherub had two faces, 19 so that the face of a man *was* toward a palm tree on one side, and the face of a young lion toward a palm tree on the other side; thus *it was* made throughout the temple all around. 20 From the floor to the space above the door, and on the wall of the sanctuary, cherubim and palm trees *were* carved.

21 The doorposts of the temple *were* square, *as was* the front of the sanctuary; their appearance was similar. 22 The altar *was* of wood, three cubits high, and its length two cubits. Its corners, its length, and its sides *were* of wood; and he said to me, "This *is* the table that *is* before the Lord."

23 The temple and the sanctuary had two doors. 24 The doors had two panels *apiece,* two folding panels: two *panels* for one door and two panels for the other *door.* 25 Cherubim and palm trees *were* carved on the doors of the temple just as they *were* carved on the walls. A wooden canopy *was* on the front of the vestibule outside. 26 *There were* beveled window *frames* and palm trees on one side and on the other, on the sides of the vestibule—also on the side chambers of the temple and on the canopies.

The Chambers for the Priests

42 Then he brought me out into the outer court, by the way toward the north; and he brought me into the chamber which *was* opposite the separating courtyard, and which *was* opposite the building toward the north. 2 Facing the length, *which was* one hundred cubits (the width was fifty cubits), was the north door. 3 Opposite the inner court of twenty *cubits,* and opposite the pavement of the outer court, *was* gallery against gallery in three *stories.* 4 In front of the chambers, toward the inside, *was* a walk ten cubits wide, at a distance of one cubit; and their doors faced north. 5 Now the upper chambers *were* shorter, because the galleries took away *space* from them more than from the lower and middle stories of the building. 6 For they *were* in three *stories* and did not have pillars like the pillars of the courts; therefore *the upper level* was shortened more than the lower and middle levels from the ground up. 7 And a wall which *was* outside ran parallel to the chambers, at the front of the chambers, toward the outer court; its length *was* fifty cubits. 8 The length of the chambers toward the outer court *was* fifty cubits, whereas that facing the temple *was* one hundred cubits. 9 At the lower chambers *was* the entrance on the east side, as one goes into them from the outer court.

10 Also *there were* chambers in the thickness of the wall of the court toward the east, opposite the separating courtyard and opposite the building. 11 *There was* a walk in front of them also, and their appearance *was* like the chambers which *were* toward the north; they *were* as long and as wide as the others, and all their exits and entrances *were* according to plan. 12 And corresponding to the doors of the chambers that *were* facing south, as one enters them, *there was* a door in front of the walk, the way directly in front of the wall toward the east.

13 Then he said to me, "The north chambers *and* the south chambers, which *are* opposite the separating courtyard, *are* the holy chambers where the priests who approach the Lord shall eat the most holy offerings. There they shall lay the most holy offerings—the grain offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering—for the place *is* holy. 14 When the priests enter them, they shall not go out of the holy *chamber* into the outer court; but there they shall leave their garments in which they

41:17 [a] Literally *house,* here *the Most Holy Place*

minister, for they *are* holy. They shall put on other garments; then they may approach *that* which *is* for the people."

Outer Dimensions of the Temple

15 Now when he had finished measuring the inner temple, he brought me out through the gateway that faces toward the east, and measured it all around. 16 He measured the east side with the measuring rod,[a] five hundred rods by the measuring rod all around. 17 He measured the north side, five hundred rods by the measuring rod all around. 18 He measured the south side, five hundred rods by the measuring rod. 19 He came around to the west side *and* measured five hundred rods by the measuring rod. 20 He measured it on the four sides; it had a wall all around, five hundred *cubits* long and five hundred wide, to separate the holy areas from the common.

The Temple, the Lord's Dwelling Place

43 Afterward he brought me to the gate, the gate that faces toward the east. 2 And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice *was* like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory. 3 *It was* like the appearance of the vision which I saw—like the vision which I saw when I[a] came to destroy the city. The visions *were* like the vision which I saw by the River Chebar; and I fell on my face. 4 And the glory of the Lord came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east. 5 The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple.

6 Then I heard *Him* speaking to me from the temple, while a man stood beside me. 7 And He said to me, "Son of man, *this is* the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever. No more shall the house of Israel defile My holy name, they nor their kings, by their harlotry or with the carcasses of their kings on their high places. 8 When they set their threshold by My threshold, and their doorpost by My doorpost, with a wall between them and Me, they defiled My holy name by the abominations which they committed; therefore I have consumed them in My anger. 9 Now let them put their harlotry and the carcasses of their kings far away from Me, and I will dwell in their midst forever.

10 "Son of man, describe the temple to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the pattern. 11 And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the temple and its arrangement, its exits and its entrances, its entire design and all its ordinances, all its forms and all its laws. Write *it* down in their sight, so that they may keep its whole design and all its ordinances, and perform them. 12 This *is* the law of the temple: The whole area surrounding the mountaintop *is* most holy. Behold, this *is* the law of the temple.

Dimensions of the Altar

13 "These are the measurements of the altar in cubits (the cubit *is* one cubit and a handbreadth): the base one cubit high and one cubit

42:16 [a]Compare 40:5 **43:3** [a]Some Hebrew manuscripts and Vulgate read *He*.

Life Lessons

Ezekiel 43:1—48:35

SITUATION
God's glory had been present in Solomon's temple (2 Chronicles 2—7), but it departed before Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians.

OBSERVATION
God requires His people to be holy (v. 12). Therefore, as believers, we should be completely devoted to Him and separated from sin.

INSPIRATION
On the one occasion seraphim appear in Scripture, they endlessly trilogize the same word. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:2, 3). Repetition, in Hebrew, performs the work of our highlighter. A tool of emphasis. God, proclaims the six-winged angels, is not holy. He is not holy, holy. He is holy, holy, holy.

What other attribute receives such enforcement? No verse describes God as "wise, wise, wise" or "strong, strong, strong." Only as "holy, holy, holy." God's holiness commands headline attention. . . . The first and final songs of the Bible magnify the holiness of God. Having crossed the Red Sea, Moses and the Israelites sang, "Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exodus 15:11). In Revelation those who had been victorious over the beast sang, "Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy" (15:4).

The Hebrew word for *holy* is *qadosh*, which means cut off or separate.

Holiness, then, speaks of the "otherness" of God. His total uniqueness. Everything about God is different from the world He has made.

What you are to a paper airplane, God is to you. Take a sheet of paper and make one. Contrast yourself with your creation. Challenge it to a spelling contest. Who will win? Dare it to race you around the block. Who is faster? Invite the airplane to a game of one-on-one basketball. Will you not dominate the court?

And well you should. The thing has no brainwaves, no pulse. It exists only because you formed it and flies only when someone throws it. Multiply the contrasts between you and the paper plane by infinity, and you will begin to catch a glimpse of the disparity between God and us. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you completely dedicated to God? Is there an area of life you have not committed to Him? What sin still stays with you? Lust, gossip, selfishness, an unrepentant or unforgiving heart? Talk to your minister about how you can overcome these sins.

EXPLORATION

Glory of God—Exodus 15:11; 40:34, 35; Deuteronomy 5:24; Psalm 8:1; Luke 2:9, 14; Hebrews 1:3; Revelation 21:23.

wide, with a rim all around its edge of one span. This *is* the height of the altar: 14 from the base on the ground to the lower ledge, two cubits; the width of the ledge, one cubit; from the smaller ledge to the larger ledge, four cubits; and the width of the ledge, *one* cubit. 15 The altar hearth *is* four cubits high, with four horns extending upward from the hearth. 16 The altar hearth *is* twelve *cubits* long, twelve wide, square at its four corners; 17 the ledge, fourteen *cubits* long and fourteen wide on its four sides, with a rim of half a cubit around it; its base, one cubit all around; and its steps face toward the east."

Consecrating the Altar

18 And He said to me, "Son of man, thus says the Lord God: 'These *are* the ordinances for the altar on the day when it is made, for sacrificing burnt offerings on it, and for sprinkling blood on it. 19 You shall give a young bull for a sin offering to the priests, the Levites, who are of the seed of Zadok, who approach Me to minister to Me,' says the Lord God. 20 'You shall take some of its blood and put *it* on the four horns of the altar, on the four corners of the ledge, and on the rim around it; thus you shall cleanse it and make atonement for it. 21 Then you shall also take the bull of the sin offering, and burn it in the appointed place of the temple, outside the sanctuary. 22 On the second day you shall offer a kid of the goats without blemish for a sin offering; and they shall cleanse the altar, as they cleansed *it* with the bull. 23 When you have finished cleansing *it,* you shall offer a young bull without blemish, and a ram from the flock without blemish. 24 When you offer them before the Lord, the priests shall throw salt on them, and they will offer them up *as* a burnt offering to the Lord. 25 Every day for seven days you shall prepare a goat *for* a sin offering; they shall also prepare a young bull and a ram from the flock, both without blemish. 26 Seven days they shall make atonement for the altar and purify it, and so consecrate *it.* 27 When these days are over it shall be, on the eighth day and thereafter, that the priests shall offer your burnt offerings and your peace offerings on the altar; and I will accept you,' says the Lord God."

The East Gate and the Prince

44 Then He brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary which faces toward the east, but it *was* shut. 2 And the Lord said to me, "This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut. 3 *As for* the prince, *because* he *is* the prince, he may sit in it to eat bread before the Lord; he shall enter by way of the vestibule of the gateway, and go out the same way."

Those Admitted to the Temple

4 Also He brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the temple; so I looked, and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord; and I fell on my face. 5 And the Lord said to me, "Son of man, mark well, see with your eyes and hear with your ears, all that I say to you concerning all the ordinances of the house of the Lord and all its laws. Mark well who may enter the house and all who go out from the sanctuary.

6 "Now say to the rebellious, to the house
of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God: "O house of
Israel, let Us have no more of all your abomina-
tions. 7 When you brought in foreigners, uncir-
cumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh,
to be in My sanctuary to defile it—My house—
and when you offered My food, the fat and the
blood, then they broke My covenant because
of all your abominations. 8 And you have not
kept charge of My holy things, but you have
set *others* to keep charge of My sanctuary for
you." 9 Thus says the Lord God: "No foreigner,
uncircumcised in heart or uncircumcised in
flesh, shall enter My sanctuary, including any
foreigner who *is* among the children of Israel.

Laws Governing Priests

10 "And the Levites who went far from Me,
when Israel went astray, who strayed away
from Me after their idols, they shall bear their
iniquity. 11 Yet they shall be ministers in My
sanctuary, *as* gatekeepers of the house and
ministers of the house; they shall slay the
burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people,
and they shall stand before them to minister
to them. 12 Because they ministered to them
before their idols and caused the house of
Israel to fall into iniquity, therefore I have
raised My hand in an oath against them,"
says the Lord God, "that they shall bear their
iniquity. 13 And they shall not come near Me to
minister to Me as priest, nor come near any of
My holy things, nor into the Most Holy *Place;*
but they shall bear their shame and their
abominations which they have committed.
14 Nevertheless I will make them keep charge
of the temple, for all its work, and for all that
has to be done in it.

15 "But the priests, the Levites, the sons
of Zadok, who kept charge of My sanctuary
when the children of Israel went astray from
Me, they shall come near Me to minister to
Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer to
Me the fat and the blood," says the Lord God.
16 "They shall enter My sanctuary, and they
shall come near My table to minister to Me,
and they shall keep My charge. 17 And it shall
be, whenever they enter the gates of the inner
court, that they shall put on linen garments;
no wool shall come upon them while they
minister within the gates of the inner court
or within the house. 18 They shall have linen
turbans on their heads and linen trousers on
their bodies; they shall not clothe themselves
with *anything that causes* sweat. 19 When they
go out to the outer court, to the outer court to
the people, they shall take off their garments
in which they have ministered, leave them
in the holy chambers, and put on other gar-
ments; and in their holy garments they shall
not sanctify the people.

20 "They shall neither shave their heads nor
let their hair grow long, but they shall keep
their hair well trimmed. 21 No priest shall drink
wine when he enters the inner court. 22 They
shall not take as wife a widow or a divorced
woman, but take virgins of the descendants of
the house of Israel, or widows of priests.

23 "And they shall teach My people *the dif-
ference* between the holy and the unholy, and
cause them to discern between the unclean
and the clean. 24 In controversy they shall
stand as judges, *and* judge it according to My
judgments. They shall keep My laws and My
statutes in all My appointed meetings, and
they shall hallow My Sabbaths.

25 "They shall not defile *themselves* by com-
ing near a dead person. Only for father or
mother, for son or daughter, for brother or
unmarried sister may they defile themselves.
26 After he is cleansed, they shall count seven
days for him. 27 And on the day that he goes to
the sanctuary to minister in the sanctuary, he
must offer his sin offering in the inner court,"
says the Lord God.

28 "It shall be, in regard to their inheritance,
that I *am* their inheritance. You shall give
them no possession in Israel, for I *am* their
possession. 29 They shall eat the grain offer-
ing, the sin offering, and the trespass offering;
every dedicated thing in Israel shall be theirs.
30 The best of all firstfruits of any kind, and
every sacrifice of any kind from all your sac-
rifices, shall be the priest's; also you shall give
to the priest the first of your ground meal, to
cause a blessing to rest on your house. 31 The
priests shall not eat anything, bird or beast,
that died naturally or was torn *by wild beasts.*

The Holy District

45 "Moreover, when you divide the land
by lot into inheritance, you shall set
apart a district for the Lord, a holy section
of the land; its length *shall be* twenty-five

thousand *cubits,* and the width ten thousand. It *shall be* holy throughout its territory all around. 2 Of this there shall be a square plot for the sanctuary, five hundred by five hundred *rods,* with fifty cubits around it for an open space. 3 So this is the district you shall measure: twenty-five thousand *cubits* long and ten thousand wide; in it shall be the sanctuary, the Most Holy *Place.* 4 It shall be a holy *section* of the land, belonging to the priests, the ministers of the sanctuary, who come near to minister to the Lord; it shall be a place for their houses and a holy place for the sanctuary. 5 *An area* twenty-five thousand *cubits* long and ten thousand wide shall belong to the Levites, the ministers of the temple; they shall have twenty chambers as a possession.[a]

Properties of the City and the Prince

6 "You shall appoint as the property of the city *an area* five thousand *cubits* wide and twenty-five thousand long, adjacent to the district of the holy *section;* it shall belong to the whole house of Israel.

7 "The prince shall have *a section* on one side and the other of the holy district and the city's property; and bordering on the holy district and the city's property, extending westward on the west side and eastward on the east side, the length *shall be* side by side with one of the *tribal* portions, from the west border to the east border. 8 The land shall be his possession in Israel; and My princes shall no more oppress My people, but they shall give *the rest of* the land to the house of Israel, according to their tribes."

Laws Governing the Prince

9 'Thus says the Lord God: "Enough, O princes of Israel! Remove violence and plundering, execute justice and righteousness, and stop dispossessing My people," says the Lord God. 10 "You shall have honest scales, an honest ephah, and an honest bath. 11 The ephah and the bath shall be of the same measure, so that the bath contains one-tenth of a homer, and the ephah one-tenth of a homer; their measure shall be according to the homer. 12 The shekel *shall be* twenty gerahs; twenty shekels, twenty-five shekels, *and* fifteen shekels shall be your mina.

13 "This *is* the offering which you shall offer: you shall give one-sixth of an ephah from a homer of wheat, and one-sixth of an ephah from a homer of barley. 14 The ordinance concerning oil, the bath of oil, *is* one-tenth of a bath from a kor. *A kor is* a homer or ten baths, for ten baths *are* a homer. 15 And one lamb shall be given from a flock of two hundred, from the rich pastures of Israel. These shall be for grain offerings, burnt offerings, and peace offerings, to make atonement for them," says the Lord God. 16 "All the people of the land shall give this offering for the prince in Israel. 17 Then it shall be the prince's part *to give* burnt offerings, grain offerings, and drink offerings, at the feasts, the New Moons, the Sabbaths, and at all the appointed seasons of the house of Israel. He shall prepare the sin offering, the grain offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offerings to make atonement for the house of Israel."

Keeping the Feasts

18 'Thus says the Lord God: "In the first *month,* on the first *day* of the month, you shall take a young bull without blemish and cleanse the sanctuary. 19 The priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering and put *it* on the doorposts of the temple, on the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and on the gateposts of the gate of the inner court. 20 And so you shall do on the seventh *day* of the month for everyone who has sinned unintentionally or in ignorance. Thus you shall make atonement for the temple.

21 "In the first *month,* on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall observe the Passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten. 22 And on that day the prince shall prepare for himself and for all the people of the land a bull *for* a sin offering. 23 On the seven days of the feast he shall prepare a burnt offering to the Lord, seven bulls and seven rams without blemish, daily for seven days, and a kid of the goats daily *for* a sin offering. 24 And he shall prepare a grain offering of one ephah for each bull and one ephah for each ram, together with a hin of oil for each ephah.

45:5 [a] Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *a possession, cities of dwelling.*

25 "In the seventh *month,* on the fifteenth
day of the month, at the feast, he shall do
likewise for seven days, according to the sin
offering, the burnt offering, the grain offering,
and the oil."

The Manner of Worship

46 'Thus says the Lord God: "The gateway
of the inner court that faces toward
the east shall be shut the six working days;
but on the Sabbath it shall be opened, and on
the day of the New Moon it shall be opened.
2 The prince shall enter by way of the vestibule
of the gateway from the outside, and stand
by the gatepost. The priests shall prepare his
burnt offering and his peace offerings. He
shall worship at the threshold of the gate.
Then he shall go out, but the gate shall not
be shut until evening. 3 Likewise the people of
the land shall worship at the entrance to this
gateway before the Lord on the Sabbaths and
the New Moons. 4 The burnt offering that the
prince offers to the Lord on the Sabbath day
shall be six lambs without blemish, and a ram
without blemish; 5 and the grain offering *shall
be one* ephah for a ram, and the grain offering
for the lambs, as much as he wants to give, as
well as a hin of oil with every ephah. 6 On the
day of the New Moon *it shall be* a young bull
without blemish, six lambs, and a ram; they
shall be without blemish. 7 He shall prepare a
grain offering of an ephah for a bull, an ephah
for a ram, as much as he wants to give for
the lambs, and a hin of oil with every ephah.
8 When the prince enters, he shall go in by way
of the vestibule of the gateway, and go out the
same way.

9 "But when the people of the land come
before the Lord on the appointed feast days,
whoever enters by way of the north gate to
worship shall go out by way of the south gate;
and whoever enters by way of the south gate
shall go out by way of the north gate. He shall
not return by way of the gate through which
he came, but shall go out through the opposite
gate. 10 The prince shall then be in their midst.
When they go in, he shall go in; and when
they go out, he shall go out. 11 At the festivals
and the appointed feast days the grain offer-
ing shall be an ephah for a bull, an ephah for
a ram, as much as he wants to give for the
lambs, and a hin of oil with every ephah.

12 "Now when the prince makes a voluntary
burnt offering or voluntary peace offering to
the Lord, the gate that faces toward the east
shall then be opened for him; and he shall
prepare his burnt offering and his peace offer-
ings as he did on the Sabbath day. Then he
shall go out, and after he goes out the gate
shall be shut.

13 "You shall daily make a burnt offering
to the Lord *of* a lamb of the first year without
blemish; you shall prepare it every morning.
14 And you shall prepare a grain offering with it
every morning, a sixth of an ephah, and a third
of a hin of oil to moisten the fine flour. This
grain offering is a perpetual ordinance, to be
made regularly to the Lord. 15 Thus they shall
prepare the lamb, the grain offering, and the
oil, *as* a regular burnt offering every morning."

The Prince and Inheritance Laws

16 'Thus says the Lord God: "If the prince
gives a gift *of some* of his inheritance to any
of his sons, it shall belong to his sons; it is
their possession by inheritance. 17 But if he
gives a gift of some of his inheritance to one
of his servants, it shall be his until the year of
liberty, after which it shall return to the prince.
But his inheritance shall belong to his sons;
it shall become theirs. 18 Moreover the prince
shall not take any of the people's inheritance
by evicting them from their property; he shall
provide an inheritance for his sons from his
own property, so that none of My people may
be scattered from his property." ' "

How the Offerings Were Prepared

19 Now he brought me through the entrance,
which *was* at the side of the gate, into the holy
chambers of the priests which face toward the
north; and there a place *was* situated at their
extreme western end. 20 And he said to me,
"This *is* the place where the priests shall boil
the trespass offering and the sin offering, *and*
where they shall bake the grain offering, so
that they do not bring *them* out into the outer
court to sanctify the people."

21 Then he brought me out into the outer
court and caused me to pass by the four cor-
ners of the court; and in fact, in every corner
of the court *there was another* court. 22 In the
four corners of the court *were* enclosed courts,
forty *cubits* long and thirty wide; all four cor-

ners *were* the same size. 23 *There was* a row *of building stones* all around in them, all around the four of them; and cooking hearths were made under the rows of stones all around. 24 And he said to me, "These *are* the kitchens where the ministers of the temple shall boil the sacrifices of the people."

The Healing Waters and Trees

47 Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar. 2 He brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gateway that faces east; and there was water, running out on the right side.

3 And when the man went out to the east with the line in his hand, he measured one thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the water *came up to my* ankles. 4 Again he measured one thousand and brought me through the waters; the water *came up to my* knees. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through; the water *came up to my* waist. 5 Again he measured one thousand, *and it was* a river that I could not cross; for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed. 6 He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen *this?*" Then he brought me and returned me to the bank of the river.

7 When I returned, there, along the bank of the river, *were* very many trees on one side and the other. 8 Then he said to me: "This water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. *When it* reaches the sea, *its* waters are healed. 9 And it shall be *that* every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes. 10 It shall be *that* fishermen will stand by it from En Gedi to En Eglaim; they will be *places* for spreading their nets. Their fish will be of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea, exceedingly many. 11 But its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt. 12 Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all *kinds of* trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine."

Borders of the Land

13 Thus says the Lord God: "These *are* the borders by which you shall divide the land as an inheritance among the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph *shall have two* portions. 14 You shall inherit it equally with one another; for I raised My hand in an oath to give it to your fathers, and this land shall fall to you as your inheritance.

15 "This *shall be* the border of the land on the north: from the Great Sea, *by* the road to Hethlon, as one goes to Zedad, 16 Hamath, Berothah, Sibraim (which *is* between the border of Damascus and the border of Hamath), to Hazar Hatticon (which *is* on the border of Hauran). 17 Thus the boundary shall be from the Sea to Hazar Enan, the border of Damascus; and as for the north, northward, it is the border of Hamath. *This is* the north side.

18 "On the east side you shall mark out the border from between Hauran and Damascus, and between Gilead and the land of Israel, along the Jordan, and along the eastern side of the sea. *This is* the east side.

19 "The south side, toward the South,[a] *shall be* from Tamar to the waters of Meribah by Kadesh, along the brook to the Great Sea. *This is* the south side, toward the South.

20 "The west side *shall be* the Great Sea, from the *southern* boundary until one comes to a point opposite Hamath. This *is* the west side.

21 "Thus you shall divide this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. 22 It shall be that you will divide it by lot as an inheritance for yourselves, and for the strangers who dwell among you and who bear children among you. They shall be to you as native-born among the children of Israel; they shall have an inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. 23 And it shall

47:19 [a]Hebrew *Negev*

be *that* in whatever tribe the stranger dwells, there you shall give *him* his inheritance," says the Lord God.

Division of the Land

48 "Now these *are* the names of the tribes: From the northern border along the road to Hethlon at the entrance of Hamath, to Hazar Enan, the border of Damascus northward, in the direction of Hamath, *there shall be* one *section for* Dan from its east to its west side; 2 by the border of Dan, from the east side to the west, one *section for* Asher; 3 by the border of Asher, from the east side to the west, one *section for* Naphtali; 4 by the border of Naphtali, from the east side to the west, one *section for* Manasseh; 5 by the border of Manasseh, from the east side to the west, one *section for* Ephraim; 6 by the border of Ephraim, from the east side to the west, one *section for* Reuben; 7 by the border of Reuben, from the east side to the west, one *section for* Judah; 8 by the border of Judah, from the east side to the west, shall be the district which you shall set apart, twenty-five thousand *cubits* in width, and *in* length the same as one of the *other* portions, from the east side to the west, with the sanctuary in the center.

9 "The district that you shall set apart for the Lord *shall be* twenty-five thousand *cubits* in length and ten thousand in width. 10 To these—to the priests—the holy district shall belong: on the north twenty-five thousand *cubits in length,* on the west ten thousand in width, on the east ten thousand in width, and on the south twenty-five thousand in length. The sanctuary of the Lord shall be in the center. 11 *It shall be* for the priests of the sons of Zadok, who are sanctified, who have kept My charge, who did not go astray when the children of Israel went astray, as the Levites went astray. 12 And *this* district of land that is set apart shall be to them a thing most holy by the border of the Levites.

13 "Opposite the border of the priests, the Levites *shall have an area* twenty-five thousand *cubits* in length and ten thousand in width; its entire length *shall be* twenty-five thousand and its width ten thousand. 14 And they shall not sell or exchange any of it; they may not alienate this best *part* of the land, for *it is* holy to the Lord.

15 "The five thousand *cubits* in width that remain, along the edge of the twenty-five thousand, shall be for general use by the city, for dwellings and common-land; and the city shall be in the center. 16 These *shall be* its measurements: the north side four thousand five hundred *cubits,* the south side four thousand five hundred, the east side four thousand five hundred, and the west side four thousand five hundred. 17 The common-land of the city shall be: to the north two hundred and fifty *cubits,* to the south two hundred and fifty, to the east two hundred and fifty, and to the west two hundred and fifty. 18 The rest of the length, alongside the district of the holy *section, shall be* ten thousand *cubits* to the east and ten thousand to the west. It shall be adjacent to the district of the holy *section,* and its produce shall be food for the workers of the city. 19 The workers of the city, from all the tribes of Israel, shall cultivate it. 20 The entire district *shall be* twenty-five thousand *cubits* by twenty-five thousand *cubits,* foursquare. You shall set apart the holy district with the property of the city.

21 "The rest *shall belong* to the prince, on one side and on the other of the holy district and of the city's property, next to the twenty-five thousand *cubits* of the *holy* district as far as the eastern border, and westward next to the twenty-five thousand as far as the western border, adjacent to the *tribal* portions; *it shall belong* to the prince. It shall be the holy district, and the sanctuary of the temple *shall be* in the center. 22 Moreover, apart from the possession of the Levites and the possession of the city *which are* in the midst of what *belongs* to the prince, *the area* between the border of Judah and the border of Benjamin shall belong to the prince.

23 "As for the rest of the tribes, from the east side to the west, Benjamin *shall have* one *section;* 24 by the border of Benjamin, from the east side to the west, Simeon *shall have* one *section;* 25 by the border of Simeon, from the east side to the west, Issachar *shall have* one *section;* 26 by the border of Issachar, from the east side to the west, Zebulun *shall have* one *section;* 27 by the border of Zebulun, from the east side to the west, Gad *shall have* one *sec-*

tion; [28] by the border of Gad, on the south side, toward the South,[a] the border shall be from Tamar *to* the waters of Meribah *by* Kadesh, along the brook to the Great Sea. [29] This *is* the land which you shall divide by lot as an inheritance among the tribes of Israel, and these *are* their portions," says the Lord God.

The Gates of the City and Its Name

[30] "These *are* the exits of the city. On the north side, measuring four thousand five hundred *cubits* [31] (the gates of the city *shall be* named after the tribes of Israel), the three gates northward: one gate for Reuben, one gate for Judah, and one gate for Levi; [32] on the east side, four thousand five hundred *cubits,* three gates: one gate for Joseph, one gate for Benjamin, and one gate for Dan; [33] on the south side, measuring four thousand five hundred *cubits,* three gates: one gate for Simeon, one gate for Issachar, and one gate for Zebulun; [34] on the west side, four thousand five hundred *cubits* with their three gates: one gate for Gad, one gate for Asher, and one gate for Naphtali. [35] All the way around *shall be* eighteen thousand *cubits;* and the name of the city from *that* day *shall be:* THE LORD *IS* THERE."[a]

48:28 [a]Hebrew *Negev* **48:35** [a]Hebrew *YHWH Shammah*

THE BOOK OF

DANIEL

INTRODUCTION

If you are a Jew in Babylon, you've got reason to be depressed. Jeremiah was right all along. All those times you thought he was one taco short of a platter, he was telling the truth!

Jerusalem is in ashes. The temple is in ruins. And you and the rest of your people are in captivity.

Your captors mock you, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" (Psalm 137:3). But you don't sing. You hang your harps on the poplar trees and sit on the banks of the river, watching the water and your days pass by.

Who can sing songs about the Lord in a foreign country?

Daniel can.

Though he was only a teenager when taken captive, he remembers well the songs of his youth. Somewhere in his early years he came to believe that God was sovereign. Nothing happens without His permission. Nothing happens outside of His plan.

But even Daniel could not have imagined the plans God had for him. Prime minister of the court. Interpreter of dreams. Prophet. Teacher. Ruler. A lifelong voice for God among pagan people.

But though the central character of the book is Daniel, the hero is God. "There is a God in heaven . . ." Daniel told the king (2:28), and it was that God in heaven who sustained Daniel and the people while in captivity.

That God, by the way, still reigns.

And anytime God's people have hung up their harps, listen carefully.

God always has a Daniel who remembers how to sing.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Daniel

Date Written: c. 530 B.C.

Key Themes:

- God leads in our lives even in difficult circumstances.
- Sometimes faithfulness is rewarded by miracles.
- God will be faithful to His people in the future as He has in the past.

Key Verse:

"I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, and steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall endure to the end" (Daniel 6:26).

Contents:

I. Daniel's Life Story 1:1—6:28
II. Daniel's Prophecy 7:1—12:13

Life LESSONS

Daniel 1:1–21

SITUATION
Daniel and his Israelite friends were exiled to Babylon. Servants of the king prepared them to serve in the royal court.

OBSERVATION
It is possible to be obedient to God even when surrounded by people who are disobedient to His Word. The Hebrew boys stood strong in the faith, despite what might have caused them to fear.

INSPIRATION
What's your worst fear? A fear of public failure, unemployment, or heights? The fear that you'll never find the right spouse or enjoy good health? The fear of being trapped, abandoned, or forgotten?

These are real fears, born out of legitimate concerns. Yet left unchecked, they metastasize into obsessions. The step between prudence and paranoia is short and steep. Prudence wears a seat belt. Paranoia avoids cars. Prudence washes with soap. Paranoia avoids human contact. Prudence saves for old age. Paranoia hoards even trash. Prudence prepares and plans. Paranoia panics. Prudence calculates the risk and takes the plunge. Paranoia never enters the water.

The words *plunge* and *water* come to mind as I'm writing this while sitting on the edge of a hotel swimming pool. (Amazing what a hot sun, a cool soda, and a pool chair can do for creativity.) A father and his two small daughters are at play. He's in the water; they jump into his arms. Let me

Daniel and His Friends Obey God

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.

3 Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, 4 young men in whom *there was* no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who *had* ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans. 5 And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of *that time* they might serve before the king. 6 Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. 7 To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel *the name* Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.

8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. 9 Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs. 10 And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who *are* your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king."

11 So Daniel said to the steward[a] whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 12 "Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, *so* deal with your servants." 14 So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days.

15 And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies. 16 Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

17 As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

18 Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. 19 Then the king interviewed[a] them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. 20 And in all matters of wisdom *and* understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians *and* astrologers who

1:11 [a]Hebrew *Melzar,* also in verse 16 **1:19** [a]Literally *talked with them*

were in all his realm. 21 Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus.

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

2 Now in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was *so* troubled that his sleep left him. 2 Then the king gave the command to call the magicians, the astrologers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king. 3 And the king said to them, "I have had a dream, and my spirit is anxious to know the dream."

4 Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic,[a] "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will give the interpretation."

5 The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, "My decision is firm: if you do not make known the dream to me, and its interpretation, you shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made an ash heap. 6 However, if you tell the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts, rewards, and great honor. Therefore tell me the dream and its interpretation."

7 They answered again and said, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will give its interpretation."

8 The king answered and said, "I know for certain that you would gain time, because you see that my decision is firm: 9 if you do not make known the dream to me, *there is only* one decree for you! For you have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the time has changed. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can give me its interpretation."

10 The Chaldeans answered the king, and said, "There is not a man on earth who can tell the king's matter; therefore no king, lord, or ruler has *ever* asked such things of any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean. 11 *It is* a difficult thing that the king requests, and there is no other who can tell it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh."

12 For this reason the king was angry and very furious, and gave the command to destroy all the wise *men* of Babylon. 13 So the decree went out, and they began killing the wise *men;* and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill *them.*

God Reveals Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

14 Then with counsel and wisdom Daniel answered Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise *men* of Babylon; 15 he answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, "Why is the decree from the king so urgent?" Then Arioch made the decision known to Daniel.

16 So Daniel went in and asked the king to give him time, that he might tell the king the interpretation. 17 Then Daniel went to his house, and made the decision known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, 18 that they might seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret, so that Daniel and his compan-

restate that: one jumps; the other ponders. The dry one gleefully watches her sister leap. She dances up and down as the other splashes. But when her dad invites her to do the same, she shakes her head and backs away.

A living parable! How many people spend life on the edge of the pool? Consulting caution. Ignoring faith. Never taking the plunge. Happy to experience life vicariously through others. Preferring to take no risk rather than any risk. For fear of the worst, they never enjoy life at its best.

By contrast, their sister jumps. Not with foolish abandon, but with belief in the goodness of a father's heart and trust in a father's arms. Such was the choice of Jesus. He did more than speak about fear. He faced it. . . .

As followers of God, you and I have a huge asset. We know everything is going to turn out all right. Christ hasn't budged from his throne, and Romans 8:28 hasn't evaporated from the Bible. Our problems have always been his possibilities. The kidnapping of Joseph resulted in the preservation of his family. The persecution of Daniel led to a cabinet position. Christ entered the world by a surprise pregnancy and redeemed it through his unjust murder. Dare we believe what the Bible teaches? That no disaster is ultimately fatal? (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you ever in a situation when you are afraid to do what is right? Plan how you will handle those situations to bring honor to God. Ask Him for strength to respond correctly. Be bold!

2:4 [a] The original language of Daniel 2:4b through 7:28 is Aramaic.

EXPLORATION
Unwavering Witness—Daniel 3:28; Matthew 5:16; Philippians 1:27–30.

Life Lessons

Daniel 2:1–49

SITUATION
Because the astrologers were unable to interpret his dream, King Nebuchadnezzar ordered all of the wise men to be killed.

OBSERVATION
Even though astrologers and psychics don't have all the answers, God does.

INSPIRATION
To what can we compare God? "For who in the heavens can be compared to the Lord? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the Lord?" (Psalm 89:6). "To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?" (Isaiah 40:18).

Even God asks, "To whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal?" (Isaiah 40:25). As if his question needed an answer, he gives one: "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.' . . . Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it" (Isaiah 46:9–11).

Any pursuit of God's counterpart is vain. Any search for a godlike person or position on earth is futile. No one and nothing compares with him. No one advises him. No one helps him. It is he who "executes judgment, putting down

ions might not perish with the rest of the wise *men* of Babylon. 19 Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. So Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

20 Daniel answered and said:

"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
For wisdom and might are His.
21 And He changes the times and the seasons;
He removes kings and raises up kings;
He gives wisdom to the wise
And knowledge to those who have understanding.
22 He reveals deep and secret things;
He knows what *is* in the darkness,
And light dwells with Him.

23 "I thank You and praise You,
O God of my fathers;
You have given me wisdom and might,
And have now made known to me what we asked of You,
For You have made known to us the king's demand."

Daniel Explains the Dream

24 Therefore Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise *men* of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: "Do not destroy the wise *men* of Babylon; take me before the king, and I will tell the king the interpretation."

25 Then Arioch quickly brought Daniel before the king, and said thus to him, "I have found a man of the captives[a] of Judah, who will make known to the king the interpretation."

26 The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name *was* Belteshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen, and its interpretation?"

27 Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, "The secret which the king has demanded, the wise *men,* the astrologers, the magicians, and the soothsayers cannot declare to the king. 28 But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these: 29 As for you, O king, thoughts came *to* your *mind while* on your bed, *about* what would come to pass after this; and He who reveals secrets has made known to you what will be. 30 But as for me, this secret has not been revealed to me because I have more wisdom than anyone living, but for *our* sakes who make known the interpretation to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your heart.

31 "You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor *was* excellent, stood before you; and its form *was* awesome. 32 This image's head *was* of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs[a] of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.[a] 34 You watched while a stone was cut

2:25 [a]Literally *of the sons of the captivity* **2:32** [a]Or *sides* **2:33** [a]Or *baked clay,* and so in verses 34, 35, and 42

out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. 35 Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

36 "This *is* the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. 37 You, O king, *are* a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; 38 and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given *them* into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you *are* this head of gold. 39 But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. 40 And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, *that kingdom* will break in pieces and crush all the others. 41 Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. 42 And *as* the toes of the feet *were* partly of iron and partly of clay, *so* the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. 43 As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay. 44 And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. 45 Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure."

Daniel and His Friends Promoted

46 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face, prostrate before Daniel, and commanded that they should present an offering and incense to him. 47 The king answered Daniel, and said, "Truly your God *is* the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret." 48 Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts; and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise *men* of Babylon. 49 Also Daniel petitioned the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego over the affairs of the province of Babylon; but Daniel *sat* in the gate[a] of the king.

The Image of Gold

3 Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height *was* sixty cubits *and* its width six cubits. He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. 2 And King Nebuchadnezzar sent *word* to gather together the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and

2:49 [a] That is, the king's court

one and lifting up another" (Psalm 75:7 ESV).

You and I may have power. But God *is* power. We may be a lightning bug, but he is lightning itself. "Wisdom and power are His" (Daniel 2:20). (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Have you ever visited a psychic or fortune-teller? Do you even glance at your horoscope, just for fun? Put the newspaper down. Trust God to lead your future and fulfill His promises to you. He alone knows what the future holds. Wisdom and power are His.

EXPLORATION

Giving Credit to God—Joshua 6:16; 1 Samuel 1:27; Luke 19:37; John 9:24–33; 11:40, 41; Acts 14:8–15.

Life LESSONS

Daniel 3:1–30

SITUATION
Although at one time he praised God, Nebuchadnezzar had an image of gold erected in the area of Babylon.

OBSERVATION
Pride and arrogance led Nebuchadnezzar to command all the officials to worship the image or face death. Undoubtedly it was a way for the king to promote submission to his authority.

INSPIRATION
Ever wonder why churches are powerful in one generation but empty the next? Perhaps the answer is found in Proverbs 15:25: "The Lord will destroy the house of the proud."

God hates arrogance. He hates arrogance because we haven't done anything to be arrogant about. Do art critics give awards to the canvas? Is there a Pulitzer for ink? Can you imagine a scalpel growing smug after a successful heart transplant? Of course not. They are only tools, so they get no credit for the accomplishments.

And the message of the Twenty-third Psalm is that we have nothing to be proud about either. We have rest, salvation, blessings, and a home in heaven—and we did nothing to earn any of it. Who did? Who did the work? The answer threads through the psalm like a silk thread through pearls.

"He makes me . . ."
"He leads me . . ."
"He restores my soul . . ."
"You are with me . . ."
"Your rod and Your staff . . . comfort me . . ."
"You prepare a table . . ."

all the officials of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 3 So the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered together for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 4 Then a herald cried aloud: "To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, 5 *that* at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, *and* psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up; 6 and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace."

7 So at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, harp, *and* lyre, in symphony with all kinds of music, all the people, nations, and languages fell down *and* worshiped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Daniel's Friends Disobey the King

8 Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and accused the Jews. 9 They spoke and said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! 10 You, O king, have made a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, *and* psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the gold image; 11 and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. 12 There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; these men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up."

13 Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king. 14 Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, "*Is it* true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, *that* you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up? 15 Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, *and* psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, *good!* But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who *is* the god who will deliver you from my hands?"

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. 17 If that *is the case,* our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver *us* from your hand, O king. 18 But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."

Saved in Fiery Trial

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. 20 And he commanded certain mighty men of

valor who *were* in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, *and* cast *them* into the burning fiery furnace. 21 Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their *other* garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. 22 Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. 23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste *and* spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?"

They answered and said to the king, "True, O king."

25 "Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."[a]

Nebuchadnezzar Praises God

26 Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace *and* spoke, saying, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come *here.*" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire. 27 And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them.

28 Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel[a] and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God! 29 Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this."

30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in the province of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar's Second Dream

4 Nebuchadnezzar the king,

To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth:

Peace be multiplied to you.

2 I thought it good to declare the signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked for me.

3 How great *are* His signs,
And how mighty His wonders!

3:25 [a]Or *a son of the gods* **3:28** [a]Or *angel*

"You anoint my head . . ."

We may be the canvas, the paper, or the scalpel, but we are not the ones who deserve the applause. And just to make sure we get the point, right smack-dab in the middle of the poem, David declares who does. The shepherd leads his sheep, not for our names' sake, but "for His name's sake."

Why does God have anything to do with us? For his name's sake. No other name on the marquee. No other name up in lights. No other name on the front page. This is all done for God's glory. (From *Traveling Light* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

In what areas of your life is there a temptation to become proud or arrogant? Is it a special ability or talent? Is it your possessions—the house you live in or the car you drive? Or is it your educational background or your accomplishments? Make a list of those items and then confess to God your pride. Ask that God will help you remove that spirit of arrogance.

EXPLORATION

Arrogance—Proverbs 8:13; Isaiah 13:11; Jeremiah 48:29; Romans 1:30.

His kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom,
And His dominion *is* from generation to generation.

4 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house, and flourishing
in my palace. 5 I saw a dream which made me afraid, and
the thoughts on my bed and the visions of my head trou-
bled me. 6 Therefore I issued a decree to bring in all the wise
men of Babylon before me, that they might make known to
me the interpretation of the dream. 7 Then the magicians, the
astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers came in, and
I told them the dream; but they did not make known to me its
interpretation. 8 But at last Daniel came before me (his name
is Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god; in him *is* the
Spirit of the Holy God), and I told the dream before him, *say-
ing:* 9 "Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, because I know that
the Spirit of the Holy God *is* in you, and no secret troubles you,
explain to me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and its
interpretation.

10 "These *were* the visions of my head *while* on my bed:

I was looking, and behold,
A tree in the midst of the earth,
And its height was great.
11 The tree grew and became strong;
Its height reached to the heavens,
And it could be seen to the ends of all the earth.
12 Its leaves *were* lovely,
Its fruit abundant,
And in it *was* food for all.
The beasts of the field found shade under it,
The birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches,
And all flesh was fed from it.

13 "I saw in the visions of my head *while* on my bed, and there was
a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven. 14 He cried
aloud and said thus:

'Chop down the tree and cut off its branches,
Strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit.
Let the beasts get out from under it,
And the birds from its branches.
15 Nevertheless leave the stump and roots in the earth,
Bound with a band of iron and bronze,
In the tender grass of the field.
Let it be wet with the dew of heaven,
And *let* him graze with the beasts
On the grass of the earth.
16 Let his heart be changed from *that of* a man,
Let him be given the heart of a beast,
And let seven times[a] pass over him.

4:16 [a] Possibly *seven years,* and so in verses 23, 25, and 32

Life Lessons

Daniel 4:1–37

SITUATION
When King Nebuchadnezzar had a strange dream, he asked Daniel to interpret it.

OBSERVATION
God has an eternal kingdom. He brings earthly kings under His control.

INSPIRATION
To confess the sovereignty of God is to acknowledge the reign of God, his regal authority and veto power over everything that happens. To embrace God's sovereignty is to drink from the well of his lordship and make a sailboat-in-the-storm decision. . . . . You look toward the Captain and resolve: he knows what's best.

After all, doesn't he quarterback the activities of the universe?

"Our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases" (Psalm 115:3).

"Indeed before the day was, I am He; and there is no one who can deliver out of My hand; I work, and who will reverse it?" (Isaiah 43:13).

"Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure'" (Isaiah 46:10).

"In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11).

Divine decrees direct the cosmos. Jesus informed Pilate, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you

17 'This decision *is* by the decree of the watchers,
And the sentence by the word of the holy ones,
In order that the living may know
That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men,
Gives it to whomever He will,
And sets over it the lowest of men.'

18 "This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, have seen. Now you, Belteshazzar, declare its interpretation, since all the wise *men* of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation; but you *are* able, for the Spirit of the Holy God *is* in you."

Daniel Explains the Second Dream

19 Then Daniel, whose name *was* Belteshazzar, was astonished for a time, and his thoughts troubled him. *So* the king spoke, and said, "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its interpretation trouble you."

Belteshazzar answered and said, "My lord, *may* the dream concern those who hate you, and its interpretation concern your enemies!

20 "The tree that you saw, which grew and became strong, whose height reached to the heavens and which *could be* seen by all the earth, 21 whose leaves *were* lovely and its fruit abundant, in which *was* food for all, under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and in whose branches the birds of the heaven had their home— 22 it *is* you, O king, who have grown and become strong; for your greatness has grown and reaches to the heavens, and your dominion to the end of the earth.

23 "And inasmuch as the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave its stump and roots in the earth, *bound* with a band of iron and bronze in the tender grass of the field; let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let him graze with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him'; 24 this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king: 25 They shall drive you from men, your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. They shall wet you with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.

26 "And inasmuch as they gave the command to leave the stump *and* roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be assured to you, after you come to know that Heaven rules. 27 Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you; break off your sins by *being* righteous, and your iniquities by showing mercy to *the* poor. Perhaps there may be a lengthening of your prosperity."

from above" (John 19:11). The Jewish leaders thought they were the ones who sent Christ to the cross. Peter corrected them. Jesus was "delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23 NASB).

Jeremiah rhetorically inquired, "Can anything happen without the Lord's permission?" (Lamentations 3:37 NLT).

The book of Daniel declares, "He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" (Daniel 4:35).

Scripture, from Old Testament to New, from prophets to poets to preachers, renders one unanimous chorus: God directs the affairs of humanity. As Paul wrote, "God . . . is the *blessed controller* of all things, the king over all kings and the master of all masters" (1 Timothy 6:15 PHILLIPS, emphasis mine).

No leaf falls without God's knowledge. No dolphin gives birth without his permission. No wave crashes on the shore apart from his calculation. God has never been surprised. Not once. Jesus is "upholding all things by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3). "He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need there is" (Acts 17:25 NLT). King David proclaimed, "In Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them" (Psalm 139:16).

Denying the sovereignty of God requires busy scissors and results in a hole-y Bible, for many holes

are made as the verses are cut out. (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Choose one or two people you have read about in the newspaper the past week and pray for God's Holy Spirit to convict them of sin and reveal Christ to them.

EXPLORATION
Concern for Others—Luke 19:41; Galatians 6:1; Hebrews 3:12, 13; 12:14–16; James 5:19, 20.

Fear may fill our world, but it doesn't have to fill our hearts.

—Max Lucado (Fearless)

Nebuchadnezzar's Humiliation

28 All *this* came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. 29 At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. 30 The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?"

31 While the word *was still* in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! 32 And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling *shall be* with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses."

33 That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' *feathers* and his nails like birds' *claws*.

Nebuchadnezzar Praises God

34 And at the end of the time[a] I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever:

For His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion,
And His kingdom *is* from generation to generation.
35 All the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing;
He does according to His will in the army of heaven
And *among* the inhabitants of the earth.
No one can restrain His hand
Or say to Him, "What have You done?"

36 At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and splendor returned to me. My counselors and nobles resorted to me, I was restored to my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added to me. 37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works *are* truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.

Belshazzar's Feast

5 Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand. 2 While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which *had been* in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. 3 Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which *had been* in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives,

4:34 [a] Literally *days*

and his concubines drank from them. 4 They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.

5 In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. 6 Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other. 7 The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke, saying to the wise *men* of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and *have* a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom." 8 Now all the king's wise *men* came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation. 9 Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished.

10 The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall. The queen spoke, saying, "O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change. 11 There is a man in your kingdom in whom *is* the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, *and* soothsayers. 12 Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas[a] were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation."

The Writing on the Wall Explained

13 Then Daniel was brought in before the king. The king spoke, and said to Daniel, "*Are* you that Daniel who is one of the captives[a] from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah? 14 I have heard of you, that the Spirit of God *is* in you, and *that* light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you. 15 Now the wise *men,* the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, but they could not give the interpretation of the thing. 16 And I have heard of you, that you can give interpretations and explain enigmas. Now if you can read the writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and *have* a chain of gold around your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom."

17 Then Daniel answered, and said before the king, "Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation. 18 O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. 19 And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he

5:12 [a] Literally *untying knots,* and so in verse 16 **5:13** [a] Literally *of the sons of the captivity*

Life Lessons

Daniel 5:1–31

SITUATION
At the height of his power, Belshazzar, king of Assyria, was judged by God for his corrupt and worldly lifestyle, which included desecrating the temple goblets in a wild party. A mysterious hand wrote a cryptic message on the wall of the Assyrian palace. Only Daniel could translate the message. The message told of the imminent fall of the Assyrian empire.

OBSERVATION
Materialism is not the answer to a fulfilled life. Trust only in God.

INSPIRATION
A businessman bought popcorn from an old street vendor each day after lunch. He once arrived to find the peddler closing up his stand at noon. "Is something wrong?" he asked.

A smile wrinkled the seller's leathery face. "By no means. All is well."

"Then why are you closing your popcorn stand?"

"So I can go to my house, sit on my porch, and sip tea with my wife."

The man of commerce objected. "But the day is still young. You can still sell."

"No need to," the stand owner replied. "I've made enough money for today."

"Enough? Absurd. You should keep working."

The spry old man stopped and stared at his well-dressed visitor. "And why should I keep working?"

"To sell more popcorn."

"And why sell more popcorn?"

"Because the more popcorn you sell, the more

money you make. The more money you make, the richer you are. The richer you are, the more popcorn stands you can buy. The more popcorn stands you buy, the more peddlers sell your product, and the richer you become. And when you have enough, you can stop working, sell your popcorn stands, stay home, and sit on the porch with your wife and drink tea."

The popcorn man smiled. "I can do that today. I guess I have enough."

I'm rich enough—a phrase on the verge of extinction. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How materialistic are you? Do you think that you would ever feel like you have enough? How can you learn to trust in God for what you need, not always what you want?

EXPLORATION

Materialism—Proverbs 11:28; Ecclesiastes 5:10; Matthew 6:24; Revelation 18:9, 10.

wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down. 20 But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. 21 Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling *was* with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.

22 "But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. 23 And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who *holds* your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified. 24 Then the fingers[a] of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written.

25 "And this is the inscription that was written:

MENE,[a] MENE, TEKEL,[b] UPHARSIN.[c]

26 This *is* the interpretation of *each* word. Mene: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; 27 Tekel: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; 28 Peres: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."[a] 29 Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and *put* a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Belshazzar's Fall

30 That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. 31 And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, *being* about sixty-two years old.

The Plot Against Daniel

6 It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, to be over the whole kingdom; 2 and over these, three governors, of whom Daniel *was* one, that the satraps might give account to them, so that the king would suffer no loss. 3 Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit *was* in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm. 4 So the governors and satraps sought to find *some* charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he *was* faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him. 5 Then these men said, "We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find *it* against him concerning the law of his God."

6 So these governors and satraps thronged before the king, and said

5:24 [a]Literally *palm* **5:25** [a]Literally *a mina* (50 shekels) from the verb "to number" [b]Literally *a shekel* from the verb "to weigh" [c]Literally *and half-shekels* from the verb "to divide" **5:28** [a]Aramaic *Paras,* consonant with *Peres*

thus to him: "King Darius, live forever! 7 All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counselors and advisors, have consulted together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. 8 Now, O king, establish the decree and sign the writing, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter." 9 Therefore King Darius signed the written decree.

Daniel in the Lions' Den

10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.

11 Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. 12 And they went before the king, and spoke concerning the king's decree: "Have you not signed a decree that every man who petitions any god or man within thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?"

The king answered and said, "The thing *is* true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter."

13 So they answered and said before the king, "That Daniel, who is one of the captives[a] from Judah, does not show due regard for you, O king, or for the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day."

14 And the king, when he heard *these* words, was greatly displeased with himself, and set *his* heart on Daniel to deliver him; and he labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him. 15 Then these men approached the king, and said to the king, "Know, O king, that *it is* the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed."

16 So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast *him* into the den of lions. *But* the king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you." 17 Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed.

Daniel Saved from the Lions

18 Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; and no musicians[a] were brought before him. Also his sleep went from him. 19 Then the king arose very early in the morning and went in haste to the den of lions. 20 And when he came to the den, he cried out with a lamenting voice to Daniel. The king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?"

21 Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! 22 My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you."

6:13 [a] Literally *of the sons of the captivity* **6:18** [a] Exact meaning unknown

Life Lessons

Daniel 6:1–28

SITUATION
Daniel's enemies coveted his job and sought to destroy him. They developed a clever scheme to force the king to kill Daniel, but God rescued him.

OBSERVATION
God protects those who remain faithful to Him. Daniel was not ashamed of his faith and did his best to serve God and the king faithfully.

INSPIRATION
I recently read a story of a woman who for years was married to a harsh husband. Each day he would leave her a list of chores to complete before he returned at the end of the day. "Clean the yard. Stack the firewood. Wash the windows. . . . "

If she didn't complete the tasks, she would be greeted with his explosive anger. But even if she did complete the list, he was never satisfied; he would always find inadequacies in her work.

After several years, the husband passed away. Some time later she remarried, this time to a man who lavished her with tenderness and adoration.

One day, while going through a box of old papers, the wife discovered one of her first husband's lists. And as she read the sheet, a realization caused a tear of joy to splash on the paper.

"I'm still doing all these things, and no one has to tell me. I do it because I love him."

That is the unique characteristic of the new kingdom. Its subjects don't work in order to go to heaven; they work because

they are going to heaven. Arrogance and fear are replaced with gratitude and joy. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Because you love God, give honor to those in positions of leadership. Avoid telling cutting jokes about the president. Don't gossip about your boss. Give policemen proper respect. In this way, others may see your love for God.

EXPLORATION
Faith—Psalm 27:1; 118:5–9; Habakkuk 2:4; Mark 9:23.

23 Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded
that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken
up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because
he believed in his God.

Darius Honors God

24 And the king gave the command, and they brought those men
who had accused Daniel, and they cast *them* into the den of lions—
them, their children, and their wives; and the lions overpowered
them, and broke all their bones in pieces before they ever came to the
bottom of the den.
25 Then King Darius wrote:

To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth:

Peace be multiplied to you.

26 I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom *men*
must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel.

For He *is* the living God,
And steadfast forever;
His kingdom *is the one* which shall not be destroyed,
And His dominion *shall endure* to the end.
27 He delivers and rescues,
And He works signs and wonders
In heaven and on earth,
Who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.

28 So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign
of Cyrus the Persian.

Vision of the Four Beasts

7 In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream
and visions of his head *while* on his bed. Then he wrote down the
dream, telling the main facts.[a]
2 Daniel spoke, saying, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the
four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea. 3 And four great
beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other. 4 The first
was like a lion, and had eagle's wings. I watched till its wings were
plucked off; and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on
two feet like a man, and a man's heart was given to it.
5 "And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. It was raised
up on one side, and *had* three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And
they said thus to it: 'Arise, devour much flesh!'
6 "After this I looked, and there was another, like a leopard, which
had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads,
and dominion was given to it.
7 "After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast,
dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it

7:1 [a] Literally *the head* (or *chief*) *of the words*

was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It *was* different from all the beasts that *were* before it, and it had ten horns. 8 I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, *were* eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words.

Vision of the Ancient of Days

9 "I watched till thrones were put in place,
And the Ancient of Days was seated;
His garment *was* white as snow,
And the hair of His head *was* like pure wool.
His throne *was* a fiery flame,
Its wheels a burning fire;
10 A fiery stream issued
And came forth from before Him.
A thousand thousands ministered to Him;
Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him.
The court[a] was seated,
And the books were opened.

11 "I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame. 12 As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

13 "I was watching in the night visions,
And behold, *One* like the Son of Man,
Coming with the clouds of heaven!
He came to the Ancient of Days,
And they brought Him near before Him.
14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.
His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion,
Which shall not pass away,
And His kingdom *the one*
Which shall not be destroyed.

Daniel's Visions Interpreted

15 "I, Daniel, was grieved in my spirit within *my* body, and the visions of my head troubled me. 16 I came near to one of those who stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of these things: 17 'Those great beasts, which are four, *are* four kings[a] *which* arise out of the earth. 18 But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.'

19 "Then I wished to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, *with* its teeth of iron and its nails of bronze, *which* devoured, broke in pieces, and

7:10 [a]Or *judgment* **7:17** [a]Representing their kingdoms (compare verse 23)

Life Lessons

Daniel 7:1–28

SITUATION
Through a vision, God told Daniel about the coming of the Messiah and the final judgment. Daniel didn't understand everything he saw, because some of the events would take place five hundred years later.

OBSERVATION
God always fulfills his prophecies. Christians can have confidence in him no matter how bleak the world may seem.

INSPIRATION
I sit a few feet from a man on death row. Jewish by birth. Tentmaker by trade. Apostle by calling. His days are marked. I'm curious about what bolsters this man as he nears his execution. So I ask some questions.

Do you have family, Paul? *I have none.*

What about your health? *My body is beaten and tired.*

What do you own? *I have my parchments. My pen. A cloak.*

And your reputation? *Well, it's not much. I'm a heretic to some, a maverick to others.*

Do you have friends? *I do, but even some of them have turned back.*

Any awards? *Not on earth.*

Then what do you have, Paul? No belongings. No family. Criticized by some. Mocked by others. What do you have, Paul? What do you have that matters?

I sit back quietly and watch. Paul rolls his hand into a fist. He looks at it. I look at it. What is he holding? What does he have?

He extends his hand so I can see. As I lean forward, he opens his fingers. I peer at his palm. It's empty.

I have my faith. It's all I have. But it's all I need. I have kept the faith.

Paul leans back against the wall of his cell and smiles. And I lean back against another and stare into the face of a man who has learned that there is more to life than meets the eye.

For that's what faith is. Faith is trusting what the eye can't see.

Eyes see the prowling lion. Faith sees Daniel's angel.

Eyes see storms. Faith sees Noah's rainbow.

Eyes see giants. Faith sees Canaan.

Your eyes see your faults. Your faith sees your Savior.

Your eyes see your guilt. Your faith sees his blood.

Your eyes see your grave. Your faith sees a city whose builder and maker is God.

Your eyes look in the mirror and see a sinner, a failure, a promise-breaker. But by faith you look in the mirror and see a robed prodigal bearing the ring of grace on your finger and the kiss of your Father on your face. (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Who tries to predict the future for you? What forecasts do you rely on? If your biggest fears and problems could be solved, would the future really make you happier? Pray that God would fill your heart with assurance of His love and care.

EXPLORATION

Prophecy—Deuteronomy 18:21, 22; 1 Corinthians 14:1; Revelation 1:3.

trampled the residue with its feet; 20 and the ten horns that *were* on its head, and the other *horn* which came up, before which three fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth which spoke pompous words, whose appearance *was* greater than his fellows.

21 "I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, 22 until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made *in favor* of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom.

23 "Thus he said:

'The fourth beast shall be
A fourth kingdom on earth,
Which shall be different from all *other* kingdoms,
And shall devour the whole earth,
Trample it and break it in pieces.
24 The ten horns *are* ten kings
Who shall arise from this kingdom.
And another shall rise after them;
He shall be different from the first *ones,*
And shall subdue three kings.
25 He shall speak *pompous* words against the Most High,
Shall persecute[a] the saints of the Most High,
And shall intend to change times and law.
Then *the saints* shall be given into his hand
For a time and times and half a time.

26 'But the court shall be seated,
And they shall take away his dominion,
To consume and destroy *it* forever.
27 Then the kingdom and dominion,
And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven,
Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High.
His kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom,
And all dominions shall serve and obey Him.'

28 "This *is* the end of the account.[a] As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly troubled me, and my countenance changed; but I kept the matter in my heart."

Vision of a Ram and a Goat

8 In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar a vision appeared *to* me—to me, Daniel—after the one that appeared to me the first time. 2 I saw in the vision, and it so happened while I was looking, that I *was* in Shushan, the citadel, which *is* in the province of Elam; and I saw in the vision that I was by the River Ulai. 3 Then I lifted my eyes and saw, and there, standing beside the river, was a ram which had two horns, and the two horns *were* high; but one *was* higher than the other, and the higher *one* came up last. 4 I saw the ram pushing westward, northward, and southward, so that no animal could withstand him; nor *was there any* that could deliver from his hand, but he did according to his will and became great.

7:25 [a] Literally *wear out* **7:28** [a] Literally *the word*

5 And as I was considering, suddenly a male goat came from the
west, across the surface of the whole earth, without touching the
ground; and the goat *had* a notable horn between his eyes. 6 Then
he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing
beside the river, and ran at him with furious power. 7 And I saw him
confronting the ram; he was moved with rage against him, attacked
the ram, and broke his two horns. There was no power in the ram to
withstand him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled
him; and there was no one that could deliver the ram from his hand.
8 Therefore the male goat grew very great; but when he became
strong, the large horn was broken, and in place of it four notable ones
came up toward the four winds of heaven. 9 And out of one of them
came a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south,
toward the east, and toward the Glorious *Land.* 10 And it grew up to
the host of heaven; and it cast down *some* of the host and *some* of the
stars to the ground, and trampled them. 11 He even exalted *himself*
as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily *sacrifices* were
taken away, and the place of His sanctuary was cast down. 12 Because
of transgression, an army was given over *to the horn* to oppose the
daily *sacrifices;* and he cast truth down to the ground. He did *all this*
and prospered.
13 Then I heard a holy one speaking; and *another* holy one said
to that certain *one* who was speaking, "How long *will* the vision *be,*
concerning the daily *sacrifices* and the transgression of desolation, the
giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled underfoot?"
14 And he said to me, "For two thousand three hundred days;[a] then
the sanctuary shall be cleansed."

Gabriel Interprets the Vision

15 Then it happened, when I, Daniel, had seen the vision and was
seeking the meaning, that suddenly there stood before me one hav-
ing the appearance of a man. 16 And I heard a man's voice between
the banks of the Ulai, who called, and said, "Gabriel, make this *man*
understand the vision." 17 So he came near where I stood, and when
he came I was afraid and fell on my face; but he said to me, "Under-
stand, son of man, that the vision *refers* to the time of the end."
18 Now, as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep with my
face to the ground; but he touched me, and stood me upright. 19 And
he said, "Look, I am making known to you what shall happen in the
latter time of the indignation; for at the appointed time the end *shall*
be. 20 The ram which you saw, having the two horns—*they are* the
kings of Media and Persia. 21 And the male goat *is* the kingdom[a] of
Greece. The large horn that *is* between its eyes *is* the first king. 22 As for
the broken *horn* and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms
shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power.

23 "And in the latter time of their kingdom,
When the transgressors have reached their fullness,
A king shall arise,

8:14 [a]Literally *evening-mornings* (compare 7:17, 23) **8:21** [a]Literally *king,* representing his kingdom

Life Lessons

Daniel 8:1–27

SITUATION
Daniel's dreams symbolized the future rise and fall of Greece. By overthrowing human power, God would triumph and establish his kingdom.

OBSERVATION
The chapters in this book have given rise to various interpretations. Some Old Testament prophecies would have their fulfillment in the near future, others in the far future. But one thing is certain: The nations and the future are under God's ultimate control.

INSPIRATION
Jesus has said the same to us. Just prior to his crucifixion, he told his disciples that he would be leaving them. "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward" (John 13:36).

Such a statement was bound to stir some questions. Peter spoke for the others and asked, "Lord, why can I not follow You now?" (v. 37).

See if Jesus' reply doesn't reflect the tenderness of a parent to a child: "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house; I would not tell you this if it were not true. I am going there to prepare a place for you. . . . I will come back and take you to be with me so that you may be where I am going" (John 14:1–3 NCV).

Reduce the paragraph to a sentence and it might read: "You do the trusting and I'll do the taking." A

healthy reminder when it comes to anticipating the return of Christ. For many, the verb "trust" is not easily associated with his coming.

Our pre-K minds are ill-equipped to handle the thoughts of eternity. When it comes to a world with no boundaries of space and time, we don't have the hooks for those hats. Consequently, our Lord takes the posture of a parent, "You do the trusting and I'll do the taking." This is precisely his message in these warm words of John 14. Let's ponder them for a bit.

All of his words can be reduced to two: *Trust me.* "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust in me" (v. 1).

Don't be troubled by the return of Christ. Don't be anxious about things you cannot comprehend. Issues like the millennium and the Antichrist are intended to challenge and stretch us, but not overwhelm and certainly not divide us. For the Christian, the return of Christ is not a riddle to be solved or a code to be broken, but rather a day to be anticipated.

Jesus wants us to trust him. He doesn't want us to be troubled, so he reassures us with these truths. (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Many people like to predict future events and the timing of them. However, even though we are given some information in the Scriptures, we aren't expected to know all the exact dates. We are expected, though, to study the Scriptures to the best of our ability and live every day as if the Lord were coming back that day.

Having fierce features,
Who understands sinister schemes.
24 His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power;
He shall destroy fearfully,
And shall prosper and thrive;
He shall destroy the mighty, and *also* the holy people.

25 "Through his cunning
He shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule;[a]
And he shall exalt *himself* in his heart.
He shall destroy many in *their* prosperity.
He shall even rise against the Prince of princes;
But he shall be broken without *human* means.[b]

26 "And the vision of the evenings and mornings
Which was told is true;
Therefore seal up the vision,
For *it refers* to many days *in the future.*"

27 And I, Daniel, fainted and was sick for days; afterward I arose and went about the king's business. I was astonished by the vision, but no one understood it.

Daniel's Prayer for the People

9 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—
2 in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years *specified* by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

3 Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. 4 And I prayed to the Lord my God, and made confession, and said, "O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, 5 we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments. 6 Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land. 7 O Lord, righteousness *belongs* to You, but to us shame of face, as *it is* this day—to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those near and those far off in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of the unfaithfulness which they have committed against You.

8 "O Lord, to us *belongs* shame of face, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against You. 9 To the Lord our God *belong* mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him. 10 We have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in His laws, which He set before us by His servants the prophets. 11 Yes, all Israel has transgressed Your law, and has departed so as not to

8:25 [a] Literally *hand* [b] Literally *hand*

obey Your voice; therefore the curse and the oath written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against Him. 12 And He has confirmed His words, which He spoke against us and against our judges who judged us, by bringing upon us a great disaster; for under the whole heaven such has never been done as what has been done to Jerusalem.

13 "As *it is* written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us; yet we have not made our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth. 14 Therefore the Lord has kept the disaster in mind, and brought it upon us; for the Lord our God *is* righteous in all the works which He does, though we have not obeyed His voice. 15 And now, O Lord our God, who brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and made Yourself a name, as *it is* this day—we have sinned, we have done wickedly!

16 "O Lord, according to all Your righteousness, I pray, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people *are* a reproach to all *those* around us. 17 Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate. 18 O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies. 19 O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name."

The Seventy-Weeks Prophecy

20 Now while I *was* speaking, praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God, 21 yes, while I *was* speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering. 22 And he informed *me,* and talked with me, and said, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand. 23 At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell *you,* for you *are* greatly beloved; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision:

24 "Seventy weeks[a] are determined
For your people and for your holy city,
To finish the transgression,
To make an end of[b] sins,
To make reconciliation for iniquity,
To bring in everlasting righteousness,
To seal up vision and prophecy,
And to anoint the Most Holy.

9:24 [a]Literally *sevens,* and so throughout the chapter [b]Following Qere, Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate; Kethib and Theodotion read *To seal up.*

EXPLORATION
Prophecy—Genesis 41:8; 42:8, 9; Daniel 2:1–11; 2 Timothy 4:6–8; Revelation 22:10–14.

Life Lessons

Daniel 9:1–27

SITUATION
While Daniel was in exile, he read Jeremiah 25:11, 12 and Jeremiah 29:10. He realized that Israel's seventy-year punishment was almost over. Daniel knew his people had been unfaithful, but he asked God to forgive them. Daniel received another vision about the end times and the fate of Israel.

OBSERVATION
God answers our prayers and reveals His plan for us when we ask for guidance.

INSPIRATION
Those are [God's] arms you feel. Trust him. That is his voice you hear. Believe him. Allow the only decision maker in the universe to comfort you. Life at times appears to fall to pieces, seems irreparable. But it's going to be okay. How can you know? Because *God* so loved the world. And,

Since he has no needs, you cannot tire him.

Since he is without age, you cannot lose him.

Since he has no sin, you cannot corrupt him.

If God can make a billion galaxies, can't he make good out of our bad and sense out of our faltering lives? Of course he can. He is God. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
If you're fearful about the future, wondering where God is leading, just talk to Him. Trust Him. He is the God of the universe and the

One who knows how many hairs are on your head. He loves you.

EXPLORATION
Prayer—Genesis 25:21; 2 Chronicles 7:12; Ezra 8:23; Daniel 6:10; Mark 9:29; Philippians 4:6, 7.

25 "Know therefore and understand,
That from the going forth of the command
To restore and build Jerusalem
Until Messiah the Prince,
There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks;
The street[a] shall be built again, and the wall,[b]
Even in troublesome times.

26 "And after the sixty-two weeks
Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself;
And the people of the prince who is to come
Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.
The end of it *shall be* with a flood,
And till the end of the war desolations are determined.
27 Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week;
But in the middle of the week
He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.
And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes
desolate,
Even until the consummation, which is determined,
Is poured out on the desolate."

Vision of the Glorious Man

10 In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar. The message *was* true, but the appointed time *was* long;[a] and he understood the message, and had understanding of the vision. 2 In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. 3 I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.

4 Now on the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, that *is,* the Tigris,[a] 5 I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose waist *was* girded with gold of Uphaz! 6 His body *was* like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude.

7 And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision; but a great terror fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. 8 Therefore I was left alone when I saw this great vision, and no strength remained in me; for my vigor was turned to frailty in me, and I retained no strength. 9 Yet I heard the sound of his words; and while I heard the sound of his words I was in a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground.

Prophecies Concerning Persia and Greece

10 Suddenly, a hand touched me, which made me tremble on my knees and *on* the palms of my hands. 11 And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you, and

9:25 [a]Or *open square* [b]Or *moat* **10:1** [a]Or *and of great conflict* **10:4** [a]Hebrew *Hiddekel*

stand upright, for I have now been sent to you." While he was speaking this word to me, I stood trembling.

12 Then he said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. 13 But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia. 14 Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision *refers* to *many* days yet *to come*."

15 When he had spoken such words to me, I turned my face toward the ground and became speechless. 16 And suddenly, *one* having the likeness of the sons[a] of men touched my lips; then I opened my mouth and spoke, saying to him who stood before me, "My lord, because of the vision my sorrows have overwhelmed me, and I have retained no strength. 17 For how can this servant of my lord talk with you, my lord? As for me, no strength remains in me now, nor is any breath left in me."

18 Then again, *the one* having the likeness of a man touched me and strengthened me. 19 And he said, "O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace *be* to you; be strong, yes, be strong!"

So when he spoke to me I was strengthened, and said, "Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me."

20 Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? And now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come. 21 But I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth. (No one upholds me against these, except Michael your prince.

11 "Also in the first year of Darius the Mede, I, *even* I, stood up to confirm and strengthen him.) 2 And now I will tell you the truth: Behold, three more kings will arise in Persia, and the fourth shall be far richer than *them* all; by his strength, through his riches, he shall stir up all against the realm of Greece. 3 Then a mighty king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will. 4 And when he has arisen, his kingdom shall be broken up and divided toward the four winds of heaven, but not among his posterity nor according to his dominion with which he ruled; for his kingdom shall be uprooted, even for others besides these.

Warring Kings of North and South

5 "Also the king of the South shall become strong, as well as *one* of his princes; and he shall gain power over him and have dominion. His dominion *shall be* a great dominion. 6 And at the end of *some* years they shall join forces, for the daughter of the king of the South shall go to the king of the North to make an agreement; but she shall not retain the power of her authority,[a] and neither he nor his authority[b] shall stand; but she shall be given up, with those who brought her, and with him who begot her, and with him who strengthened her in *those* times. 7 But from a branch of her roots *one* shall arise in his

10:16 [a]Theodotion and Vulgate read *the son;* Septuagint reads *a hand.*
11:6 [a]Literally *arm* [b]Literally *arm*

Life Lessons

Daniel 10:1—12:13

SITUATION
Daniel lived in a time of persecution, but he found comfort in knowing that God transcended the political limits and destiny of Israel.

OBSERVATION
Daniel realized that there are events that take place beyond human understanding. Daniel was comforted to know that God will not forget those who follow Him.

INSPIRATION
Posted outside the choir rehearsal room was this flyer:

High School Musical: *Oklahoma!*

Tryouts next Thursday and Friday

My opportunity at last! If Buddy Holly and Roy Orbison could make the leap from West Texas to the big stage, why couldn't I? I was a high school sophomore, brimming with untapped and undiscovered talent. Besides, I already had the boots, hat, and accent. Why not give it a go?

My audition was stellar, until I opened my mouth to sing. The music director covered his ears and placed his head between his knees. Outside the window, a dog began to howl. On the wall, paint began to curl. Still, the director said he might have a spot for me. He asked if I had theater experience. I told him I went to the movies about once a month. That was enough for him. He gave me a script and the page number on which I would find my part. That's right, page number. Not page numbers. Page

number. My part fit on one page. Check that. One paragraph on one page. More accurately, one line in one paragraph on one page.

Decades later I still remember both words. Having knelt over the body of a just-shot cowboy, I was to lift my head and cry in desperation, "He's daid!" Not "He's dead," but "He's d-a-i-d, daid!"

Others might resent such a diminutive role. Not me. Were my words not essential? Someone has to announce a stage death. I poured my soul into that line. Why, had you looked closely enough, you might have spotted the tiny tear forming in the corner of my eye.

Rodgers and Hammerstein would have been proud. But, of course, they never knew. When they wrote their story, they weren't thinking of me. But when God wrote his, he was thinking of us all.

What's your part? Don't think for a moment that you don't have one. God "shaped each person in turn" (Psalm 33:15 MSG). "Each of us is an original" (Galatians 5:26 MSG). He cast you in his play, wrote you into his story. No assignment too small. No lines too brief. He has a definite direction for your life. Fulfill it and enjoy fulfillment. Play the part God prepared for you, and get ready for some great days. (From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Use your godly values to influence society for good. Become involved in local, state, or national government. Many mayors are eager to appoint local citizens to city boards. Call

place, who shall come with an army, enter the fortress of the king of the North, and deal with them and prevail. 8 And he shall also carry their gods captive to Egypt, with their princes[a] *and* their precious articles of silver and gold; and he shall continue *more* years than the king of the North.

9 "Also *the king of the North* shall come to the kingdom of the king of the South, but shall return to his own land. 10 However his sons shall stir up strife, and assemble a multitude of great forces; and *one* shall certainly come and overwhelm and pass through; then he shall return to his fortress and stir up strife.

11 "And the king of the South shall be moved with rage, and go out and fight with him, with the king of the North, who shall muster a great multitude; but the multitude shall be given into the hand of his *enemy.* 12 When he has taken away the multitude, his heart will be lifted up; and he will cast down tens of thousands, but he will not prevail. 13 For the king of the North will return and muster a multitude greater than the former, and shall certainly come at the end of some years with a great army and much equipment.

14 "Now in those times many shall rise up against the king of the South. Also, violent men[a] of your people shall exalt themselves in fulfillment of the vision, but they shall fall. 15 So the king of the North shall come and build a siege mound, and take a fortified city; and the forces[a] of the South shall not withstand *him.* Even his choice troops *shall have* no strength to resist. 16 But he who comes against him shall do according to his own will, and no one shall stand against him. He shall stand in the Glorious Land with destruction in his power.[a]

17 "He shall also set his face to enter with the strength of his whole kingdom, and upright ones[a] with him; thus shall he do. And he shall give him the daughter of women to destroy it; but she shall not stand *with him,* or be for him. 18 After this he shall turn his face to the coastlands, and shall take many. But a ruler shall bring the reproach against them to an end; and with the reproach removed, he shall turn back on him. 19 Then he shall turn his face toward the fortress of his own land; but he shall stumble and fall, and not be found.

20 "There shall arise in his place one who imposes taxes *on* the glorious kingdom; but within a few days he shall be destroyed, but not in anger or in battle. 21 And in his place shall arise a vile person, to whom they will not give the honor of royalty; but he shall come in peaceably, and seize the kingdom by intrigue. 22 With the force[a] of a flood they shall be swept away from before him and be broken, and also the prince of the covenant. 23 And after the league *is made* with him he shall act deceitfully, for he shall come up and become strong with a small *number of* people. 24 He shall enter peaceably, even into the richest places of the province; and he shall do *what* his fathers have not done, nor his forefathers: he shall disperse among them the plunder, spoil, and riches; and he shall devise his plans against the strongholds, but *only* for a time.

25 "He shall stir up his power and his courage against the king of

11:8 [a]Or *molded images* **11:14** [a]Or *robbers,* literally *sons of breakage* **11:15** [a]Literally *arms* **11:16** [a]Literally *hand* **11:17** [a]Or *bring equitable terms* **11:22** [a]Literally *arms*

the South with a great army. And the king of the South shall be stirred up to battle with a very great and mighty army; but he shall not stand, for they shall devise plans against him. 26 Yes, those who eat of the portion of his delicacies shall destroy him; his army shall be swept away, and many shall fall down slain. 27 Both these kings' hearts *shall be* bent on evil, and they shall speak lies at the same table; but it shall not prosper, for the end *will* still *be* at the appointed time. 28 While returning to his land with great riches, his heart shall be *moved* against the holy covenant; so he shall do *damage* and return to his own land.

The Northern King's Blasphemies

29 "At the appointed time he shall return and go toward the south; but it shall not be like the former or the latter. 30 For ships from Cyprus[a] shall come against him; therefore he shall be grieved, and return in rage against the holy covenant, and do *damage.*

"So he shall return and show regard for those who forsake the holy covenant. 31 And forces[a] shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily *sacrifices,* and place *there* the abomination of desolation. 32 Those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall corrupt with flattery; but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out *great exploits.* 33 And those of the people who understand shall instruct many; yet *for many* days they shall fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plundering. 34 Now when they fall, they shall be aided with a little help; but many shall join with them by intrigue. 35 And *some* of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify *them,* and make *them* white, *until* the time of the end; because *it is* still for the appointed time.

36 "Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the wrath has been accomplished; for what has been determined shall be done. 37 He shall regard neither the God[a] of his fathers nor the desire of women, nor regard any god; for he shall exalt himself above *them* all. 38 But in their place he shall honor a god of fortresses; and a god which his fathers did not know he shall honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and pleasant things. 39 Thus he shall act against the strongest fortresses with a foreign god, which he shall acknowledge, *and* advance *its* glory; and he shall cause them to rule over many, and divide the land for gain.

The Northern King's Conquests

40 "At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm *them,* and pass through. 41 He shall also enter the Glorious Land, and many *countries* shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom, Moab, and the prom-

11:30 [a]Hebrew *Kittim,* western lands, especially Cyprus **11:31** [a]Literally *arms*
11:37 [a]Or *gods*

today and find out how to become more involved.

EXPLORATION
God's Power and Love—Psalm 36; Lamentations 3:1–24; John 13:1; 1 John 3:1–3.

How does one receive Christ? By coming thirsty and drinking deeply. How, then, does one live in Christ? By coming thirsty and drinking deeply.

—Max Lucado (Come Thirsty)

inent people of Ammon. 42He shall stretch
out his hand against the countries, and the
land of Egypt shall not escape. 43He shall have
power over the treasures of gold and silver,
and over all the precious things of Egypt; also
the Libyans and Ethiopians *shall follow* at
his heels. 44But news from the east and the
north shall trouble him; therefore he shall go
out with great fury to destroy and annihilate
many. 45And he shall plant the tents of his
palace between the seas and the glorious holy
mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and
no one will help him.

Prophecy of the End Time

12 "At that time Michael shall stand up,
The great prince who stands *watch*
over the sons of your people;
And there shall be a time of trouble,
Such as never was since there was a
nation,
Even to that time.
And at that time your people shall be
delivered,
Every one who is found written in the
book.
2 And many of those who sleep in the dust
of the earth shall awake,
Some to everlasting life,
Some to shame *and* everlasting
contempt.
3 Those who are wise shall shine
Like the brightness of the firmament,
And those who turn many to
righteousness
Like the stars forever and ever.

4 "But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and
seal the book until the time of the end; many
shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall
increase."

5Then I, Daniel, looked; and there stood
two others, one on this riverbank and the
other on that riverbank. 6And *one* said to
the man clothed in linen, who *was* above the
waters of the river, "How long shall the fulfill-
ment of these wonders *be?*"

7Then I heard the man clothed in linen,
who *was* above the waters of the river, when
he held up his right hand and his left hand to
heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever,
that *it shall be* for a time, times, and half *a
time;* and when the power of the holy peo-
ple has been completely shattered, all these
things shall be finished.

8Although I heard, I did not understand.
Then I said, "My lord, what *shall be* the end of
these *things?*"

9And he said, "Go *your way,* Daniel, for the
words *are* closed up and sealed till the time of
the end. 10Many shall be purified, made white,
and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly;
and none of the wicked shall understand, but
the wise shall understand.

11 "And from the time *that* the daily *sacrifice*
is taken away, and the abomination of desola-
tion is set up, *there shall be* one thousand two
hundred and ninety days. 12Blessed *is* he who
waits, and comes to the one thousand three
hundred and thirty-five days.

13 "But you, go *your way* till the end; for you
shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at
the end of the days."

THE BOOK OF

HOSEA

INTRODUCTION

"It's only puppy love," adults used to say, commenting on your early love life. You wanted to shout back, "No! This is the real thing!" And it was real for you, the puppy. But soon you forgot that love and moved on to another.

A few years later in high school, you found another and were head-over-heels-in-love and going steady. You pledged devotion to each other—emotions and sexual attraction pulled you two together. And when the breakup occurred, you thought you would die . . . but you didn't. In fact, you survived to experience several other relationships, some pretty serious. Through each experience you learned a bit more about love—true love.

Today you chuckle at youthful infatuation and have to bite your tongue to avoid saying something about puppy love. Over the years, you have learned that real love—true love—is more than emotions, sex, fun, dating, and feeling good. Real love—lasting love—involves giving, serving, listening, and being there. At the foundation lies commitment: the solid decision to stick with that person through everything—no matter what.

The Book of Hosea is a love story involving a very unlikely couple: Hosea, the prophet of God, and Gomer, a prostitute. Hosea marries Gomer, even though he knows that she will be unfaithful to him. And when she is . . . well, I'll let you read for yourself.

This profound book, however, holds a deeper love story—God's love for His people, mirrored by this very human couple. As you read, look for traces of yourself in Gomer and her actions. And watch God, through Hosea, display true love.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: The prophet Hosea

Date Written: c. 715 B.C.

Key Themes:

- Just as there are consequences for a person who refuses to be faithful, there are consequences for a nation that refuses to be faithful.
- God will judge His people according to their actions.
- God will also redeem His people, though not without consequences.

Key Verse:

"My people have made up their minds to turn away from me. The prophets call them to turn to me, but none of them honors me at all" (Hosea 11:7).

Contents:

I. Hosea and His Unfaithful Wife 1:1—3:5

II. The Lord and His Unfaithful Nation 4:1—8:14

III. Israel's Judgment 9:1—10:15

IV. Israel's Restoration 11:1—14:9

Life Lessons

Hosea 1:1—3:5

SITUATION
Hosea illustrates God's enduring desire for His people. The first three chapters, Hosea's personal life story, symbolize God's relationship with Israel.

OBSERVATION
When we turn away from God, He does not wait for us to come back to Him. He pursues us and desires that we be reunited with Him.

INSPIRATION
God takes promises seriously and seals them dramatically. Consider the case of Hosea. Seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus, God commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute named Gomer. (If her profession didn't get you, her name would.) Still, Hosea obeyed. Gomer gave birth to three children, none of whom were Hosea's. Gomer abandoned Hosea for a life equivalent to a call girl at a strip club. Rock bottom came in the form of an auction pit, where men bid on her as a slave. Lesser men would have waved her off. Not Hosea. He jumped into the bidding and bought his wife and took her home again. Why? Here's Hosea's explanation.

"The Lord said to me again, 'Go, show your love to a woman loved by someone else, who has been unfaithful to you. In the same way the Lord loves the people of Israel, even though they worship other gods and love to eat the raisin cakes'" (Hosea 3:1, 2).

Need a picture of our promise-keeping God? Look at Hosea buying back

The word of the Lord that came to Hosea the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, *and* Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.

The Family of Hosea

2 When the Lord began to speak by Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea:

"Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry
And children of harlotry,
For the land has committed great harlotry
By departing from the Lord."

3 So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. 4 Then the Lord said to him:

"Call his name Jezreel,
For in a little *while*
I will avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu,
And bring an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.
5 It shall come to pass in that day
That I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel."

6 And she conceived again and bore a daughter. Then *God* said to him:

"Call her name Lo-Ruhamah,[a]
For I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel,
But I will utterly take them away.[b]
7 Yet I will have mercy on the house of Judah,
Will save them by the Lord their God,
And will not save them by bow,
Nor by sword or battle,
By horses or horsemen."

8 Now when she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. 9 Then *God* said:

"Call his name Lo-Ammi,[a]
For you *are* not My people,
And I will not be your *God*.

The Restoration of Israel

10 "Yet the number of the children of Israel
Shall be as the sand of the sea,
Which cannot be measured or numbered.
And it shall come to pass
In the place where it was said to them,
'You *are* not My people,'[a]

1:6 [a]Literally *No-Mercy* [b]Or *That I may forgive them at all* **1:9** [a]Literally *Not-My-People* **1:10** [a]Hebrew *lo-ammi* (compare verse 9)

There it shall be said to them,
'*You are* sons of the living God.'
11 Then the children of Judah and the children of Israel
Shall be gathered together,
And appoint for themselves one head;
And they shall come up out of the land,
For great *will be* the day of Jezreel!
2 Say to your brethren, 'My people,'[a]
And to your sisters, 'Mercy[b] *is shown.*'

God's Unfaithful People

2 "Bring charges against your mother, bring charges;
For she *is* not My wife, nor *am* I her Husband!
Let her put away her harlotries from her sight,
And her adulteries from between her breasts;
3 Lest I strip her naked
And expose her, as in the day she was born,
And make her like a wilderness,
And set her like a dry land,
And slay her with thirst.

4 "I will not have mercy on her children,
For they *are* the children of harlotry.
5 For their mother has played the harlot;
She who conceived them has behaved shamefully.
For she said, 'I will go after my lovers,
Who give *me* my bread and my water,
My wool and my linen,
My oil and my drink.'

6 "Therefore, behold,
I will hedge up your way with thorns,
And wall her in,
So that she cannot find her paths.
7 She will chase her lovers,
But not overtake them;
Yes, she will seek them, but not find *them.*
Then she will say,
'I will go and return to my first husband,
For then *it was* better for me than now.'
8 For she did not know
That I gave her grain, new wine, and oil,
And multiplied her silver and gold—
Which they prepared for Baal.

9 "Therefore I will return and take away
My grain in its time
And My new wine in its season,
And will take back My wool and My linen,
Given to cover her nakedness.

2:1 [a]Hebrew *Ammi* (compare 1:9, 10) [b]Hebrew *Ruhamah* (compare 1:6)

his wife. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Have you ever wandered from God the way Gomer did from Hosea? How did God initiate reconciliation with you? Did He convict you or use friends to encourage you? Thank God for His faithfulness to bring you back into fellowship with Him.

EXPLORATION
Endurance—Matthew 10:22; Mark 13:13; 2 Timothy 4:5–8; Hebrews 3:6; Revelation 14:12.

In an act that broke the heart of the Father, yet honored the holiness of heaven, sin-purging judgment flowed over the sinless Son of the ages. And heaven gave earth her finest gift.

—Max Lucado (Next Door Savior)

10 Now I will uncover her lewdness in the
sight of her lovers,
And no one shall deliver her from My
hand.
11 I will also cause all her mirth to cease,
Her feast days,
Her New Moons,
Her Sabbaths—
All her appointed feasts.

12 "And I will destroy her vines and her fig
trees,
Of which she has said,
'These *are* my wages that my lovers have
given me.'
So I will make them a forest,
And the beasts of the field shall eat them.
13 I will punish her
For the days of the Baals to which she
burned incense.
She decked herself with her earrings and
jewelry,
And went after her lovers;
But Me she forgot," says the Lord.

God's Mercy on His People

14 "Therefore, behold, I will allure her,
Will bring her into the wilderness,
And speak comfort to her.
15 I will give her her vineyards from there,
And the Valley of Achor as a door of hope;
She shall sing there,
As in the days of her youth,
As in the day when she came up from the
land of Egypt.

16 "And it shall be, in that day,"
Says the Lord,
"*That* you will call Me 'My Husband,'[a]
And no longer call Me 'My Master,'[b]
17 For I will take from her mouth the names
of the Baals,
And they shall be remembered by their
name no more.
18 In that day I will make a covenant for
them
With the beasts of the field,
With the birds of the air,
And *with* the creeping things of the
ground.
Bow and sword of battle I will shatter
from the earth,
To make them lie down safely.

19 "I will betroth you to Me forever;
Yes, I will betroth you to Me
In righteousness and justice,
In lovingkindness and mercy;
20 I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness,
And you shall know the Lord.

21 "It shall come to pass in that day
That I will answer," says the Lord;
"I will answer the heavens,
And they shall answer the earth.
22 The earth shall answer
With grain,
With new wine,
And with oil;
They shall answer Jezreel.[a]
23 Then I will sow her for Myself in the
earth,
And I will have mercy on *her who had* not
obtained mercy;[a]
Then I will say to *those who were* not My
people,[b]
'You *are* My people!'
And they shall say, *'You are* my God!' "

Israel Will Return to God

3 Then the Lord said to me, "Go again, love a woman *who is* loved by a lover[a] and is committing adultery, just like the love of the Lord for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love *the* raisin cakes *of the pagans.*"

2 So I bought her for myself for fifteen *shekels* of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley. 3 And I said to her, "You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man—so, too, *will* I *be* toward you."

4 For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or *sacred* pillar, without ephod or teraphim. 5 Afterward the children of Israel shall return

2:16 [a]Hebrew *Ishi* [b]Hebrew *Baali* **2:22** [a]Literally *God Will Sow* **2:23** [a]Hebrew *lo-ruhamah* [b]Hebrew *lo-ammi* **3:1** [a]Literally *friend* or *husband*

and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days.

God's Charge Against Israel

4 Hear the word of the Lord,
You children of Israel,
For the Lord *brings* a charge against the inhabitants of the land:

"There is no truth or mercy
Or knowledge of God in the land.
2 *By* swearing and lying,
Killing and stealing and committing adultery,
They break all restraint,
With bloodshed upon bloodshed.
3 Therefore the land will mourn;
And everyone who dwells there will waste away
With the beasts of the field
And the birds of the air;
Even the fish of the sea will be taken away.

4 "Now let no man contend, or rebuke another;
For your people *are* like those who contend with the priest.
5 Therefore you shall stumble in the day;
The prophet also shall stumble with you in the night;
And I will destroy your mother.
6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.
Because you have rejected knowledge,
I also will reject you from being priest for Me;
Because you have forgotten the law of your God,
I also will forget your children.

7 "The more they increased,
The more they sinned against Me;
I will change[a] their glory[b] into shame.
8 They eat up the sin of My people;
They set their heart on their iniquity.
9 And it shall be: like people, like priest.
So I will punish them for their ways,
And reward them for their deeds.
10 For they shall eat, but not have enough;
They shall commit harlotry, but not increase;
Because they have ceased obeying the Lord.

The Idolatry of Israel

11 "Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart.
12 My people ask counsel from their wooden *idols*,
And their staff informs them.

4:7 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Septuagint, and Vulgate; scribal tradition, Syriac, and Targum read *They will change.* [b]Following Masoretic Text, Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate; scribal tradition reads *My glory*.

Life Lessons

Hosea 4:1—5:15

SITUATION
Israel disobeyed. The national leaders had failed to teach God's law to the people. Many of God's chosen people sold their bodies in prostitution, which in turn led to national destruction.

OBSERVATION
People who have genuine faith and love for God will try to obey God.

INSPIRATION
God will not let you go. He has handcuffed himself to you in love. And He owns the only key. You need not win His love. You already have it. And since you can't win it, you can't lose it.

As evidence, consider exhibit A: the stubborn love of Hosea for Gomer. Contrary to the name, Gomer was a female, an irascible woman married to a remarkable Hosea. She had the fidelity code of a prairie jackrabbit, flirting and hopping from one lover to another. She ruined her life and shattered Hosea's heart.

Destitute, she was placed for sale in a slave market. Guess who stepped forward to buy her? Hosea, who'd never removed his wedding band. The way he treated her you would have thought she'd never loved another man. God uses this story, indeed orchestrated this drama, to illustrate His steadfast love for His fickle people. . . .

This is the love described in John 3:16. *Hasaq* is replaced with the Greek term *agape,* but the meaning is equally

powerful. "God so [*agapao*] the world . . ."

Agape love. Less an affection, more a decision; less a feeling, more an action. . . .

Stated more simply: junkyard wrecks and showroom models share equal space in God's garage. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Does obedience to God come easier—or harder—at certain times of the week? In certain places? Among certain people? In order to obey God faithfully, you may need to make changes in your heart and in your life. Make a change and declare a new start today.

EXPLORATION

Obedience—Genesis 2:16, 17; Exodus 8:25–29; Joshua 1:6–8; 1 Samuel 15:22; Matthew 23:23, 24; Luke 17:7–10.

For the spirit of harlotry has caused *them* to stray,
And they have played the harlot against their God.
13 They offer sacrifices on the mountaintops,
And burn incense on the hills,
Under oaks, poplars, and terebinths,
Because their shade *is* good.
Therefore your daughters commit harlotry,
And your brides commit adultery.

14 "I will not punish your daughters when they commit harlotry,
Nor your brides when they commit adultery;
For *the men* themselves go apart with harlots,
And offer sacrifices with a ritual harlot.[a]
Therefore people *who* do not understand will be trampled.

15 "Though you, Israel, play the harlot,
Let not Judah offend.
Do not come up to Gilgal,
Nor go up to Beth Aven,
Nor swear an oath, *saying,* 'As the Lord lives'—

16 "For Israel is stubborn
Like a stubborn calf;
Now the Lord will let them forage
Like a lamb in open country.

17 "Ephraim *is* joined to idols,
Let him alone.
18 Their drink is rebellion,
They commit harlotry continually.
Her rulers dearly[a] love dishonor.
19 The wind has wrapped her up in its wings,
And they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices.

Impending Judgment on Israel and Judah

5 "Hear this, O priests!
Take heed, O house of Israel!
Give ear, O house of the king!
For yours *is* the judgment,
Because you have been a snare to Mizpah
And a net spread on Tabor.
2 The revolters are deeply involved in slaughter,
Though I rebuke them all.
3 I know Ephraim,
And Israel is not hidden from Me;
For now, O Ephraim, you commit harlotry;
Israel is defiled.

4 "They do not direct their deeds

4:14 [a]Compare Deuteronomy 23:18 **4:18** [a]Hebrew is difficult; a Jewish tradition reads *Her rulers shamefully love, 'Give!'*

Toward turning to their God,
For the spirit of harlotry is in their midst,
And they do not know the Lord.
5 The pride of Israel testifies to his face;
Therefore Israel and Ephraim stumble in their iniquity;
Judah also stumbles with them.

6 "With their flocks and herds
They shall go to seek the Lord,
But they will not find *Him;*
He has withdrawn Himself from them.
7 They have dealt treacherously with the Lord,
For they have begotten pagan children.
Now a New Moon shall devour them and their heritage.

8 "Blow the ram's horn in Gibeah,
The trumpet in Ramah!
Cry aloud *at* Beth Aven,
'*Look* behind you, O Benjamin!'
9 Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke;
Among the tribes of Israel I make known what is sure.

10 "The princes of Judah are like those who remove a landmark;
I will pour out My wrath on them like water.
11 Ephraim is oppressed *and* broken in judgment,
Because he willingly walked by *human* precept.
12 Therefore I *will be* to Ephraim like a moth,
And to the house of Judah like rottenness.

13 "When Ephraim saw his sickness,
And Judah *saw* his wound,
Then Ephraim went to Assyria
And sent to King Jareb;
Yet he cannot cure you,
Nor heal you of your wound.
14 For I *will be* like a lion to Ephraim,
And like a young lion to the house of Judah.
I, *even* I, will tear *them* and go away;
I will take *them* away, and no one shall rescue.
15 I will return again to My place
Till they acknowledge their offense.
Then they will seek My face;
In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me."

A Call to Repentance

6 Come, and let us return to the Lord;
For He has torn, but He will heal us;
He has stricken, but He will bind us up.
2 After two days He will revive us;
On the third day He will raise us up,
That we may live in His sight.
3 Let us know,

Life Lessons

Hosea 6:1—10:15

SITUATION
God called Hosea to be a living parable to Israel. God loved His people despite their unfaithfulness.

OBSERVATION
God wants us to be faithful to Him. It hurts Him to see us wander away.

INSPIRATION
Don't build your house on a career. Don't build your house on a thrill. Don't build your house on a talent. Don't build your house on one solitary earthly relationship. Don't pursue things that don't last. Build your house on the only thing that can last: faith.

Do you have faith? If you have faith, then you have what it takes to tackle your problems before they tackle you. If you have that confident hope, then you will know how to handle whatever life brings you.

One thing no one can take away from you is your faith. This world can and may take everything you have. But no one can take away your faith. Grab that faith; clutch tightly that anchor of the soul.

Make your faith an independent dogged faith, firmly planted in God's sacrificed Son on the hill of Calvary. It can never be taken away from you. (From *The Inspirational Bible,* "Faith")

APPLICATION
Write down one situation in which your faith is being tested. Pray about this situation and ask God to strengthen your faith in this specific area. Thank God for how He is going to help

your faith grow through this circumstance.

EXPLORATION
Faithfulness—Psalm 31:23; Habakkuk 2:4; 1 Corinthians 16:13; Galatians 5:22; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Timothy 2:2; Revelation 2:10.

Let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord.
His going forth is established as the morning;
He will come to us like the rain,
Like the latter *and* former rain to the earth.

Impenitence of Israel and Judah

4 "O Ephraim, what shall I do to you?
O Judah, what shall I do to you?
For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud,
And like the early dew it goes away.
5 Therefore I have hewn *them* by the prophets,
I have slain them by the words of My mouth;
And your judgments *are like* light *that* goes forth.
6 For I desire mercy and not sacrifice,
And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

7 "But like men[a] they transgressed the covenant;
There they dealt treacherously with Me.
8 Gilead *is* a city of evildoers
And defiled with blood.
9 As bands of robbers lie in wait for a man,
So the company of priests murder on the way to Shechem;
Surely they commit lewdness.
10 I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel:
There *is* the harlotry of Ephraim;
Israel is defiled.
11 Also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed for you,
When I return the captives of My people.

7 "When I would have healed Israel,
Then the iniquity of Ephraim was uncovered,
And the wickedness of Samaria.
For they have committed fraud;
A thief comes in;
A band of robbers takes spoil outside.
2 They do not consider in their hearts
That I remember all their wickedness;
Now their own deeds have surrounded them;
They are before My face.
3 They make a king glad with their wickedness,
And princes with their lies.

4 "They *are* all adulterers.
Like an oven heated by a baker—
He ceases stirring *the fire* after kneading the dough,
Until it is leavened.
5 In the day of our king
Princes have made *him* sick, inflamed with wine;
He stretched out his hand with scoffers.
6 They prepare their heart like an oven,

6:7 [a]Or *like Adam*

While they lie in wait;
Their baker[a] sleeps all night;
In the morning it burns like a flaming fire.
7 They are all hot, like an oven,
And have devoured their judges;
All their kings have fallen.
None among them calls upon Me.

8 "Ephraim has mixed himself among the peoples;
Ephraim is a cake unturned.
9 Aliens have devoured his strength,
But he does not know *it;*
Yes, gray hairs are here and there on him,
Yet he does not know *it.*
10 And the pride of Israel testifies to his face,
But they do not return to the Lord their God,
Nor seek Him for all this.

Futile Reliance on the Nations

11 "Ephraim also is like a silly dove, without sense—
They call to Egypt,
They go to Assyria.
12 Wherever they go, I will spread My net on them;
I will bring them down like birds of the air;
I will chastise them
According to what their congregation has heard.

13 "Woe to them, for they have fled from Me!
Destruction to them,
Because they have transgressed against Me!
Though I redeemed them,
Yet they have spoken lies against Me.
14 They did not cry out to Me with their heart
When they wailed upon their beds.

"They assemble together for[a] grain and new wine,
They rebel against Me;[b]
15 Though I disciplined *and* strengthened their arms,
Yet they devise evil against Me;
16 They return, *but* not to the Most High;[a]
They are like a treacherous bow.
Their princes shall fall by the sword
For the cursings of their tongue.
This *shall be* their derision in the land of Egypt.

The Apostasy of Israel

8 "*Set* the trumpet[a] to your mouth!
He shall come like an eagle against the house of the Lord,
Because they have transgressed My covenant
And rebelled against My law.
2 Israel will cry to Me,
'My God, we know You!'
3 Israel has rejected the good;
The enemy will pursue him.

4 "They set up kings, but not by Me;
They made princes, but I did not acknowledge *them.*
From their silver and gold
They made idols for themselves—
That they might be cut off.
5 Your calf is rejected, O Samaria!
My anger is aroused against them—
How long until they attain to innocence?
6 For from Israel *is* even this:
A workman made it, and it *is* not God;
But the calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces.

7 "They sow the wind,
And reap the whirlwind.
The stalk has no bud;
It shall never produce meal.
If it should produce,
Aliens would swallow it up.
8 Israel is swallowed up;
Now they are among the Gentiles
Like a vessel in which *is* no pleasure.
9 For they have gone up to Assyria,
Like a wild donkey alone by itself;
Ephraim has hired lovers.

7:6 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Syriac and Targum read *Their anger;* Septuagint reads *Ephraim.* **7:14** [a]Following Masoretic Text and Targum; Vulgate reads *thought upon;* Septuagint reads *slashed themselves for* (compare 1 Kings 18:28). [b]Following Masoretic Text, Syriac, and Targum; Septuagint omits *They rebel against Me;* Vulgate reads *They departed from Me.* **7:16** [a]Or *upward* **8:1** [a]Hebrew *shophar,* ram's horn

10 Yes, though they have hired among the nations,
Now I will gather them;
And they shall sorrow a little,[a]
Because of the burden[b] of the king of princes.

11 "Because Ephraim has made many altars for sin,
They have become for him altars for sinning.
12 I have written for him the great things of My law,
But they were considered a strange thing.
13 *For* the sacrifices of My offerings they sacrifice flesh and eat *it,*
But the Lord does not accept them.
Now He will remember their iniquity and punish their sins.
They shall return to Egypt.

14 "For Israel has forgotten his Maker,
And has built temples;[a]
Judah also has multiplied fortified cities;
But I will send fire upon his cities,
And it shall devour his palaces."

Judgment of Israel's Sin

9 Do not rejoice, O Israel, with joy like *other* peoples,
For you have played the harlot against your God.
You have made love *for* hire on every threshing floor.
2 The threshing floor and the winepress
Shall not feed them,
And the new wine shall fail in her.

3 They shall not dwell in the Lord's land,
But Ephraim shall return to Egypt,
And shall eat unclean *things* in Assyria.
4 They shall not offer wine *offerings* to the Lord,
Nor shall their sacrifices be pleasing to Him.
It shall be like bread of mourners to them;
All who eat it shall be defiled.
For their bread *shall be* for their *own* life;
It shall not come into the house of the Lord.

5 What will you do in the appointed day,
And in the day of the feast of the Lord?
6 For indeed they are gone because of destruction.
Egypt shall gather them up;
Memphis shall bury them.
Nettles shall possess their valuables of silver;
Thorns *shall be* in their tents.

7 The days of punishment have come;
The days of recompense have come.
Israel knows!
The prophet *is* a fool,
The spiritual man *is* insane,
Because of the greatness of your iniquity and great enmity.
8 The watchman of Ephraim *is* with my God;
But the prophet *is* a fowler's[a] snare in all his ways—
Enmity in the house of his God.
9 They are deeply corrupted,
As in the days of Gibeah.
He will remember their iniquity;
He will punish their sins.

10 "I found Israel
Like grapes in the wilderness;
I saw your fathers
As the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season.
But they went to Baal Peor,
And separated themselves *to that* shame;
They became an abomination like the thing they loved.
11 *As for* Ephraim, their glory shall fly away like a bird—
No birth, no pregnancy, and no conception!
12 Though they bring up their children,
Yet I will bereave them to the last man.
Yes, woe to them when I depart from them!
13 Just as I saw Ephraim like Tyre, planted in a pleasant place,
So Ephraim will bring out his children to the murderer."

14 Give them, O Lord—
What will You give?

8:10 [a]Or *begin to diminish* [b]Or *oracle* **8:14** [a]Or *palaces* **9:8** [a]That is, one who catches birds in a trap or snare

Give them a miscarrying womb
And dry breasts!

15 "All their wickedness *is* in Gilgal,
For there I hated them.
Because of the evil of their deeds
I will drive them from My house;
I will love them no more.
All their princes *are* rebellious.
16 Ephraim is stricken,
Their root is dried up;
They shall bear no fruit.
Yes, were they to bear children,
I would kill the darlings of their womb."

17 My God will cast them away,
Because they did not obey Him;
And they shall be wanderers among the nations.

Israel's Sin and Captivity

10 Israel empties *his* vine;
He brings forth fruit for himself.
According to the multitude of his fruit
He has increased the altars;
According to the bounty of his land
They have embellished *his sacred* pillars.
2 Their heart is divided;
Now they are held guilty.
He will break down their altars;
He will ruin their *sacred* pillars.

3 For now they say,
"We have no king,
Because we did not fear the Lord.
And as for a king, what would he do for us?"
4 They have spoken words,
Swearing falsely in making a covenant.
Thus judgment springs up like hemlock in the furrows of the field.

5 The inhabitants of Samaria fear
Because of the calf[a] of Beth Aven.
For its people mourn for it,
And its priests shriek for it—
Because its glory has departed from it.
6 *The idol* also shall be carried to Assyria
As a present for King Jareb.
Ephraim shall receive shame,
And Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel.

7 *As for* Samaria, her king is cut off
Like a twig on the water.
8 Also the high places of Aven, the sin of Israel,
Shall be destroyed.
The thorn and thistle shall grow on their altars;
They shall say to the mountains, "Cover us!"
And to the hills, "Fall on us!"

9 "O Israel, you have sinned from the days of Gibeah;
There they stood.
The battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity[a]
Did not overtake them.
10 When *it is* My desire, I will chasten them.
Peoples shall be gathered against them
When I bind them for their two transgressions.[a]
11 Ephraim *is* a trained heifer
That loves to thresh *grain;*
But I harnessed her fair neck,
I will make Ephraim pull *a plow.*
Judah shall plow;
Jacob shall break his clods."

12 Sow for yourselves righteousness;
Reap in mercy;
Break up your fallow ground,
For *it is* time to seek the Lord,
Till He comes and rains righteousness on you.

13 You have plowed wickedness;
You have reaped iniquity.
You have eaten the fruit of lies,
Because you trusted in your own way,
In the multitude of your mighty men.
14 Therefore tumult shall arise among your people,
And all your fortresses shall be plundered
As Shalman plundered Beth Arbel in the day of battle—

10:5 [a]Literally *calves* **10:9** [a]So read many Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text reads *unruliness.* **10:10** [a]Or *in their two habitations*

A mother dashed in pieces upon *her* children.
15 Thus it shall be done to you, O Bethel,
Because of your great wickedness.
At dawn the king of Israel
Shall be cut off utterly.

God's Continuing Love for Israel

11 "When Israel *was* a child, I loved him,
And out of Egypt I called My son.
2 *As* they called them,[a]
So they went from them;[b]
They sacrificed to the Baals,
And burned incense to carved images.

3 "I taught Ephraim to walk,
Taking them by their arms;[a]
But they did not know that I healed them.
4 I drew them with gentle cords,[a]
With bands of love,
And I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck.[b]
I stooped *and* fed them.

5 "He shall not return to the land of Egypt;
But the Assyrian shall be his king,
Because they refused to repent.
6 And the sword shall slash in his cities,
Devour his districts,
And consume *them,*
Because of their own counsels.
7 My people are bent on backsliding from Me.
Though they call to the Most High,[a]
None at all exalt *Him.*

8 "How can I give you up, Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, Israel?
How can I make you like Admah?
How can I set you like Zeboiim?
My heart churns within Me;
My sympathy is stirred.
9 I will not execute the fierceness of My anger;
I will not again destroy Ephraim.
For I *am* God, and not man,
The Holy One in your midst;
And I will not come with terror.[a]

10 "They shall walk after the Lord.
He will roar like a lion.

11:2 [a]Following Masoretic Text and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *Just as I called them;* Targum interprets as *I sent prophets to a thousand of them.* [b]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *from My face.* **11:3** [a]Some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *My arms.* **11:4** [a]Literally *cords of a man* [b]Literally *jaws* **11:7** [a]Or *upward* **11:9** [a]Or *I will not enter a city*

Life Lessons

Hosea 11:1—14:9

SITUATION
Although Israel abandoned God, God still loved the nation. Through anger and punishment, God desired to show favor to Israel.

OBSERVATION
Although at times we tend to be ungrateful, faithless, and loveless toward God, He remains devoted to us.

INSPIRATION
Farmers in ancient Israel used to train an inexperienced ox by yoking it to an experienced one with a wooden harness. The straps around the older animal were tightly drawn. He carried the load. But the yoke around the younger animal was loose. He walked alongside the more mature ox, but his burden was light. [Read Matthew 11:30.] In this verse Jesus is saying, "I walk alongside you. We are yoked together. But I pull the weight and carry the burden."

I wonder, how many burdens is Jesus carrying for us that we know nothing about? We're aware of some. He carries our sin. He carries our shame. He carries our eternal debt. But are there others? Has He lifted fears before we felt them? Has He carried our confusion so we wouldn't have to? Those times when we have been surprised by our own sense of peace? Could it be that Jesus has lifted our anxiety onto His shoulders and placed a yoke of kindness on ours?

And how often do we thank Him for His kindness? Not often enough. But does our ingratitude restrict His kindness? No. "He is kind

When He roars,
Then *His* sons shall come trembling from the west;
11 They shall come trembling like a bird from Egypt,
Like a dove from the land of Assyria.
And I will let them dwell in their houses,"
Says the Lord.

God's Charge Against Ephraim

12 "Ephraim has encircled Me with lies,
And the house of Israel with deceit;
But Judah still walks with God,
Even with the Holy One[a] *who is* faithful.

12 "Ephraim feeds on the wind,
And pursues the east wind;
He daily increases lies and desolation.
Also they make a covenant with the Assyrians,
And oil is carried to Egypt.

2 "The Lord also *brings* a charge against Judah,
And will punish Jacob according to his ways;
According to his deeds He will recompense him.
3 He took his brother by the heel in the womb,
And in his strength he struggled with God.[a]
4 Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed;
He wept, and sought favor from Him.
He found Him *in* Bethel,
And there He spoke to us—
5 That is, the Lord God of hosts.
The Lord *is* His memorable name.
6 So you, by *the help of* your God, return;
Observe mercy and justice,
And wait on your God continually.

7 "A cunning Canaanite!
Deceitful scales *are* in his hand;
He loves to oppress.
8 And Ephraim said,
'Surely I have become rich,
I have found wealth for myself;
In all my labors
They shall find in me no iniquity that *is* sin.'

9 "But I *am* the Lord your God,
Ever since the land of Egypt;
I will again make you dwell in tents,
As in the days of the appointed feast.
10 I have also spoken by the prophets,
And have multiplied visions;
I have given symbols through the witness of the prophets."

11:12 [a]Or *holy ones* **12:3** [a]Compare Genesis 32:28

to the unthankful and evil" (Luke 6:35).

In the original language, the word for "kindness" carries an added idea the English word does not. Chiefly it refers to an act of grace. But it also refers to a deed or person who is "useful, serviceable, adapted to its purpose." "Kindness" was even employed to describe food that was tasty as well as healthy. Sounds odd to our ears. "Hey, honey, what a great meal. The salad is especially *kind* tonight."

But the usage makes sense. Isn't kindness good *and* good for you? Pleasant *and* practical? Kindness not only says good morning, kindness makes the coffee. Again, doesn't Jesus fit this description? He not only attended the wedding, he rescued it. He not only healed the woman, He honored her. He did more than call Zacchaeus by name; He entered His house.

Hasn't He acted similarly with you? Hasn't He helped you out of a few jams? Hasn't He come into your house? And has there ever been a time when He was too busy to listen to your story? The Bible says, "Whoever is wise will observe these things, and they will understand the lovingkindness of the Lord" [Psalm 107:43]. Hasn't God been kind—pleasantly useful—to you? And since God has been so kind to you (you know what I am about to say), can't you be kind to others?

Paul's question is for all of us: "Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" [Romans 2:4, NASB]. Repentance from what? Certainly from ungodliness, rebellion, and

sin. But can't we equally state that God's kindness leads to repentance from unkindness? (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Take time right now to thank God for His incredible mercy even when you are ungrateful. Prayerfully list the ways God has shown mercy and kindness to you recently. Think of at least two ways you can extend God's kindness to others.

EXPLORATION

God's Mercy—2 Samuel 24:14; Nehemiah 9:31; Psalm 25:6; 57:1; Isaiah 63:9; Ephesians 2:4–7; Hebrews 4:16; 1 Peter 1:3.

11 Though Gilead *has* idols—
Surely they are vanity—
Though they sacrifice bulls in Gilgal,
Indeed their altars *shall be* heaps in the furrows of the field.

12 Jacob fled to the country of Syria;
Israel served for a spouse,
And for a wife he tended *sheep.*
13 By a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt,
And by a prophet he was preserved.
14 Ephraim provoked *Him* to anger most bitterly;
Therefore his Lord will leave the guilt of his bloodshed upon him,
And return his reproach upon him.

Relentless Judgment on Israel

13 When Ephraim spoke, trembling,
He exalted *himself* in Israel;
But when he offended through Baal *worship,* he died.
2 Now they sin more and more,
And have made for themselves molded images,
Idols of their silver, according to their skill;
All of it *is* the work of craftsmen.
They say of them,
"Let the men who sacrifice[a] kiss the calves!"
3 Therefore they shall be like the morning cloud
And like the early dew that passes away,
Like chaff blown off from a threshing floor
And like smoke from a chimney.

4 "Yet I *am* the Lord your God
Ever since the land of Egypt,
And you shall know no God but Me;
For *there is* no savior besides Me.
5 I knew you in the wilderness,
In the land of great drought.
6 When they had pasture, they were filled;
They were filled and their heart was exalted;
Therefore they forgot Me.

7 "So I will be to them like a lion;
Like a leopard by the road I will lurk;
8 I will meet them like a bear deprived *of her cubs;*
I will tear open their rib cage,
And there I will devour them like a lion.
The wild beast shall tear them.

9 "O Israel, you are destroyed,[a]
But your help[b] *is* from Me.

13:2 [a]Or *those who offer human sacrifice* **13:9** [a]Literally *it* or *he destroyed you* [b]Literally *in your help*

10 I will be your King;[a]
Where *is any other,*
That he may save you in all your cities?
And your judges to whom you said,
'Give me a king and princes'?
11 I gave you a king in My anger,
And took *him* away in My wrath.

12 "The iniquity of Ephraim *is* bound up;
His sin *is* stored up.
13 The sorrows of a woman in childbirth
shall come upon him.
He *is* an unwise son,
For he should not stay long where
children are born.

14 "I will ransom them from the power of the
grave;[a]
I will redeem them from death.
O Death, I will be your plagues![b]
O Grave,[c] I will be your destruction![d]
Pity is hidden from My eyes."

15 Though he is fruitful among *his* brethren,
An east wind shall come;
The wind of the Lord shall come up from
the wilderness.
Then his spring shall become dry,
And his fountain shall be dried up.
He shall plunder the treasury of every
desirable prize.
16 Samaria is held guilty,[a]
For she has rebelled against her God.
They shall fall by the sword,
Their infants shall be dashed in pieces,
And their women with child ripped open.

Israel Restored at Last

14 O Israel, return to the Lord your God,
For you have stumbled because of
your iniquity;
2 Take words with you,
And return to the Lord.
Say to Him,
"Take away all iniquity;
Receive *us* graciously,
For we will offer the sacrifices[a] of our lips.
3 Assyria shall not save us,
We will not ride on horses,
Nor will we say anymore to the work of
our hands, '*You are* our gods.'
For in You the fatherless finds mercy."

4 "I will heal their backsliding,
I will love them freely,
For My anger has turned away from him.
5 I will be like the dew to Israel;
He shall grow like the lily,
And lengthen his roots like Lebanon.
6 His branches shall spread;
His beauty shall be like an olive tree,
And his fragrance like Lebanon.
7 Those who dwell under his shadow shall
return;
They shall be revived *like* grain,
And grow like a vine.
Their scent[a] *shall be* like the wine of
Lebanon.

8 "Ephraim *shall say,* 'What have I to do
anymore with idols?'
I have heard and observed him.
I *am* like a green cypress tree;
Your fruit is found in Me."

9 Who *is* wise?
Let him understand these things.
Who is prudent?
Let him know them.
For the ways of the Lord *are* right;
The righteous walk in them,
But transgressors stumble in them.

13:10 [a]Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate read *Where is your king?* **13:14** [a]Or *Sheol* [b]Septuagint reads *where is your punishment?* [c]Or *Sheol* [d]Septuagint reads *where is your sting?* **13:16** [a]Septuagint reads *shall be disfigured* **14:2** [a]Literally *bull calves;* Septuagint reads *fruit.* **14:7** [a]Literally *remembrance*

THE BOOK OF

JOEL

INTRODUCTION

"Hey!"

"Listen up!" "I'm talking to you!"

What gets your attention? For some, a touch on the arm. For others, a shout from the street. But some people seem oblivious to everything and everyone.

Distractions, daydreams, worries, and concerns can consume us. They make it difficult to hear or think about anything else. Sometimes we need a wake-up call, something to grab our attention and put us on the right track.

The people of Judah needed such a call.

They were coasting.

Prosperous and complacent, they had become self-centered. Taking God for granted, they had turned to idols. So, through Joel, God sends a wake-up call, a divine attention-getter, to shake them out of their lethargy and sin. Joel predicts a devastating plague of locusts that will destroy the land unless the people repent and turn back to God.

God does what it takes to get our attention. Does He have yours?

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: The prophet Joel

Date Written: 850–750 B.C.

Key Themes:

- God will use difficulties if necessary (in this case locusts) to bring His people closer to Him.
- Until the final judgment there is always hope for God's mercy through the Holy Spirit.
- The coming of the Messiah will change the status of the world as we know it.
- There is a better world in store.

Key Verse:

"And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions" (Joel 2:28).

Contents:

I. The Locust Plague 1:1–20

II. Judgment and Blessing on God's People 2:1–27

III. The Final Reckoning 2:28—3:21

The word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel.

The Land Laid Waste

2 Hear this, you elders,
And give ear, all you inhabitants of the land!
Has *anything like* this happened in your days,
Or even in the days of your fathers?
3 Tell your children about it,
Let your children *tell* their children,
And their children another generation.

4 What the chewing locust[a] left, the swarming locust has eaten;
What the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten;
And what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten.

5 Awake, you drunkards, and weep;
And wail, all you drinkers of wine,
Because of the new wine,
For it has been cut off from your mouth.
6 For a nation has come up against My land,
Strong, and without number;
His teeth *are* the teeth of a lion,
And he has the fangs of a fierce lion.
7 He has laid waste My vine,
And ruined My fig tree;
He has stripped it bare and thrown *it* away;
Its branches are made white.

8 Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth
For the husband of her youth.
9 The grain offering and the drink offering
Have been cut off from the house of the Lord;
The priests mourn, who minister to the Lord.
10 The field is wasted,
The land mourns;
For the grain is ruined,
The new wine is dried up,
The oil fails.

11 Be ashamed, you farmers,
Wail, you vinedressers,
For the wheat and the barley;
Because the harvest of the field has perished.
12 The vine has dried up,
And the fig tree has withered;
The pomegranate tree,
The palm tree also,
And the apple tree—

1:4 [a]Exact identity of these locusts is unknown.

Life LESSONS

Joel 1:1—3:21

SITUATION

The prophet Joel cautioned Israel about God's impending judgment for its spiritual complacency and religious neglect. When the people prospered, they abandoned God or minimized the importance of Him in their lives.

OBSERVATION

God always gives us a chance to repent before He inflicts discipline. Like a loving parent, God's purpose is not to punish but to correct and nurture.

INSPIRATION

I'd seen that silly light burning on the car panel for days. And for days I'd ignored it. Too busy. "I'll take the car to the mechanic tomorrow." But tomorrow never became today. The light continued to burn, vainly waving red flags before my blind eyes. Something was wrong, but I had too many things to do.

"Next time I'll pay attention," I mumbled to myself. The flashlight I was waving must have looked like a dancing firefly to the oncoming traffic. The Situation was not pretty: a cold winter night, stranded on a lonely highway in rural Brazil with my daughter and pregnant wife.

My breath became smoke as I stood on the shoulder flagging cars. I promised myself I would never ignore a warning again.

Warnings. Red lights in life that signal us of impending danger. They exist in all parts of life. Sirens scream as a marriage starts to sour; alarms blare when a faith weakens; flares

go up to alert us of morals being compromised.

They manifest themselves in a variety of ways: guilt, depression, rationalizations. A friend might confront. A Scripture might sting. A burden might prove too heavy. Regardless of how they may arrive, warnings come with the same purpose: To alert. To wake up.

Unfortunately, they are not always heeded. All of us have learned to cover our ears and shield our eyes at the right moment. It's amazing how adept we can be at keeping them out. Warnings can be as blunt as a sledgehammer and we still turn our heads and whistle them away. We have just enough of the rascal in us to believe we are the proverbial exception to the rule.

Are you close to the falls? Are your senses numb? Are your eyes trained to turn and roll when they should pause and observe?

Then maybe you need to repair your warning detector.

Divine warnings. All inspired by God and tested by time. They're yours to do with as you wish. They are red lights on your dashboard. Heed them and safety is yours to enjoy. Ignore them and I'll be looking for you on the side of the road.

(From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What warning signs should alert you to trouble? What attitude or action have you failed to confront? Is it hard to persevere? Yes! But it is so important.

EXPLORATION

Warnings—Deuteronomy 27:15–26; Ezekiel 3:18, 19; 1 Timothy 4:1–6.

All the trees of the field are withered;
Surely joy has withered away from the sons of men.

Mourning for the Land

13 Gird yourselves and lament, you priests;
Wail, you who minister before the altar;
Come, lie all night in sackcloth,
You who minister to my God;
For the grain offering and the drink offering
Are withheld from the house of your God.
14 Consecrate a fast,
Call a sacred assembly;
Gather the elders
And all the inhabitants of the land
Into the house of the Lord your God,
And cry out to the Lord.

15 Alas for the day!
For the day of the Lord *is* at hand;
It shall come as destruction from the Almighty.
16 Is not the food cut off before our eyes,
Joy and gladness from the house of our God?
17 The seed shrivels under the clods,
Storehouses are in shambles;
Barns are broken down,
For the grain has withered.
18 How the animals groan!
The herds of cattle are restless,
Because they have no pasture;
Even the flocks of sheep suffer punishment.[a]

19 O Lord, to You I cry out;
For fire has devoured the open pastures,
And a flame has burned all the trees of the field.
20 The beasts of the field also cry out to You,
For the water brooks are dried up,
And fire has devoured the open pastures.

The Day of the Lord

2 Blow the trumpet in Zion,
And sound an alarm in My holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble;
For the day of the Lord is coming,
For it is at hand:
2 A day of darkness and gloominess,
A day of clouds and thick darkness,
Like the morning *clouds* spread over the mountains.
A people *come,* great and strong,
The like of whom has never been;

1:18 [a]Septuagint and Vulgate read *are made desolate.*

Nor will there ever be any *such* after them,
Even for many successive generations.

3 A fire devours before them,
And behind them a flame burns;
The land *is* like the Garden of Eden before them,
And behind them a desolate wilderness;
Surely nothing shall escape them.
4 Their appearance is like the appearance of horses;
And like swift steeds, so they run.
5 With a noise like chariots
Over mountaintops they leap,
Like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble,
Like a strong people set in battle array.

6 Before them the people writhe in pain;
All faces are drained of color.[a]
7 They run like mighty men,
They climb the wall like men of war;
Every one marches in formation,
And they do not break ranks.
8 They do not push one another;
Every one marches in his own column.[a]
Though they lunge between the weapons,
They are not cut down.[b]
9 They run to and fro in the city,
They run on the wall;
They climb into the houses,
They enter at the windows like a thief.

10 The earth quakes before them,
The heavens tremble;
The sun and moon grow dark,
And the stars diminish their brightness.
11 The Lord gives voice before His army,
For His camp is very great;
For strong *is the One* who executes His word.
For the day of the Lord *is* great and very terrible;
Who can endure it?

A Call to Repentance

12 "Now, therefore," says the Lord,
"Turn to Me with all your heart,
With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning."
13 So rend your heart, and not your garments;
Return to the Lord your God,
For He *is* gracious and merciful,
Slow to anger, and of great kindness;
And He relents from doing harm.
14 Who knows *if* He will turn and relent,
And leave a blessing behind Him—
A grain offering and a drink offering
For the Lord your God?

15 Blow the trumpet in Zion,
Consecrate a fast,
Call a sacred assembly;
16 Gather the people,
Sanctify the congregation,
Assemble the elders,
Gather the children and nursing babes;
Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber,
And the bride from her dressing room.
17 Let the priests, who minister to the Lord,
Weep between the porch and the altar;
Let them say, "Spare Your people, O Lord,
And do not give Your heritage to reproach,
That the nations should rule over them.
Why should they say among the peoples,
'Where *is* their God?'"

The Land Refreshed

18 Then the Lord will be zealous for His land,
And pity His people.
19 The Lord will answer and say to His people,
"Behold, I will send you grain and new wine and oil,
And you will be satisfied by them;
I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations.

20 "But I will remove far from you the northern *army,*
And will drive him away into a barren and desolate land,

2:6 [a]Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate read *gather blackness.* **2:8** [a]Literally *his own highway* [b]That is, they are not halted by losses

With his face toward the eastern sea
And his back toward the western sea;
His stench will come up,
And his foul odor will rise,
Because he has done monstrous things."

21 Fear not, O land;
Be glad and rejoice,
For the Lord has done marvelous things!
22 Do not be afraid, you beasts of the field;
For the open pastures are springing up,
And the tree bears its fruit;
The fig tree and the vine yield their strength.
23 Be glad then, you children of Zion,
And rejoice in the Lord your God;
For He has given you the former rain faithfully,[a]
And He will cause the rain to come down for you—
The former rain,
And the latter rain in the first *month*.
24 The threshing floors shall be full of wheat,
And the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil.

25 "So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten,
The crawling locust,
The consuming locust,
And the chewing locust,[a]
My great army which I sent among you.
26 You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,
And praise the name of the Lord your God,
Who has dealt wondrously with you;
And My people shall never be put to shame.
27 Then you shall know that I *am* in the midst of Israel:
I *am* the Lord your God
And there is no other.
My people shall never be put to shame.

God's Spirit Poured Out

28 "And it shall come to pass afterward
That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your old men shall dream dreams,
Your young men shall see visions.
29 And also on *My* menservants and on *My* maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

30 "And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth:
Blood and fire and pillars of smoke.
31 The sun shall be turned into darkness,
And the moon into blood,
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.
32 And it shall come to pass
That whoever calls on the name of the Lord
Shall be saved.
For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance,
As the Lord has said,
Among the remnant whom the Lord calls.

God Judges the Nations

3 "For behold, in those days and at that time,
When I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem,
2 I will also gather all nations,
And bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat;
And I will enter into judgment with them there
On account of My people, My heritage Israel,
Whom they have scattered among the nations;
They have also divided up My land.
3 They have cast lots for My people,
Have given a boy *as payment* for a harlot,
And sold a girl for wine, that they may drink.

4 "Indeed, what have you to do with Me,
O Tyre and Sidon, and all the coasts of Philistia?
Will you retaliate against Me?
But if you retaliate against Me,
Swiftly and speedily I will return your retaliation upon your own head;
5 Because you have taken My silver and My gold,

2:23 [a]Or *the teacher of righteousness* **2:25** [a]Compare 1:4

And have carried into your temples My
prized possessions.
6 Also the people of Judah and the people
of Jerusalem
You have sold to the Greeks,
That you may remove them far from their
borders.

7 "Behold, I will raise them
Out of the place to which you have sold
them,
And will return your retaliation upon
your own head.
8 I will sell your sons and your daughters
Into the hand of the people of Judah,
And they will sell them to the Sabeans,[a]
To a people far off;
For the Lord has spoken."

9 Proclaim this among the nations:
"Prepare for war!
Wake up the mighty men,
Let all the men of war draw near,
Let them come up.
10 Beat your plowshares into swords
And your pruning hooks into spears;
Let the weak say, 'I *am* strong.'"
11 Assemble and come, all you nations,
And gather together all around.
Cause Your mighty ones to go down there,
O Lord.

12 "Let the nations be wakened, and come up
to the Valley of Jehoshaphat;
For there I will sit to judge all the
surrounding nations.
13 Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.
Come, go down;
For the winepress is full,
The vats overflow—
For their wickedness *is* great."

14 Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of
decision!
For the day of the Lord *is* near in the
valley of decision.
15 The sun and moon will grow dark,
And the stars will diminish their
brightness.
16 The Lord also will roar from Zion,
And utter His voice from Jerusalem;
The heavens and earth will shake;
But the Lord will be a shelter for His
people,
And the strength of the children of
Israel.

17 "So you shall know that I *am* the Lord your
God,
Dwelling in Zion My holy mountain.
Then Jerusalem shall be holy,
And no aliens shall ever pass through her
again."

God Blesses His People

18 And it will come to pass in that day
That the mountains shall drip with new
wine,
The hills shall flow with milk,
And all the brooks of Judah shall be
flooded with water;
A fountain shall flow from the house of
the Lord
And water the Valley of Acacias.

19 "Egypt shall be a desolation,
And Edom a desolate wilderness,
Because of violence *against* the people of
Judah,
For they have shed innocent blood in
their land.
20 But Judah shall abide forever,
And Jerusalem from generation to
generation.
21 For I will acquit them of the guilt of
bloodshed, whom I had not
acquitted;
For the Lord dwells in Zion."

3:8 [a]Literally *Shebaites* (compare Isaiah 60:6 and Ezekiel 27:22)

THE BOOK OF

AMOS

INTRODUCTION

Ever met a "justa"? "Just a salesman." "Just a secretary." "Just a farmer." or "Just a custodian." "Just a" implies that one's calling or occupation is fairly insignificant, not very important in the grand scheme of things. We would feel much better if we could say with pride: world-class athlete, high-powered politician, best-selling author, brain surgeon, dynamic evangelist, CEO, television star, or rocket scientist. Self-esteem would soar, people would take notice, and God could use us to change the world. Being a "justa" feels small and ordinary.

By most standards, Amos would be considered a "justa." After all, he wasn't a prophet or priest or the son of either. He was just a shepherd, a small businessman in Judah. Who would listen to him?

But instead of making excuses, Amos obeyed and became God's powerful voice for change.

God has no "justas."

God has often used "justas"—shepherds, carpenters, fishermen . . . Whatever your station in life, God can use you. Check out Amos's example and God's message and be willing to be used by your Lord.

Amos wasn't much. He was a "justa" . . . just a servant of God. But that was enough.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: The prophet Amos

Date Written: c. 750 B.C.

Key Themes:

- People can only walk with God in peace when they follow His laws.
- Sin will be punished.
- God will try to draw His people back to Him before He judges them.

Key Verse:

"'Behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord GOD, 'That I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD'" (Amos 8:11).

Contents:

I. Amos's Call and Eight Judgments 1:1—2:16

II. Judgment Against Israel 3:1—6:14

III. Amos's Five Visions 7:1—9:10

IV. Final Blessings 9:11–15

The words of Amos, who was among the sheepbreeders[a] of Tekoa,
which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of
Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two
years before the earthquake.
2 And he said:

"The Lord roars from Zion,
And utters His voice from Jerusalem;
The pastures of the shepherds mourn,
And the top of Carmel withers."

Judgment on the Nations

3 Thus says the Lord:

"For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four,
I will not turn away its *punishment,*
Because they have threshed Gilead with implements of iron.
4 But I will send a fire into the house of Hazael,
Which shall devour the palaces of Ben-Hadad.
5 I will also break the *gate* bar of Damascus,
And cut off the inhabitant from the Valley of Aven,
And the one who holds the scepter from Beth Eden.
The people of Syria shall go captive to Kir,"
Says the Lord.

6 Thus says the Lord:

"For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four,
I will not turn away its *punishment,*
Because they took captive the whole captivity
To deliver *them* up to Edom.
7 But I will send a fire upon the wall of Gaza,
Which shall devour its palaces.
8 I will cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod,
And the one who holds the scepter from Ashkelon;
I will turn My hand against Ekron,
And the remnant of the Philistines shall perish,"
Says the Lord God.

9 Thus says the Lord:

"For three transgressions of Tyre, and for four,
I will not turn away its *punishment,*
Because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom,
And did not remember the covenant of brotherhood.
10 But I will send a fire upon the wall of Tyre,
Which shall devour its palaces."

11 Thus says the Lord:

1:1 [a] Compare 2 Kings 3:4

Life LESSONS

Amos 1:1—2:16

SITUATION
God called Amos, a shepherd from Judah, to prophesy against the northern kingdom (Israel). Amos's prophecy preceded the Assyrian captivity.

OBSERVATION
God holds people accountable for their actions. He judged the Israelites for their evil works, and He will also examine our works.

INSPIRATION
Hell is a hideous topic. Any person who discusses it glibly or proclaims it gleefully has failed to ponder it deeply. Scripture writers dip pens in gloomy ink to describe its nature. They speak of the "blackness of darkness" (Jude 13), "everlasting destruction" (2 Thessalonians 1:9), "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 8:12).

A glimpse into the pit won't brighten your day, but it will enlighten your understanding of Jesus. He didn't avoid the discussion. Quite the contrary. He planted a one-word caution sign between you and hell's path: *perish.* "Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Jesus spoke of hell often. . . .

He speaks in tangible terms. "Fear Him," he warns, "who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). He quotes Hades's rich man pleading for Lazarus to "dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue" (Luke 16:24). Words such

as *body, finger,* and *tongue* presuppose a physical state in which a throat longs for water and a person begs for relief—physical relief. . . .

Woeful, this thought. God has quarantined a precinct in his vast universe as the depository of the hard-hearted.

Exactly where is hell? Jesus gives one chilling clue: "outside."

"Tie him hand and foot, and throw him *outside,* into the darkness" (Matthew 22:13 NIV). Outside of what? Outside of the boundaries of heaven, for one thing. Abraham, in paradise, told the rich man, in torment, "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us" (Luke 16:26). No heaven-to-hell field trips. No hell-to-heaven holiday breaks. Hell is to heaven what the edge of our universe is to earth: outside the range of a commute.

Hell is also outside the realm of conclusion. Oh, that hell's punishment would end, that God would schedule an execution date. New Testament language leads some godly scholars to believe He will:

"Fear Him who is able to *destroy* both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

"Whoever believes in Him should not perish" (John 3:16).

(From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How do you react when you consider God's wrath? Does it cause you to have compassion for those who right now are outside God's love and forgiveness? Think of one or two people you can pray for and with whom you can share Jesus' saving grace.

"For three transgressions of Edom, and for four,
I will not turn away its *punishment,*
Because he pursued his brother with the sword,
And cast off all pity;
His anger tore perpetually,
And he kept his wrath forever.
12 But I will send a fire upon Teman,
Which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah."

13 Thus says the Lord:

"For three transgressions of the people of Ammon, and for four,
I will not turn away its *punishment,*
Because they ripped open the women with child in Gilead,
That they might enlarge their territory.
14 But I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah,
And it shall devour its palaces,
Amid shouting in the day of battle,
And a tempest in the day of the whirlwind.
15 Their king shall go into captivity,
He and his princes together,"
Says the Lord.

2 Thus says the Lord:

"For three transgressions of Moab, and for four,
I will not turn away its *punishment,*
Because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime.
2 But I will send a fire upon Moab,
And it shall devour the palaces of Kerioth;
Moab shall die with tumult,
With shouting *and* trumpet sound.
3 And I will cut off the judge from its midst,
And slay all its princes with him,"
Says the Lord.

Judgment on Judah

4 Thus says the Lord:

"For three transgressions of Judah, and for four,
I will not turn away its *punishment,*
Because they have despised the law of the Lord,
And have not kept His commandments.
Their lies lead them astray,
Lies which their fathers followed.
5 But I will send a fire upon Judah,
And it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem."

Judgment on Israel

6 Thus says the Lord:

"For three transgressions of Israel, and for four,
I will not turn away its *punishment,*
Because they sell the righteous for silver,
And the poor for a pair of sandals.
7 They pant after[a] the dust of the earth *which is* on the head of the poor,
And pervert the way of the humble.
A man and his father go in to the *same* girl,
To defile My holy name.
8 They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge,
And drink the wine of the condemned *in* the house of their god.

9 "Yet *it was* I *who* destroyed the Amorite before them,
Whose height *was* like the height of the cedars,
And he *was as* strong as the oaks;
Yet I destroyed his fruit above
And his roots beneath.
10 Also *it was* I *who* brought you up from the land of Egypt,
And led you forty years through the wilderness,
To possess the land of the Amorite.
11 I raised up some of your sons as prophets,
And some of your young men as Nazirites.
Is it not so, O you children of Israel?"
Says the Lord.
12 "But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink,
And commanded the prophets saying,
'Do not prophesy!'

13 "Behold, I am weighed down by you,
As a cart full of sheaves is weighed down.
14 Therefore flight shall perish from the swift,
The strong shall not strengthen his power,
Nor shall the mighty deliver himself;
15 He shall not stand who handles the bow,
The swift of foot shall not escape,
Nor shall he who rides a horse deliver himself.
16 The most courageous men of might
Shall flee naked in that day,"
Says the Lord.

Authority of the Prophet's Message

3 Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying:

2 "You only have I known of all the families of the earth;
Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

3 Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?
4 Will a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey?

2:7 [a]Or *trample on*

EXPLORATION
God's Judgment—Exodus 34:7; 1 Samuel 2:3; Job 34:10; Psalm 9:7; Romans 2:5, 6; Hebrews 10:30, 31.

Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he has caught nothing?
5 Will a bird fall into a snare on the earth, where there is no trap
for it?
Will a snare spring up from the earth, if it has caught nothing
at all?
6 If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid?
If there is calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done *it?*

7 Surely the Lord God does nothing,
Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.
8 A lion has roared!
Who will not fear?
The Lord God has spoken!
Who can but prophesy?

Punishment of Israel's Sins

9 "Proclaim in the palaces at Ashdod,[a]
And in the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say:
'Assemble on the mountains of Samaria;
See great tumults in her midst,
And the oppressed within her.
10 For they do not know to do right,'
Says the Lord,
'Who store up violence and robbery in their palaces.'"

11 Therefore thus says the Lord God:

"An adversary *shall be* all around the land;
He shall sap your strength from you,
And your palaces shall be plundered."

12 Thus says the Lord:

"As a shepherd takes from the mouth of a lion
Two legs or a piece of an ear,
So shall the children of Israel be taken out
Who dwell in Samaria—
In the corner of a bed and on the edge[a] of a couch!
13 Hear and testify against the house of Jacob,"
Says the Lord God, the God of hosts,
14 "That in the day I punish Israel for their transgressions,
I will also visit *destruction* on the altars of Bethel;
And the horns of the altar shall be cut off
And fall to the ground.
15 I will destroy the winter house along with the summer
house;
The houses of ivory shall perish,
And the great houses shall have an end,"
Says the Lord.

3:9 [a]Following Masoretic Text; Septuagint reads *Assyria.* **3:12** [a]The Hebrew is uncertain.

Life Lessons

Amos 3:1—6:14

SITUATION
Through Amos, God warned Israel of the judgment that would come upon the nation for its disobedience.

OBSERVATION
Despite continued discipline, Israel continued to turn away from God.

INSPIRATION
When my family lived in Rio de Janeiro, I owned a ham radio. I kept it in the utility room on top of the freezer. When we traveled, I always unplugged the radio and disconnected the antenna.

Once, when we were leaving for a week-long trip, I remembered I hadn't unplugged the radio. I ran back in the house, pulled the plug, and dashed out again.

But I pulled the wrong plug. I unplugged the freezer. . . . For seven days, then, a freezer full of food sat in a sweltering apartment with the power off.

When we came home . . . guess who got fingered as the one who had unplugged the freezer—and who therefore would be responsible for cleaning it? You got it. So I got to work.

What is the best way to clean out a rotten interior? I knew exactly what to do. I got a rag and a bucket of soapy water and began cleaning the outside of the appliance. I was sure the odor would disappear with a good shine, so I polished and buffed and wiped. When I was through, the freezer could have passed a Marine boot-camp inspection. It was sparkling.

4 Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who *are* on the mountain of
Samaria,
Who oppress the poor,
Who crush the needy,
Who say to your husbands,[a] "Bring *wine,* let us drink!"
2 The Lord God has sworn by His holiness:
"Behold, the days shall come upon you
When He will take you away with fishhooks,
And your posterity with fishhooks.
3 You will go out *through* broken *walls,*
Each one straight ahead of her,
And you will be cast into Harmon,"
Says the Lord.

4 "Come to Bethel and transgress,
At Gilgal multiply transgression;
Bring your sacrifices every morning,
Your tithes every three days.[a]
5 Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven,
Proclaim *and* announce the freewill offerings;
For this you love,
You children of Israel!"
Says the Lord God.

Israel Did Not Accept Correction

6 "Also I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities,
And lack of bread in all your places;
Yet you have not returned to Me,"
Says the Lord.

7 "I also withheld rain from you,
When *there were* still three months to the harvest.
I made it rain on one city,
I withheld rain from another city.
One part was rained upon,
And where it did not rain the part withered.
8 So two *or* three cities wandered to another city to drink water,
But they were not satisfied;
Yet you have not returned to Me,"
Says the Lord.

9 "I blasted you with blight and mildew.
When your gardens increased,
Your vineyards,
Your fig trees,
And your olive trees,
The locust devoured *them;*
Yet you have not returned to Me,"
Says the Lord.

4:1 [a]Literally *their lords* or *their masters* **4:4** [a]Or *years* (compare Deuteronomy 14:28)

But when I opened the door, that freezer was revolting.

(Are you wondering, "Now what kind of fool would do that?" Read on and you'll see.)

No problem, I thought. I knew what to do. This freezer needs some friends. I'd stink, too, if I had the social life of a machine in a utility room. So, I threw a party. I invited all the appliances from the neighborhood kitchens. It was hard work, but we filled our apartment with refrigerators, stoves, microwaves, and washing machines. It was a great party. A couple of toasters recognized each other from the appliance store. Everyone played pin the plug on the socket and had a few laughs about limited warranties. The blenders were the hit, though; they really mixed well.

I was sure the social interaction would cure the inside of my freezer, but I was wrong. I opened it up, and the stink was even worse!

Now what?

I had an idea. If a polish job wouldn't do it and social life didn't help, I'd give the freezer some status!

I bought a Mercedes sticker and stuck it on the door. I painted a paisley tie down the front. I put a "Save the Whales" bumper sticker on the rear and installed a cellular phone on the side. That freezer was classy. It was stylish. It was . . . cool. I splashed it with cologne and gave it a credit card for clout. . . .

Then I opened the door, expecting to see a clean inside, but what I saw was putrid—a stinky and repulsive interior.

I could think of only one other option. My freezer needed some high-voltage

pleasure! I immediately bought it some copies of *Playfridge* magazines—the publication that displays freezers with their doors open. I rented some films about foxy appliances. . . . I even tried to get my freezer a date with the Westinghouse next door, but she gave him the cold shoulder.

After a few days of supercharged, after-hours entertainment, I opened the door. And I nearly got sick.

I know what you're thinking. The only thing worse than Max's humor is his common sense. Who would concentrate on the outside when the problem is on the inside?

Do you really want to know?

A homemaker battles with depression. What is the solution suggested by some well-meaning friend? Buy a new dress.

A husband is involved in an affair that brings him as much guilt as it does adventure. The solution? Change peer groups. Hang out with people who don't make you feel guilty!

A young professional is plagued with loneliness. His obsession with success has left him with no friends. His boss gives him an idea: Change your style. Get a new haircut. Flash some cash.

Case after case of treating the outside while ignoring the inside—polishing the case while ignoring the interior. And what is the result?

The homemaker gets a new dress, and the depression disappears . . . for a day, maybe. Then the shadow returns.

The husband finds a bunch of buddies who sanction his adultery. The result? Peace . . . until the

10 "I sent among you a plague after the manner of Egypt;
Your young men I killed with a sword,
Along with your captive horses;
I made the stench of your camps come up into your nostrils;
Yet you have not returned to Me,"
Says the Lord.

11 "I overthrew *some* of you,
As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah,
And you were like a firebrand plucked from the burning;
Yet you have not returned to Me,"
Says the Lord.

12 "Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel;
Because I will do this to you,
Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!"

13 For behold,
He who forms mountains,
And creates the wind,
Who declares to man what his[a] thought *is,*
And makes the morning darkness,
Who treads the high places of the earth—
The Lord God of hosts *is* His name.

A Lament for Israel

5 Hear this word which I take up against you, a lamentation, O house of Israel:

2 The virgin of Israel has fallen;
She will rise no more.
She lies forsaken on her land;
There is no one to raise her up.

3 For thus says the Lord God:

"The city that goes out by a thousand
Shall have a hundred left,
And that which goes out by a hundred
Shall have ten left to the house of Israel."

A Call to Repentance

4 For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel:

"Seek Me and live;
5 But do not seek Bethel,
Nor enter Gilgal,
Nor pass over to Beersheba;
For Gilgal shall surely go into captivity,
And Bethel shall come to nothing.

4:13 [a] Or *His*

6 Seek the Lord and live,
Lest He break out like fire *in* the house of Joseph,
And devour *it,*
With no one to quench *it* in Bethel—
7 You who turn justice to wormwood,
And lay righteousness to rest in the earth!"

8 He made the Pleiades and Orion;
He turns the shadow of death into morning
And makes the day dark as night;
He calls for the waters of the sea
And pours them out on the face of the earth;
The Lord *is* His name.
9 He rains ruin upon the strong,
So that fury comes upon the fortress.

10 They hate the one who rebukes in the gate,
And they abhor the one who speaks uprightly.
11 Therefore, because you tread down the poor
And take grain taxes from him,
Though you have built houses of hewn stone,
Yet you shall not dwell in them;
You have planted pleasant vineyards,
But you shall not drink wine from them.
12 For I know your manifold transgressions
And your mighty sins:
Afflicting the just *and* taking bribes;
Diverting the poor *from justice* at the gate.
13 Therefore the prudent keep silent at that time,
For it *is* an evil time.

14 Seek good and not evil,
That you may live;
So the Lord God of hosts will be with you,
As you have spoken.
15 Hate evil, love good;
Establish justice in the gate.
It may be that the Lord God of hosts
Will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

The Day of the Lord

16 Therefore the Lord God of hosts, the Lord, says this:

"*There shall be* wailing in all streets,
And they shall say in all the highways,
'Alas! Alas!'
They shall call the farmer to mourning,
And skillful lamenters to wailing.
17 In all vineyards *there shall be* wailing,
For I will pass through you,"
Says the Lord.

crowd is gone. Then the guilt is back.

The young professional gets a new look and the people notice . . . until the styles change. Then he has to scurry out and buy more stuff so he won't appear outdated.

The exterior polished; the interior corroding. The outside altered; the inside faltering. One thing is clear: Cosmetic changes are only skin deep.

. . . You change your life by changing your heart. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

No one enjoys being disciplined. Yet, it is often through the discomfort of chastisement that we return to the right path. Make your life easier: repent of your sin before God must bring discipline. If you are being disciplined, correct the wrong quickly.

EXPLORATION

Discipline—Job 5:17; Psalm 39:11; 94:12; Proverbs 3:11, 12; Jeremiah 30:11; Hebrews 12:7–10.

18 Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord!
For what good *is* the day of the Lord to you?
It *will be* darkness, and not light.
19 It *will be* as though a man fled from a lion,
And a bear met him!
Or *as though* he went into the house,
Leaned his hand on the wall,
And a serpent bit him!
20 *Is* not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light?
Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?

21 "I hate, I despise your feast days,
And I do not savor your sacred assemblies.
22 Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings,
I will not accept *them,*
Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings.
23 Take away from Me the noise of your songs,
For I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments.
24 But let justice run down like water,
And righteousness like a mighty stream.

25 "Did you offer Me sacrifices and offerings
In the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?
26 You also carried Sikkuth[a] your king[b]
And Chiun,[c] your idols,
The star of your gods,
Which you made for yourselves.
27 Therefore I will send you into captivity beyond Damascus,"
Says the Lord, whose name *is* the God of hosts.

Warnings to Zion and Samaria

6 Woe to you *who are* at ease in Zion,
And trust in Mount Samaria,
Notable persons in the chief nation,
To whom the house of Israel comes!
2 Go over to Calneh and see;
And from there go to Hamath the great;
Then go down to Gath of the Philistines.
Are you better than these kingdoms?
Or is their territory greater than your territory?

3 *Woe to* you who put far off the day of doom,
Who cause the seat of violence to come near;
4 Who lie on beds of ivory,
Stretch out on your couches,
Eat lambs from the flock
And calves from the midst of the stall;
5 Who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments,
And invent for yourselves musical instruments like David;
6 Who drink wine from bowls,
And anoint yourselves with the best ointments,
But are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.
7 Therefore they shall now go captive as the first of the captives,
And those who recline at banquets shall be removed.

8 The Lord God has sworn by Himself,
The Lord God of hosts says:
"I abhor the pride of Jacob,
And hate his palaces;
Therefore I will deliver up *the* city
And all that is in it."

9 Then it shall come to pass, that if ten men remain in one house, they shall die. 10 And when a relative *of the dead,* with one who will burn *the bodies,* picks up the bodies[a] to take them out of the house, he will say to one inside the house, "*Are there* any more with you?"
Then someone will say, "None."
And he will say, "Hold your tongue! For we dare not mention the name of the Lord."

11 For behold, the Lord gives a command:
He will break the great house into bits,
And the little house into pieces.

12 Do horses run on rocks?
Does *one* plow *there* with oxen?

5:26 [a]A pagan deity [b]Septuagint and Vulgate read *tabernacle of Moloch.* [c]A pagan deity **6:10** [a]Literally *bones*

Yet you have turned justice into gall,
And the fruit of righteousness into wormwood,
13 You who rejoice over Lo Debar,[a]
Who say, "Have we not taken Karnaim[b] for ourselves
By our own strength?"

14 "But, behold, I will raise up a nation against you,
O house of Israel,"
Says the Lord God of hosts;
"And they will afflict you from the entrance of Hamath
To the Valley of the Arabah."

Vision of the Locusts

7 Thus the Lord God showed me: Behold, He formed locust swarms at the beginning of the late crop; indeed *it was* the late crop after the king's mowings. 2 And so it was, when they had finished eating the grass of the land, that I said:

"O Lord God, forgive, I pray!
Oh, that Jacob may stand,
For he *is* small!"
3 *So* the Lord relented concerning this.
"It shall not be," said the Lord.

Vision of the Fire

4 Thus the Lord God showed me: Behold, the Lord God called for conflict by fire, and it consumed the great deep and devoured the territory. 5 Then I said:

"O Lord God, cease, I pray!
Oh, that Jacob may stand,
For he *is* small!"
6 *So* the Lord relented concerning this.
"This also shall not be," said the Lord God.

Vision of the Plumb Line

7 Thus He showed me: Behold, the Lord stood on a wall *made* with a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand. 8 And the Lord said to me, "Amos, what do you see?"
And I said, "A plumb line."
Then the Lord said:

"Behold, I am setting a plumb line
In the midst of My people Israel;
I will not pass by them anymore.
9 The high places of Isaac shall be desolate,
And the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste.
I will rise with the sword against the house of Jeroboam."

6:13 [a]Literally *Nothing* [b]Literally *Horns*, symbol of strength

Life LESSONS

Amos 7:1—9:15

SITUATION
Amos saw God's coming judgments on Israel through two visions. After each vision, he prayed that God would be merciful.

OBSERVATION
God sent His prophet Amos to warn the people of Israel to repent of their sins. God gives us these examples to teach us that He hates sin. And He promised a Savior who would save us from our sins.

INSPIRATION
At midday, darkness falls like a curtain. "From the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land" (Matthew 27:45).

This is a supernatural darkness. Not a casual gathering of clouds or a brief eclipse of the sun. This is a three-hour blanket of blackness. Merchants in Jerusalem light candles. Soldiers ignite torches. Parents worry. People everywhere ask questions. From whence comes this noonday night? . . .

Of course the sky is dark; people are killing the Light of the World.

The universe grieves. God said it would. "And it shall come to pass in that day . . . I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight . . . I will make it like mourning for an only son, and its end like a bitter day" (Amos 8:9, 10). . . .

Christ lifts his heavy head and eyelids toward the heavens and spends His final energy crying out toward the ducking stars. "*'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?'*

which means, 'My God, my God, why did you abandon me?'" (Matthew 27:46 TEV).

We would ask the same. Why Him? Why forsake your Son? Forsake the murderers. Desert the evildoers. Turn your back on perverts and peddlers of pain. Abandon them, not Him. Why would you abandon earth's only sinless soul?

Ah, there is the hardest word. *Abandon.* The house no one wants. The child no one claims. The parent no one remembers. The Savior no one understands. He pierces the darkness with heaven's loneliest question: "My God, my God, why did You abandon me?"

Paul used the same Greek word when he urged Timothy: "Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has *forsaken* me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica" (2 Timothy 4:9, 10, emphasis mine).

As Paul looks for Demas, can he find him? No. Forsaken.

As Jesus looks for God, can He find Him? No. Forsaken.

Wait a second. Doesn't David tell us, "I have not seen the righteous forsaken" (Psalm 37:25)? Did David misspeak? Did Jesus misstep? Neither. In this hour Jesus is anything but righteous. But His mistakes aren't His own. "Christ carried our sins in his body on the cross so we would stop living for sin and start living for what is right" (1 Peter 2:24 NCV).

Christ carried all our sins in His body. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Take a moment and meditate on the truth that Jesus carried your sins in His body that day when He

Amaziah's Complaint

10 Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of
Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the
house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words. 11 For thus
Amos has said:

'Jeroboam shall die by the sword,
And Israel shall surely be led away captive
From their own land.'"

12 Then Amaziah said to Amos:

"Go, you seer!
Flee to the land of Judah.
There eat bread,
And there prophesy.
13 But never again prophesy at Bethel,
For it *is* the king's sanctuary,
And it *is* the royal residence."

14 Then Amos answered, and said to Amaziah:

"I *was* no prophet,
Nor *was* I a son of a prophet,
But I *was* a sheepbreeder[a]
And a tender of sycamore fruit.
15 Then the Lord took me as I followed the flock,
And the Lord said to me,
'Go, prophesy to My people Israel.'
16 Now therefore, hear the word of the Lord:
You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel,
And do not spout against the house of Isaac.'

17 "Therefore thus says the Lord:

'Your wife shall be a harlot in the city;
Your sons and daughters shall fall by the sword;
Your land shall be divided by *survey* line;
You shall die in a defiled land;
And Israel shall surely be led away captive
From his own land.'"

Vision of the Summer Fruit

8 Thus the Lord God showed me: Behold, a basket of summer fruit.
2 And He said, "Amos, what do you see?"
So I said, "A basket of summer fruit."
Then the Lord said to me:

"The end has come upon My people Israel;
I will not pass by them anymore.

7:14 [a]Compare 2 Kings 3:4

3 And the songs of the temple
Shall be wailing in that day,"
Says the Lord God—
"Many dead bodies everywhere,
They shall be thrown out in silence."

4 Hear this, you who swallow up[a] the needy,
And make the poor of the land fail,

5 Saying:

"When will the New Moon be past,
That we may sell grain?
And the Sabbath,
That we may trade wheat?
Making the ephah small and the shekel large,
Falsifying the scales by deceit,
6 That we may buy the poor for silver,
And the needy for a pair of sandals—
Even sell the bad wheat?"

7 The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob:
"Surely I will never forget any of their works.
8 Shall the land not tremble for this,
And everyone mourn who dwells in it?
All of it shall swell like the River,[a]
Heave and subside
Like the River of Egypt.

9 "And it shall come to pass in that day," says the Lord God,
"That I will make the sun go down at noon,
And I will darken the earth in broad daylight;
10 I will turn your feasts into mourning,
And all your songs into lamentation;
I will bring sackcloth on every waist,
And baldness on every head;
I will make it like mourning for an only *son,*
And its end like a bitter day.

11 "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord God,
"That I will send a famine on the land,
Not a famine of bread,
Nor a thirst for water,
But of hearing the words of the Lord.
12 They shall wander from sea to sea,
And from north to east;
They shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the Lord,
But shall not find *it.*

8:4 [a]Or *trample on* (compare 2:7) **8:8** [a]That is, the Nile; some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate read *River;* Masoretic Text reads *the light.*

died a horrible death on the cross—abandoned by God because of your sin. Thank Him for His astonishing love.

EXPLORATION
Bold Witnesses—Matthew 5:13–16; Mark 4:21–25; John 3:21; Acts 1:8; Galatians 6:9.

As drastic as it may appear, God will actually allow a person to experience hell on earth, in hopes of awakening his faith. A holy love makes the tough choice to release the child to the consequences of his rebellion.

—Max Lucado (The Great House of God)

13 "In that day the fair virgins
And strong young men
Shall faint from thirst.
14 Those who swear by the sin[a] of Samaria,
Who say,
'As your god lives, O Dan!'
And, 'As the way of Beersheba lives!'
They shall fall and never rise again."

The Destruction of Israel

9 I saw the Lord standing by the altar, and He said:

"Strike the doorposts, that the thresholds may shake,
And break them on the heads of them all.
I will slay the last of them with the sword.
He who flees from them shall not get away,
And he who escapes from them shall not be delivered.

2 "Though they dig into hell,[a]
From there My hand shall take them;
Though they climb up to heaven,
From there I will bring them down;
3 And though they hide themselves on top of Carmel,
From there I will search and take them;
Though they hide from My sight at the bottom of the sea,
From there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them;
4 Though they go into captivity before their enemies,
From there I will command the sword,
And it shall slay them.
I will set My eyes on them for harm and not for good."

5 The Lord God of hosts,
He who touches the earth and it melts,
And all who dwell there mourn;
All of it shall swell like the River,[a]
And subside like the River of Egypt.
6 He who builds His layers in the sky,
And has founded His strata in the earth;
Who calls for the waters of the sea,
And pours them out on the face of the earth—
The Lord *is* His name.

7 "*Are* you not like the people of Ethiopia to Me,
O children of Israel?" says the Lord.
"Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt,
The Philistines from Caphtor,
And the Syrians from Kir?

8 "Behold, the eyes of the Lord God *are* on the sinful kingdom,
And I will destroy it from the face of the earth;
Yet I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob,"
Says the Lord.

9 "For surely I will command,
And will sift the house of Israel among all nations,
As *grain* is sifted in a sieve;
Yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground.
10 All the sinners of My people shall die by the sword,
Who say, 'The calamity shall not overtake nor confront us.'

Israel Will Be Restored

11 "On that day I will raise up
The tabernacle[a] of David, which has fallen down,
And repair its damages;
I will raise up its ruins,
And rebuild it as in the days of old;
12 That they may possess the remnant of Edom,[a]
And all the Gentiles who are called by My name,"
Says the Lord who does this thing.

13 "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord,
"When the plowman shall overtake the reaper,

8:14 [a]Or *Ashima,* a Syrian goddess **9:2** [a]Or *Sheol* **9:5** [a]That is, the Nile **9:11** [a]Literally *booth,* figure of a deposed dynasty **9:12** [a]Septuagint reads *mankind.*

And the treader of grapes him who sows
seed;
The mountains shall drip with sweet
wine,
And all the hills shall flow *with it.*
14 I will bring back the captives of My
people Israel;
They shall build the waste cities and
inhabit *them;*
They shall plant vineyards and drink wine
from them;
They shall also make gardens and eat
fruit from them.
15 I will plant them in their land,
And no longer shall they be
pulled up
From the land I have given them,"
Says the Lord your God.

THE BOOK OF

OBADIAH

INTRODUCTION

I know how to make you mad. I don't want to. I don't intend to. But if I desired to, I would know how to do it.

I would insult your family.

I wouldn't insult you. I would insult your family. I'd mock your mother. I'd make fun of your father. I'd criticize your kids. Again, I'm not going to. But if I did, I know what would happen.

You'd get angry. If there is any shred of loyalty in your heart, you'd tell me to mind my own business.

Even if I were right.

Even if my accusations were accurate. No matter. You'd tell me to quit sticking my nose in your business. When it comes to the family, we look out for our own. God does the same.

God's children, the Jews, weren't the best of children. They were stubborn, rebellious, and forgetful. Over the years God dished out the discipline and correction. But through all the stresses and strains, God's love for His children was stubborn.

Edom, a powerful nation, enjoyed picking on Israel. Here in Obadiah, we see God rising to the defense of His children. He says, in effect, *Mess with them and you mess with me.*

It's a small book with a huge message. God cares for His children.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Obadiah

Date Written: c. 850 B.C.

Key Themes:

- God will stand up for His people against their enemies.
- There will be judgment for those who take a stand against God's work and people.
- God's word is true and will come about.

Key Verse:

"The people of Israel will be a raging fire, and Edom a field of dry stubble. The descendants of Joseph will be a flame roaring across the field, devouring everything. There will be no survivors in Edom. I, the Lord, have spoken!" (Obadiah 18).

Contents:

I. God's Judgment 1–9
II. Edom's Sin 10–14
III. Israel's Victory 15–21

The Coming Judgment on Edom

The vision of Obadiah.

Thus says the Lord God concerning Edom
(We have heard a report from the Lord,
And a messenger has been sent among the nations, *saying,*
"Arise, and let us rise up against her for battle"):

2 "Behold, I will make you small among the nations;
You shall be greatly despised.
3 The pride of your heart has deceived you,
You who dwell in the clefts of the rock,
Whose habitation is high;
You who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?'
4 Though you ascend *as* high as the eagle,
And though you set your nest among the stars,
From there I will bring you down," says the Lord.

5 "If thieves had come to you,
If robbers by night—
Oh, how you will be cut off!—
Would they not have stolen till they had enough?
If grape-gatherers had come to you,
Would they not have left *some* gleanings?

6 "Oh, how Esau shall be searched out!
How his hidden treasures shall be sought after!
7 All the men in your confederacy
Shall force you to the border;
The men at peace with you
Shall deceive you *and* prevail against you.
Those who eat your bread shall lay a trap[a] for you.
No one is aware of it.

8 "Will I not in that day," says the Lord,
"Even destroy the wise *men* from Edom,
And understanding from the mountains of Esau?
9 Then your mighty men, O Teman, shall be dismayed,
To the end that everyone from the mountains of Esau
May be cut off by slaughter.

Edom Mistreated His Brother

10 "For violence against your brother Jacob,
Shame shall cover you,
And you shall be cut off forever.
11 In the day that you stood on the other side—
In the day that strangers carried captive his forces,
When foreigners entered his gates
And cast lots for Jerusalem—
Even you *were* as one of them.

7 [a]Or *wound,* or *plot*

Life Lessons

Obadiah 1–21

SITUATION
A bloody feud between Edom and Israel continued from the days of Esau and Jacob (Genesis 25:19–34). Obadiah denounced Edom's cruelty and pride, and then prophesied about its destruction. He also prophesied that Israel would be restored as a nation with extended territory.

OBSERVATION
God always protects and takes care of His children. With God on their side, His children are never underdogs.

INSPIRATION
For a short time in college, I worked at a vacuum-cleaner plant. We assembled the appliance from plug to hose. The last step on the assembly line was "sealing and shipping." By this point, the company had invested hours and dollars in the machine. So they took extra care to protect their product. They mummified it in bubble wrap, secured it with Styrofoam, wrapped the box with tough-to-tear tape, stamped the destination on the box, and belted it inside the truck. That machine was secure. But compared to God's care of His saints, workers dumped bare machines into the back of a pickup truck. God vacuum-seals us with His strongest force: His Spirit. He sheathes His children in a suit of spiritual armor, encircles us with angels, and indwells us Himself. The queen of England should enjoy such security.

Christ paid too high a price to leave us unguarded.

"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30).

What a difference this assurance makes. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Have you ever felt that you were out of favor with God? Did you try to ask Jesus into your heart again, and again? Jesus comes the first time! He stays! Be confident that He will never leave you for you are His child.

EXPLORATION

Security—Psalm 17:8, 9; 18:2, 3; 27:1; Proverbs 18:10; 1 Peter 1:3, 4.

12 "But you should not have gazed on the day of your brother
In the day of his captivity;[a]
Nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah
In the day of their destruction;
Nor should you have spoken proudly
In the day of distress.
13 You should not have entered the gate of My people
In the day of their calamity.
Indeed, you should not have gazed on their affliction
In the day of their calamity,
Nor laid *hands* on their substance
In the day of their calamity.
14 You should not have stood at the crossroads
To cut off those among them who escaped;
Nor should you have delivered up those among them who remained
In the day of distress.

15 "For the day of the Lord upon all the nations *is* near;
As you have done, it shall be done to you;
Your reprisal shall return upon your own head.
16 For as you drank on My holy mountain,
So shall all the nations drink continually;
Yes, they shall drink, and swallow,
And they shall be as though they had never been.

Israel's Final Triumph

17 "But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance,
And there shall be holiness;
The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.
18 The house of Jacob shall be a fire,
And the house of Joseph a flame;
But the house of Esau *shall be* stubble;
They shall kindle them and devour them,
And no survivor shall *remain* of the house of Esau,"
For the Lord has spoken.

19 The South[a] shall possess the mountains of Esau,
And the Lowland shall possess Philistia.
They shall possess the fields of Ephraim
And the fields of Samaria.
Benjamin *shall possess* Gilead.
20 And the captives of this host of the children of Israel
Shall possess the land of the Canaanites
As far as Zarephath.
The captives of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad
Shall possess the cities of the South.[a]
21 Then saviors[a] shall come to Mount Zion
To judge the mountains of Esau,
And the kingdom shall be the Lord's.

12 [a]Literally *On the day he became a foreigner* **19** [a]Hebrew *Negev* **20** [a]Hebrew *Negev* **21** [a]Or *deliverers*

THE BOOK OF

JONAH

INTRODUCTION

He had every right to run (he thought). Why should he go to that stinking city? He hated the place. Why should he warn the Ninevites about God's judgment? After how they had treated his people, they deserved to be wiped out. The last thing Jonah wanted was for his enemies to receive God's blessing.

So he ran . . . as fast and as far as he could away from what God wanted him to do.

But God had other plans.

You know the story: God stirred up a storm. Jonah bailed out of the boat and ended up in the belly of the fish.

God gave Jonah time to think over his actions and attitudes. For the first time Jonah didn't complain, he prayed. (Probably the only time anyone ever prayed for a fish-burp.)

The prayer was answered and Jonah eventually traveled to hated Nineveh. He preached to the people there. Though his odor wasn't appealing, his message was and the Ninevites repented. God relented (as Jonah knew He would), and Jonah fumed, furious over the turn of events. He sulked.

We can be so difficult.

But God can be so patient.

The Book of Jonah is more than a fascinating account of one man's futile attempt to run away from God. It is a story of God's love for even the most unlovable, despicable people we can imagine—and of our responsibility to tell them the Good News.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Probably Jonah

Date Written: c. 750 B.C.

Key Themes:

- God calls His people to relay His message even to their enemies.
- God is more powerful than our schemes and plans.
- We cannot tell when God's message will be received and heeded.

Key Verse:

"When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD; and my prayer went up to You, into Your holy temple" (Jonah 2:7).

Contents:

I. Jonah's Call and Escape Attempt 1:1–17

II. Jonah's Repentance and Deliverance 2:1–10

III. Jonah's Preaching and Nineveh's Repentance 3:1–10

IV. Jonah's Disappointment and God's Response 4:1–11

Life LESSONS

Jonah 1:1—2:10

SITUATION
God told Jonah to preach to the Assyrians in Nineveh. Jonah knew that if he preached to them, they would have an opportunity to avoid God's wrath. Jonah hoped to see these enemies punished by God, so he ran away.

OBSERVATION
Running away from God can't be done. Jonah discovered that. God's dominion extends everywhere. And no matter how far you run, God loves you and wants to bring you back.

INSPIRATION
"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Romans 8:35).

There it is. This is the question. Here is what we want to know. We want to know how long God's love will endure. . . . Does God really love us forever? Not just on Easter Sunday when our shoes are shined and our hair is fixed. We want to know (deep within, don't we really want to know?), how does God feel about me when I'm a jerk? Not when I'm peppy and positive and ready to tackle world hunger. Not then. I know how He feels about me then. Even I like me then.

I want to know how He feels about me when I snap at anything that moves, when my thoughts are gutter-level, when my tongue is sharp enough to slice a rock. How does He feel about me then? . . .

Jonah's Disobedience

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,
2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me." 3 But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

The Storm at Sea

4 But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.

5 Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that *was* in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load.[a] But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep.

6 So the captain came to him, and said to him, "What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish."

7 And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble *has come* upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 Then they said to him, "Please tell us! For whose cause *is* this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?"

9 So he said to them, "I *am* a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry *land*."

Jonah Thrown into the Sea

10 Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, "Why have you done this?" For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them. 11 Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?"—for the sea was growing more tempestuous.

12 And he said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest *is* because of me."

13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them. 14 Therefore they cried out to the Lord and said, "We pray, O Lord, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O Lord, have done as it pleased You."
15 So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows.

Jonah's Prayer and Deliverance

17 Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

1:5 [a] Literally *from upon them*

2 Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly. 2 And he said:

"I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction,
And He answered me.

"Out of the belly of Sheol I cried,
And You heard my voice.
3 For You cast me into the deep,
Into the heart of the seas,
And the floods surrounded me;
All Your billows and Your waves passed over me.
4 Then I said, 'I have been cast out of Your sight;
Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.'
5 The waters surrounded me, *even* to my soul;
The deep closed around me;
Weeds were wrapped around my head.
6 I went down to the moorings of the mountains;
The earth with its bars *closed* behind me forever;
Yet You have brought up my life from the pit,
O Lord, my God.

7 "When my soul fainted within me,
I remembered the Lord;
And my prayer went *up* to You,
Into Your holy temple.

8 "Those who regard worthless idols
Forsake their own Mercy.
9 But I will sacrifice to You
With the voice of thanksgiving;
I will pay what I have vowed.
Salvation *is* of the Lord."

10 So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry *land*.

Jonah Preaches at Nineveh

3 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying,
2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you." 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey[a] *in extent.* 4 And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

The People of Nineveh Believe

5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. 6 Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered *himself* with sackcloth and sat in ashes. 7 And he caused

3:3 [a] Exact meaning unknown

Did I drift too far? Wait too long? Slip too much?

That's what we want to know.

Can anything separate us from the love Christ has for us?

God answered our question before we asked it. So we'd see His answer, He lit the sky with a star. So we'd hear it, He filled the night with a choir; and so we'd believe it, He did what no man had ever dreamed. He became flesh and dwelt among us.

He placed His hand on the shoulder of humanity and said, "You're something special." (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Have you strayed from God? Do you wonder if He still loves you? Rest assured, God wants you to come back to Him. He loves you.

EXPLORATION
Sovereignty—Job 37:23; 38–41; Revelation 19:16.

Life Lessons

Jonah 3:1—4:11

SITUATION
Jonah finally obeyed God and preached in Nineveh. The people and their king responded immediately, and God had compassion on them.

OBSERVATION
God's words can have a transforming effect on people, causing them to repent from their sins. He is willing to pardon all who come to Him.

INSPIRATION
We cherish pardon, don't we? I was thinking about pardon a few afternoons ago on a south Texas country road with hills and

curves and turns and bends. I know it well. I now know the highway patrolman who oversees it.

And he now knows me. He looked at my driver's license. "Why is your name familiar to me? Aren't you a minister here in San Antonio?"

"Yes, sir."

"On your way to a funeral?"

"No."

"An emergency?"

"No."

"You were going awfully fast."

"I know."

"Tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to give you a second chance."

I sighed. "Thank you. And thanks for giving me a sermon illustration on pardon."

God has posted His traffic signs everywhere we look. In the universe, in Scripture, even within our own hearts. Yet we persist in disregarding His directions. But God does not give us what we deserve. He has drenched His world in grace. It has no end. It knows no limits. It empowers this life and enables us to live the next. God offers second chances, like a soup kitchen offers meals to everyone who asks.

And that includes you. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God's mercy is amazing. He offers second chances, pardons, grace. If God tells you to speak to others about their actions, take courage. You might be surprised at how many accept your words and repent.

EXPLORATION

Repentance—2 Kings 22:19; Matthew 3:8; Acts 17:30.

it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying,

> Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. 9 Who can tell *if* God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?

10 Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

Jonah's Anger and God's Kindness

4 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. 2 So he prayed to the Lord, and said, "Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You *are* a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. 3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for *it is* better for me to die than to live!"

4 Then the Lord said, "*Is it* right for you to be angry?"

5 So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city. 6 And the Lord God prepared a plant[a] and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. 7 But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it *so* damaged the plant that it withered. 8 And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "*It is* better for me to die than to live."

9 Then God said to Jonah, "*Is it* right for you to be angry about the plant?"

And he said, "*It is* right for me to be angry, even to death!"

10 But the Lord said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?"

4:6 [a] Hebrew *kikayon,* exact identity unknown

THE BOOK OF

MICAH

INTRODUCTION

Sometime ago I did something I hadn't done in years. I listened to the airline attendant as she gave her warnings. I normally tune her out. I usually bury my nose in a book or magazine and ignore her cautions. But this time I didn't.

I didn't, because the day before a commercial plane had gone down. As I boarded the flight I realized that if this plane crashed I would not know what to do.

So I listened. As she held up a seat belt, I buckled mine. As she described the oxygen mask, I looked up to see where it was stored. When she pointed to the exit doors, I turned to find them. That's when I noticed what she notices on every flight. No one was listening!

No one was paying attention. I was shocked. I seriously considered standing up and getting everyone's attention and shouting, "You guys better listen up. One mishap and this plane becomes a flaming mausoleum. What this lady is telling you might save your life!"

I wondered what would happen if she used more drastic means. What if she took a gasoline drenched doll and set it on fire? What if the in-flight screen portrayed images of desperate people scrambling to deboard a blazing plane? What if she marched up and down the aisle yanking away the papers and snatching the magazines, demanding that the passengers listen if they wanted to survive this flying inferno?

She would lose her job. But she would be doing us a favor. Love cautions the loved.

The Book of Micah is a warning. God's prophet warns of the terrible judgment which awaits all who ignore God. "Be prepared," he pleads, and then explains how to prepare.

I wonder if he noticed what I noticed on the plane. Most people don't listen to warnings. Let's be the exception.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Micah

Date Written: 750–650 B.C.

Key Themes:

- God will punish those who oppress the poor.
- Micah claims Bethlehem to be the place of the Messiah's birth.
- Religion should be practical and within the context of community and society.

Key Verse:

"He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

Contents:

I. Judgment Is Coming 1:1—3:12

II. Restoration Is Coming 4:1—5:15

III. Repent! 6:1—7:20

Life Lessons

Micah 1:1—2:13

SITUATION
Micah, a prophet from Judah, prophesied to both Israel and Judah. The people told him to be quiet.

OBSERVATION
Micah's message to the sinful people was not well received because it pointed out the worthless idols that the people worshiped instead of the one true God. They didn't even realize how dry and faithless they had become.

INSPIRATION
Deprive your soul of spiritual water, and your soul will tell you. Dehydrated hearts send desperate messages. Snarling tempers. Waves of worry. Growling mastodons of guilt and fear. You think God wants you to live with these? Hopelessness. Sleeplessness. Loneliness. Resentment. Irritability. Insecurity. These are warnings. Symptoms of a dryness deep within.

Perhaps you've never seen them as such. You've thought they, like speed bumps, are a necessary part of the journey. Anxiety, you assume, runs in your genes like eye color. Some people have bad ankles; others, high cholesterol or receding hairlines. And you? You fret.

And moodiness? Everyone has gloomy days, sad Saturdays. Aren't such emotions inevitable? Absolutely. But unquenchable? No way. View the pains of your heart, not as struggles to endure, but as an inner thirst to slake—proof that something within you is starting to shrivel.

Treat your soul as you

The word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, *and* Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

The Coming Judgment on Israel

2 Hear, all you peoples!
Listen, O earth, and all that is in it!
Let the Lord God be a witness against you,
The Lord from His holy temple.

3 For behold, the Lord is coming out of His place;
He will come down
And tread on the high places of the earth.
4 The mountains will melt under Him,
And the valleys will split
Like wax before the fire,
Like waters poured down a steep place.
5 All this is for the transgression of Jacob
And for the sins of the house of Israel.
What *is* the transgression of Jacob?
Is it not Samaria?
And what *are* the high places of Judah?
Are they not Jerusalem?

6 "Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of ruins in the field,
Places for planting a vineyard;
I will pour down her stones into the valley,
And I will uncover her foundations.
7 All her carved images shall be beaten to pieces,
And all her pay as a harlot shall be burned with the fire;
All her idols I will lay desolate,
For she gathered *it* from the pay of a harlot,
And they shall return to the pay of a harlot."

Mourning for Israel and Judah

8 Therefore I will wail and howl,
I will go stripped and naked;
I will make a wailing like the jackals
And a mourning like the ostriches,
9 For her wounds *are* incurable.
For it has come to Judah;
It has come to the gate of My people—
To Jerusalem.

10 Tell *it* not in Gath,
Weep not at all;
In Beth Aphrah[a]
Roll yourself in the dust.
11 Pass by in naked shame, you inhabitant of Shaphir;
The inhabitant of Zaanan[a] does not go out.

1:10 [a]Literally *House of Dust* **1:11** [a]Literally *Going Out*

Beth Ezel mourns;
Its place to stand is taken away from you.

12 For the inhabitant of Maroth pined[a] for good,
But disaster came down from the Lord
To the gate of Jerusalem.
13 O inhabitant of Lachish,
Harness the chariot to the swift steeds
(She *was* the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion),
For the transgressions of Israel were found in you.

14 Therefore you shall give presents to Moresheth Gath;[a]
The houses of Achzib[b] *shall be* a lie to the kings of Israel.
15 I will yet bring an heir to you, O inhabitant of Mareshah;[a]
The glory of Israel shall come to Adullam.
16 Make yourself bald and cut off your hair,
Because of your precious children;
Enlarge your baldness like an eagle,
For they shall go from you into captivity.

Woe to Evildoers

2 Woe to those who devise iniquity,
And work out evil on their beds!
At morning light they practice it,
Because it is in the power of their hand.
2 They covet fields and take *them* by violence,
Also houses, and seize *them.*
So they oppress a man and his house,
A man and his inheritance.

3 Therefore thus says the Lord:

"Behold, against this family I am devising disaster,
From which you cannot remove your necks;
Nor shall you walk haughtily,
For this *is* an evil time.
4 In that day *one* shall take up a proverb against you,
And lament with a bitter lamentation, saying:
'We are utterly destroyed!
He has changed the heritage of my people;
How He has removed *it* from me!
To a turncoat He has divided our fields.'"

5 Therefore you will have no one to determine boundaries[a] by lot
In the assembly of the Lord.

Lying Prophets

6 "Do not prattle," *you say to those* who prophesy.
So they shall not prophesy to you;[a]
They shall not return insult for insult.[b]

1:12 [a]Literally *was sick* **1:14** [a]Literally *Possession of Gath* [b]Literally *Lie*
1:15 [a]Literally *Inheritance* **2:5** [a]Literally *one casting a surveyor's line*
2:6 [a]Literally *to these* [b]Vulgate reads *He shall not take shame.*

treat your thirst. Take a gulp. Imbibe moisture. Flood your heart with a good swallow of water. . . .

Begin by heeding your thirst. Don't dismiss your loneliness. Don't deny your anger. Your restless spirit, churning stomach, the sense of dread that turns your armpits into swamplands—these are signal flares exploding in the sky. *We could use a little moisture down here!* Don't let your heart shrink into a raisin. For the sake of those who need your love, hydrate your soul! (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

The world can be a dry and wearying place. In such an environment, concentrated study of God's Word becomes crucial. An extensive and thorough knowledge of God's Word is our only means of defense. Begin a habit of studying God's Word diligently.

EXPLORATION

False Teachers—
Deuteronomy 13:1–3;
Jeremiah 14:14; Ezekiel 13:1ff.; Mark 13:22, 23;
1 Timothy 1:3, 4.

Life LESSONS

Micah 3:1—5:15

SITUATION
Micah continued his prophecies to Judah and Jerusalem. He rebuked the present leaders but promised a perfect future leader, Christ.

OBSERVATION
God promises that one day all weapons of war will be done away with and God's people will live in total peace. He also told of how a tiny town in Judah would be the birthplace of the Prince of Peace (5:2).

INSPIRATION
What is this love that endures decades, passes on sleep, and resists death to give one kiss? Call it agape love, a love that bears a semblance of God's.

But only a semblance, mind you, never a replica. Our finest love is a preschool watercolor to God's Rembrandt, a vacant-lot dandelion next to His garden rose. His love stands sequoia strong; our best attempts bend like weeping willows. . . .

Compare our love with God's? Look at the round belly of the pregnant peasant girl in Bethlehem. God's in there; the same God who can balance the universe on the tip of His finger floats in Mary's womb. Why? Love.

Peek through the Nazareth workshop window. See the lanky lad sweeping the sawdust from the floor? He once blew stardust into the night sky. Why swap the heavens for a carpentry shop? One answer: love.

Love explains why He came.

7 *You who are* named the house of Jacob:
"Is the Spirit of the Lord restricted?
Are these His doings?
Do not My words do good
To him who walks uprightly?

8 "Lately My people have risen up as an enemy—
You pull off the robe with the garment
From those who trust *you,* as they pass by,
Like men returned from war.
9 The women of My people you cast out
From their pleasant houses;
From their children
You have taken away My glory forever.

10 "Arise and depart,
For this *is* not *your* rest;
Because it is defiled, it shall destroy,
Yes, with utter destruction.
11 If a man should walk in a false spirit
And speak a lie, *saying,*
'I will prophesy to you of wine and drink,'
Even he would be the prattler of this people.

Israel Restored

12 "I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob,
I will surely gather the remnant of Israel;
I will put them together like sheep of the fold,[a]
Like a flock in the midst of their pasture;
They shall make a loud noise because of *so many* people.
13 The one who breaks open will come up before them;
They will break out,
Pass through the gate,
And go out by it;
Their king will pass before them,
With the Lord at their head."

Wicked Rulers and Prophets

3 And I said:

"Hear now, O heads of Jacob,
And you rulers of the house of Israel:
Is it not for you to know justice?
2 You who hate good and love evil;
Who strip the skin from My people,[a]
And the flesh from their bones;
3 Who also eat the flesh of My people,
Flay their skin from them,
Break their bones,
And chop *them* in pieces

2:12 [a]Hebrew *Bozrah* **3:2** [a]Literally *them*

Like *meat* for the pot,
Like flesh in the caldron."

4 Then they will cry to the Lord,
But He will not hear them;
He will even hide His face from them at that time,
Because they have been evil in their deeds.

5 Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets
Who make my people stray;
Who chant "Peace"
While they chew with their teeth,
But who prepare war against him
Who puts nothing into their mouths:
6 "Therefore you shall have night without vision,
And you shall have darkness without divination;
The sun shall go down on the prophets,
And the day shall be dark for them.
7 So the seers shall be ashamed,
And the diviners abashed;
Indeed they shall all cover their lips;
For *there is* no answer from God."

8 But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord,
And of justice and might,
To declare to Jacob his transgression
And to Israel his sin.
9 Now hear this,
You heads of the house of Jacob
And rulers of the house of Israel,
Who abhor justice
And pervert all equity,
10 Who build up Zion with bloodshed
And Jerusalem with iniquity:
11 Her heads judge for a bribe,
Her priests teach for pay,
And her prophets divine for money.
Yet they lean on the Lord, and say,
"Is not the Lord among us?
No harm can come upon us."
12 Therefore because of you
Zion shall be plowed *like* a field,
Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins,
And the mountain of the temple[a]
Like the bare hills of the forest.

The Lord's Reign in Zion

4 Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
That the mountain of the Lord's house
Shall be established on the top of the mountains,

3:12 [a]Literally *house*

Love explains how He endured.

His hometown kicked Him out. A so-called friend turned Him in. Hucksters called God a hypocrite. Sinners called God guilty. Do termites mock an eagle, tapeworms decry the beauty of a swan? How did Jesus endure such derision? "For God so loved . . ."

"Observe how Christ loved us. . . . He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us" (Ephesians 5:2 MSG). (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Christians should pray for peace and harmony in the world. The Prince of Peace, born in a stable in Bethlehem just as Micah foretold, will one day bring perfect peace to our hurting world. In the meantime, He offers perfect peace to the hearts of those who love Him.

EXPLORATION

Pursue Peace—Psalm 34:14; Matthew 5:9; Mark 9:50; Romans 12:18; Colossians 3:15; Hebrews 12:14.

And shall be exalted above the hills;
And peoples shall flow to it.
2 Many nations shall come and say,
"Come, and let us go up to the mountain
of the Lord,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
He will teach us His ways,
And we shall walk in His paths."
For out of Zion the law shall go forth,
And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
3 He shall judge between many peoples,
And rebuke strong nations afar off;
They shall beat their swords into
plowshares,
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against
nation,
Neither shall they learn war anymore.[a]

4 But everyone shall sit under his vine and
under his fig tree,
And no one shall make *them* afraid;
For the mouth of the Lord of hosts has
spoken.
5 For all people walk each in the name of
his god,
But we will walk in the name of the Lord
our God
Forever and ever.

Zion's Future Triumph

6 "In that day," says the Lord,
"I will assemble the lame,
I will gather the outcast
And those whom I have afflicted;
7 I will make the lame a remnant,
And the outcast a strong nation;
So the Lord will reign over them in Mount
Zion
From now on, even forever.
8 And you, O tower of the flock,
The stronghold of the daughter of Zion,
To you shall it come,
Even the former dominion shall come,
The kingdom of the daughter of
Jerusalem."

9 Now why do you cry aloud?
Is there no king in your midst?
Has your counselor perished?
For pangs have seized you like a woman
in labor.
10 Be in pain, and labor to bring forth,
O daughter of Zion,
Like a woman in birth pangs.
For now you shall go forth from the city,
You shall dwell in the field,
And to Babylon you shall go.
There you shall be delivered;
There the Lord will redeem you
From the hand of your enemies.

11 Now also many nations have gathered
against you,
Who say, "Let her be defiled,
And let our eye look upon Zion."
12 But they do not know the thoughts of the
Lord,
Nor do they understand His counsel;
For He will gather them like sheaves to
the threshing floor.

13 "Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion;
For I will make your horn iron,
And I will make your hooves bronze;
You shall beat in pieces many peoples;
I will consecrate their gain to the Lord,
And their substance to the Lord of the
whole earth."

5 Now gather yourself in troops,
O daughter of troops;
He has laid siege against us;
They will strike the judge of Israel with a
rod on the cheek.

The Coming Messiah

2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Though you are little among the
thousands of Judah,
Yet out of you shall come forth to Me
The One to be Ruler in Israel,
Whose goings forth *are* from of old,
From everlasting."

3 Therefore He shall give them up,
Until the time *that* she who is in labor has
given birth;
Then the remnant of His brethren
Shall return to the children of Israel.

4:3 [a]Compare Isaiah 2:2–4

4 And He shall stand and feed *His flock*
In the strength of the Lord,
In the majesty of the name of the Lord
His God;
And they shall abide,
For now He shall be great
To the ends of the earth;
5 And this *One* shall be peace.

Judgment on Israel's Enemies

When the Assyrian comes into our land,
And when he treads in our palaces,
Then we will raise against him
Seven shepherds and eight princely men.
6 They shall waste with the sword the land
of Assyria,
And the land of Nimrod at its entrances;
Thus He shall deliver *us* from the
Assyrian,
When he comes into our land
And when he treads within our borders.

7 Then the remnant of Jacob
Shall be in the midst of many peoples,
Like dew from the Lord,
Like showers on the grass,
That tarry for no man
Nor wait for the sons of men.
8 And the remnant of Jacob
Shall be among the Gentiles,
In the midst of many peoples,
Like a lion among the beasts of the
forest,
Like a young lion among flocks of sheep,
Who, if he passes through,
Both treads down and tears in pieces,
And none can deliver.
9 Your hand shall be lifted against your
adversaries,
And all your enemies shall be cut off.

10 "And it shall be in that day," says the Lord,
"That I will cut off your horses from your
midst
And destroy your chariots.
11 I will cut off the cities of your land
And throw down all your strongholds.
12 I will cut off sorceries from your hand,
And you shall have no soothsayers.
13 Your carved images I will also cut off,
And your *sacred* pillars from your midst;
You shall no more worship the work of
your hands;
14 I will pluck your wooden images[a] from
your midst;
Thus I will destroy your cities.
15 And I will execute vengeance in anger
and fury
On the nations that have not heard."[a]

God Pleads with Israel

6 Hear now what the Lord says:
"Arise, plead your case before the
mountains,
And let the hills hear your voice.
2 Hear, O you mountains, the Lord's
complaint,
And you strong foundations of the earth;
For the Lord has a complaint against His
people,
And He will contend with Israel.

3 "O My people, what have I done to you?
And how have I wearied you?
Testify against Me.
4 For I brought you up from the land of
Egypt,
I redeemed you from the house of
bondage;
And I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and
Miriam.
5 O My people, remember now
What Balak king of Moab counseled,
And what Balaam the son of Beor
answered him,
From Acacia Grove[a] to Gilgal,
That you may know the righteousness of
the Lord."

6 With what shall I come before the Lord,
And bow myself before the High God?
Shall I come before Him with burnt
offerings,
With calves a year old?
7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands
of rams,
Ten thousand rivers of oil?

5:14 [a]Hebrew *Asherim,* Canaanite deities **5:15** [a]Or *obeyed* **6:5** [a]Hebrew *Shittim* (compare Numbers 25:1; Joshua 2:1; 3:1)

Shall I give my firstborn *for* my transgression,
The fruit of my body *for* the sin of my soul?

8 He has shown you, O man, what *is* good;
And what does the Lord require of you
But to do justly,
To love mercy,
And to walk humbly with your God?

Punishment of Israel's Injustice

9 The Lord's voice cries to the city—
Wisdom shall see Your name:

"Hear the rod!
Who has appointed it?
10 Are there yet the treasures of wickedness
In the house of the wicked,
And the short measure *that is* an abomination?
11 Shall I count pure *those* with the wicked scales,
And with the bag of deceitful weights?
12 For her rich men are full of violence,
Her inhabitants have spoken lies,
And their tongue is deceitful in their mouth.

13 "Therefore I will also make *you* sick by striking you,
By making *you* desolate because of your sins.
14 You shall eat, but not be satisfied;
Hunger[a] *shall be* in your midst.
You may carry *some* away,[b] but shall not save *them;*
And what you do rescue I will give over to the sword.

15 "You shall sow, but not reap;
You shall tread the olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil;
And *make* sweet wine, but not drink wine.
16 For the statutes of Omri are kept;
All the works of Ahab's house *are done;*
And you walk in their counsels,
That I may make you a desolation,
And your inhabitants a hissing.
Therefore you shall bear the reproach of My people."[a]

Sorrow for Israel's Sins

7 Woe is me!
For I am like those who gather summer fruits,
Like those who glean vintage grapes;
There is no cluster to eat
Of the first-ripe fruit *which* my soul desires.
2 The faithful *man* has perished from the earth,
And *there is* no one upright among men.

6:14 [a]Or *Emptiness* or *Humiliation* [b]Targum and Vulgate read *You shall take hold.*
6:16 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *of nations.*

Life Lessons

Micah 6:1—7:20

SITUATION
These chapters include both an indictment of Israel for her sin and a promise of future blessing.

OBSERVATION
Micah knew that sacrifices were outward expressions of inner faith and trust. What God desired most of all was for Israel to relate to Him in a heartfelt, personal way—not just in some superficial, ritualistic fashion.

INSPIRATION
In my closet is a varsity football jacket. I earned it by playing two years of high-school football. It, too, is a symbol. It's symbolic of sweat and work and long hours on the practice field. The jacket and a sore knee are reminders of something I could do twenty years ago. Do you think if I put the jacket on now I'd instantly be twenty pounds lighter and a whole lot faster? Do you think if I wore that jacket into the office of a coach he'd extend his hand and say, "We've been waiting for a player like you. Go out there and suit up!"?

Hogwash. That jacket is merely a memoir of something I once did. It says nothing about what I could do today. It alone doesn't transform me, empower me, or enable me.

Neither does your heritage, even if you're a descendant of John Wesley.

Neither does your communion service, even if you double up on the wafers.

Neither does your baptism, even if you got dunked in the Jordan River.

Please understand.

They all lie in wait for blood;
Every man hunts his brother with a net.

3 That they may successfully do evil with both hands—
The prince asks *for gifts,*
The judge *seeks* a bribe,
And the great *man* utters his evil desire;
So they scheme together.
4 The best of them *is* like a brier;
The most upright *is sharper* than a thorn hedge;
The day of your watchman and your punishment comes;
Now shall be their perplexity.

5 Do not trust in a friend;
Do not put your confidence in a companion;
Guard the doors of your mouth
From her who lies in your bosom.
6 For son dishonors father,
Daughter rises against her mother,
Daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
A man's enemies *are* the men of his own household.
7 Therefore I will look to the Lord;
I will wait for the God of my salvation;
My God will hear me.

Israel's Confession and Comfort

8 Do not rejoice over me, my enemy;
When I fall, I will arise;
When I sit in darkness,
The Lord *will be* a light to me.
9 I will bear the indignation of the Lord,
Because I have sinned against Him,
Until He pleads my case
And executes justice for me.
He will bring me forth to the light;
I will see His righteousness.
10 Then *she who is* my enemy will see,
And shame will cover her who said to me,
"Where is the Lord your God?"
My eyes will see her;
Now she will be trampled down
Like mud in the streets.

11 *In* the day when your walls are to be built,
In that day the decree shall go far and wide.[a]
12 *In* that day they[a] shall come to you
From Assyria and the fortified cities,[b]
From the fortress[c] to the River,[d]

7:11 [a]Or *the boundary shall be extended* **7:12** [a]Literally *he,* collective of the captives [b]Hebrew *arey mazor,* possibly *cities of Egypt* [c]Hebrew *mazor,* possibly *Egypt* [d]That is, the Euphrates

Symbols are important. Some of them, like communion and baptism, illustrate the cross of Christ. They symbolize salvation, demonstrate salvation, even articulate salvation. But they do not impart salvation.

Putting your trust in a symbol is like claiming to be a sailor because you have a tattoo or claiming to be a good husband because you have a ring or claiming to be a football player because you have a letter jacket.

Do we honestly think God would save His children based upon a symbol?

What kind of god would look at a religious hypocrite and say, "You've never loved me, sought me or obeyed me, but because your name was on the roll of a church in the right denomination I will save you"?

On the other hand, what kind of god would look at the sincere seeker and say, "You dedicated your life to loving me and loving my children. You surrendered your heart and confessed your sins. I want to save you so badly. I'm so sorry, your church took communion one time a month too many. Because of a technicality, you are forever lost in hell"?

Hogwash. Our God is abundant in love and steadfast in mercy. He saves us, not because we trust in a symbol, but because we trust in a Savior. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What are you trusting to save you from your sins? The blood of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice alone? Or are you adding to it some symbol, tradition, or religious practice? What God wants is a personal relationship, not an external connection only. Make sure you are connected

to Him by faith. If you are trusting in Christ alone for your salvation, then study the Scriptures to find a proper place for symbols, ceremonies, and observances.

EXPLORATION
Faith Alone—Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:8, 9; Colossians 2:8–23; 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 Peter 1:3–5.

From sea to sea,
And mountain *to* mountain.
13 Yet the land shall be desolate
Because of those who dwell in it,
And for the fruit of their deeds.

God Will Forgive Israel

14 Shepherd Your people with Your staff,
The flock of Your heritage,
Who dwell solitarily *in* a woodland,
In the midst of Carmel;
Let them feed *in* Bashan and Gilead,
As in days of old.

15 "As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt,
I will show them[a] wonders."

16 The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might;
They shall put *their* hand over *their* mouth;
Their ears shall be deaf.
17 They shall lick the dust like a serpent;
They shall crawl from their holes like snakes of the earth.
They shall be afraid of the Lord our God,
And shall fear because of You.
18 Who *is* a God like You,
Pardoning iniquity
And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?

He does not retain His anger forever,
Because He delights *in* mercy.
19 He will again have compassion on us,
And will subdue our iniquities.

You will cast all our[a] sins
Into the depths of the sea.
20 You will give truth to Jacob
And mercy to Abraham,
Which You have sworn to our fathers
From days of old.

7:15 [a]Literally *him,* collective for the captives **7:19** [a]Literally *their*

THE BOOK OF

NAHUM

INTRODUCTION

Remember the playground bully? He was big and tough and he enjoyed pushing kids around. Everyone was afraid of him (even some of the teachers, you thought)—he seemed invincible. But over the next few years, the other boys grew past him—bigger, stronger, faster. Then the bully didn't seem so tough or frightening as before.

Assyria was the bully of the Middle East, the conqueror of many nations including Israel. This nation's power, epitomized by Nineveh, the capital city, was awesome and overwhelming. Proud and defiant, Assyria plundered, oppressed, and slaughtered its victims.

Enter Nahum, the prophet.

Nahum pronounced God's judgment upon this prideful and wicked people, exclaiming that powerful Assyria would be utterly destroyed. His prediction was fulfilled within fifty years.

This book provides strong testimony to God's ultimate power and justice—He calls all people to live under His rule: nations, cities, parents, neighborhood bullies . . . and you.

Perhaps you don't have to *remember* a bully. There may be one in your world today. Huge debt, ugly guilt. Bossy employer. If so, remember what Nahum announced thousands of years ago: Your Father is bigger than any bully.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Nahum

Date Written: c. 650 B.C.

Key Themes:

- God warned Nineveh through Jonah. His warnings are not to be ignored.
- God is more powerful than any nation or world power.
- Those who ignore God's warnings will suffer the consequences.

Key Verse:

"The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him" (Nahum 1:7).

Contents:

I. God's Mercy and Judgment 1:1–15

II. Nineveh's Destruction 2:1–13

III. The Cause and Inevitability of the Destruction 3:1–19

Life Lessons

Nahum 1:1—3:19

SITUATION
The Assyrian Empire conquered Israel and harassed Judah. God offered to free Judah from Assyrian oppression by destroying Assyria's wicked capital, Nineveh.

OBSERVATION
God doesn't want people to fail; rather, He gives them opportunities to repent and enter heaven. But if they persist in sin, they will be punished.

INSPIRATION
Do-it-yourself Christianity is not much encouragement to the done in and worn out.

Self-sanctification holds little hope for the addict.

"Try a little harder" is little encouragement for the abused.

At some point we need more than good advice; we need help. Somewhere on this journey home we realize that a fifty-fifty proposition is too little. We need more—more than a pudgy wizard who thanks us for coming but tells us the trip was unnecessary.

We need help. Help from the inside out. The kind of help Jesus promised. "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it does not see him or know him. But you know him, because he lives with you and will be *in* you" (John 14:16, 17, NCV, emphasis mine).

Note the final words of the verse. And in doing so, note the dwelling place of God—"in you."

The burden[a] against Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.

God's Wrath on His Enemies

2 God *is* jealous, and the Lord avenges;
The Lord avenges and *is* furious.
The Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries,
And He reserves *wrath* for His enemies;
3 The Lord *is* slow to anger and great in power,
And will not at all acquit *the wicked.*

The Lord has His way
In the whirlwind and in the storm,
And the clouds *are* the dust of His feet.
4 He rebukes the sea and makes it dry,
And dries up all the rivers.
Bashan and Carmel wither,
And the flower of Lebanon wilts.
5 The mountains quake before Him,
The hills melt,
And the earth heaves[a] at His presence,
Yes, the world and all who dwell in it.

6 Who can stand before His indignation?
And who can endure the fierceness of His anger?
His fury is poured out like fire,
And the rocks are thrown down by Him.

7 The Lord *is* good,
A stronghold in the day of trouble;
And He knows those who trust in Him.
8 But with an overflowing flood
He will make an utter end of its place,
And darkness will pursue His enemies.

9 What do you conspire against the Lord?
He will make an utter end *of it.*
Affliction will not rise up a second time.
10 For while tangled *like* thorns,
And while drunken *like* drunkards,
They shall be devoured like stubble fully dried.
11 From you comes forth *one*
Who plots evil against the Lord,
A wicked counselor.

12 Thus says the Lord:

"Though *they are* safe, and likewise many,
Yet in this manner they will be cut down
When he passes through.

1:1 [a]Or *oracle* **1:5** [a]Targum reads *burns.*

Though I have afflicted you,
I will afflict you no more;
13 For now I will break off his yoke from you,
And burst your bonds apart."

14 The Lord has given a command concerning you:
"Your name shall be perpetuated no longer.
Out of the house of your gods
I will cut off the carved image and the molded image.
I will dig your grave,
For you are vile."

15 Behold, on the mountains
The feet of him who brings good tidings,
Who proclaims peace!
O Judah, keep your appointed feasts,
Perform your vows.
For the wicked one shall no more pass through you;
He is utterly cut off.

The Destruction of Nineveh

2 He who scatters[a] has come up before your face. Man the fort!
Watch the road!
Strengthen *your* flanks!
Fortify *your* power mightily.

2 For the Lord will restore the excellence of Jacob
Like the excellence of Israel,
For the emptiers have emptied them out
And ruined their vine branches.

3 The shields of his mighty men *are* made red,
The valiant men *are* in scarlet.
The chariots *come* with flaming torches
In the day of his preparation,
And the spears are brandished.[a]
4 The chariots rage in the streets,
They jostle one another in the broad roads;
They seem like torches,
They run like lightning.

5 He remembers his nobles;
They stumble in their walk;
They make haste to her walls,
And the defense is prepared.
6 The gates of the rivers are opened,
And the palace is dissolved.
7 It is decreed:[a]

2:1 [a]Vulgate reads *He who destroys.* **2:3** [a]Literally *the cypresses are shaken;* Septuagint and Syriac read *the horses rush about;* Vulgate reads *the drivers are stupefied.* **2:7** [a]Hebrew *Huzzab*

Not near us. Not above us. Not around us. But in us. In the part of us we don't even know. In the heart no one else has seen. In the hidden recesses of our being dwells, not an angel, not a philosophy, not a genie, but God.

Imagine that. (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you feel empty? Overwhelmed? Do you wonder why you have to face difficult trials? Memorize Nahum 1:7 and take confidence in God who remains good.

EXPLORATION

God's Judgment—
1 Chronicles 13:10–14; Psalm 75:8; Matthew 24:51; Romans 2:5–11.

She shall be led away captive,
She shall be brought up;
And her maidservants shall lead *her* as
with the voice of doves,
Beating their breasts.

8 Though Nineveh of old *was* like a pool of
water,
Now they flee away.
"Halt! Halt!" *they cry;*
But no one turns back.
9 Take spoil of silver!
Take spoil of gold!
There is no end of treasure,
Or wealth of every desirable prize.
10 She is empty, desolate, and waste!
The heart melts, and the knees shake;
Much pain *is* in every side,
And all their faces are drained of color.[a]

11 Where *is* the dwelling of the lions,
And the feeding place of the young lions,
Where the lion walked, the lioness *and*
lion's cub,
And no one made *them* afraid?
12 The lion tore in pieces enough for his
cubs,
Killed for his lionesses,
Filled his caves with prey,
And his dens with flesh.

13 "Behold, I *am* against you," says the Lord of hosts, "I will burn your[a] chariots in smoke, and the sword shall devour your young lions; I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your messengers shall be heard no more."

The Woe of Nineveh

3 Woe to the bloody city!
It *is* all full of lies *and* robbery.
Its victim never departs.
2 The noise of a whip
And the noise of rattling wheels,
Of galloping horses,
Of clattering chariots!
3 Horsemen charge with bright sword and
glittering spear.
There is a multitude of slain,
A great number of bodies,
Countless corpses—
They stumble over the corpses—
4 Because of the multitude of harlotries of
the seductive harlot,
The mistress of sorceries,
Who sells nations through her harlotries,
And families through her sorceries.

5 "Behold, I *am* against you," says the Lord
of hosts;
"I will lift your skirts over your face,
I will show the nations your nakedness,
And the kingdoms your shame.
6 I will cast abominable filth upon you,
Make you vile,
And make you a spectacle.
7 It shall come to pass *that* all who look
upon you
Will flee from you, and say,
'Nineveh is laid waste!
Who will bemoan her?'
Where shall I seek comforters for you?"

8 Are you better than No Amon[a]
That was situated by the River,[b]
That had the waters around her,
Whose rampart *was* the sea,
Whose wall *was* the sea?
9 Ethiopia and Egypt *were* her strength,
And *it was* boundless;
Put and Lubim were your[a] helpers.
10 Yet she *was* carried away,
She went into captivity;
Her young children also were dashed to
pieces
At the head of every street;
They cast lots for her honorable men,
And all her great men were bound in chains.
11 You also will be drunk;
You will be hidden;
You also will seek refuge from the enemy.

12 All your strongholds *are* fig trees with
ripened figs:
If they are shaken,
They fall into the mouth of the eater.
13 Surely, your people in your midst *are*
women!

2:10 [a]Compare Joel 2:6 **2:13** [a]Literally *her* **3:8** [a]That is, ancient Thebes; Targum and Vulgate read *populous Alexandria.* [b]Literally *rivers,* that is, the Nile and the surrounding canals **3:9** [a]Septuagint reads *her.*

The gates of your land are wide open for
your enemies;
Fire shall devour the bars of your *gates.*

14 Draw your water for the siege!
Fortify your strongholds!
Go into the clay and tread the mortar!
Make strong the brick kiln!
15 There the fire will devour you,
The sword will cut you off;
It will eat you up like a locust.

Make yourself many—like the locust!
Make yourself many— like the *swarming*
locusts!
16 You have multiplied your merchants
more than the stars of heaven.
The locust plunders and flies away.
17 Your commanders *are* like *swarming*
locusts,
And your generals like great
grasshoppers,
Which camp in the hedges on a cold day;
When the sun rises they flee away,
And the place where they *are* is not
known.

18 Your shepherds slumber, O king of
Assyria;
Your nobles rest *in the dust.*
Your people are scattered on the
mountains,
And no one gathers them.
19 Your injury *has* no healing,
Your wound is severe.
All who hear news of you
Will clap *their* hands over you,
For upon whom has not your wickedness
passed continually?

THE BOOK OF

HABAKKUK

INTRODUCTION

Here's a challenge. Find one sincere seeker whom God ignored. Search the Bible for one honest person spurned by heaven. Go ahead. Flip the pages. Examine the Scriptures. Read the stories. Where in the Bible did God turn away the genuine heart? Where in history did God spurn the authentic soul?

Thomas came with doubts. Did Christ turn him away?

Moses had his reservations. Did God tell him to go home?

Job had his struggles. Did God avoid him?

Paul had his hard times. Did God abandon him?

And Habakkuk had his questions. Tough questions. Get-down-and-get-honest type of questions.

Lord, how long must I ask for help and you ignore me? (1:2).

How can you put up with those evil people? (1:13).

Did God tell him to talk to someone else?

No. God never turns away the sincere heart. Tough questions don't stump God. He invites our probing. And that is what Habakkuk did. He probed. As well as speaking for God, he spoke to God. He dared to ask his own troubling questions.

Were all his questions answered? I don't know. But I do know Habakkuk was satisfied. You might want to underline his declaration of devotion found in chapter three:

"Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls—yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (vv. 17, 18).

Mark it down. God never turns away the honest seeker. Go to God with your questions. You may not find all the answers, but in finding God, you know the One who does.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Habakkuk

Date Written: 625–575 B.C.

Key Themes:

- God will discipline even His most beloved when they live apart from Him.
- Sometimes God uses the wicked to discipline the righteous.
- Even in the midst of the consequences of our sin, we can worship.

Key Verse:

"Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4).

Contents:

I. Habakkuk Questions God 1:1—2:20

II. Habakkuk Praises God 3:1–19

The burden[a] which the prophet Habakkuk saw.

The Prophet's Question

2 O Lord, how long shall I cry,
And You will not hear?
Even cry out to You, "Violence!"
And You will not save.
3 Why do You show me iniquity,
And cause *me* to see trouble?
For plundering and violence *are* before me;
There is strife, and contention arises.
4 Therefore the law is powerless,
And justice never goes forth.
For the wicked surround the righteous;
Therefore perverse judgment proceeds.

The Lord's Reply

5 "Look among the nations and watch—
Be utterly astounded!
For *I will* work a work in your days
Which you would not believe, though it were told *you.*
6 For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans,
A bitter and hasty nation
Which marches through the breadth of the earth,
To possess dwelling places *that are* not theirs.
7 They are terrible and dreadful;
Their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves.
8 Their horses also are swifter than leopards,
And more fierce than evening wolves.
Their chargers charge ahead;
Their cavalry comes from afar;
They fly as the eagle *that* hastens to eat.

9 "They all come for violence;
Their faces are set *like* the east wind.
They gather captives like sand.
10 They scoff at kings,
And princes are scorned by them.
They deride every stronghold,
For they heap up earthen *mounds* and seize it.
11 Then *his* mind[a] changes, and he transgresses;
He commits offense,
Ascribing this power to his god."

The Prophet's Second Question

12 Are You not from everlasting,
O Lord my God, my Holy One?
We shall not die.
O Lord, You have appointed them for judgment;

1:1 [a]Or *oracle* **1:11** [a]Literally *spirit* or *wind*

Life Lessons

Habakkuk 1:1—3:19

SITUATION
Judah was making alliances with other nations. God was bringing judgment on Judah through the Babylonians. Habakkuk prophesied at the same time as Jeremiah.

OBSERVATION
In the face of great trouble, Habakkuk brought his questions to God. After hearing God's answer, he responded with a prayer of faith (3:2). He asked God to do great miracles.

INSPIRATION
To be clear, fear serves a healthy function. It is the canary in the coal mine, warning of potential danger. A dose of fright can keep a child from running across a busy road or an adult from smoking a pack of cigarettes. Fear is the appropriate reaction to a burning building or growling dog. Fear itself is not a sin. But it can lead to sin.

If we medicate fear with angry outbursts, drinking binges, sullen withdrawals, self-starvation, or viselike control, we exclude God from the solution and exacerbate the problem. We subject ourselves to a position of fear, allowing anxiety to dominate and define our lives. Joy-sapping worries. Day-numbing dread. Repeated bouts of insecurity that petrify and paralyze us. Hysteria is not from God. "For God has not given us a spirit of fear" (2 Timothy 1:7).

Fear may fill our world, but it doesn't have to fill our hearts. It will always knock on the door. Just don't invite it in for dinner, and

for heaven's sake don't offer it a bed for the night. Let's embolden our hearts with a select number of Jesus' "do not fear" statements. The promise of Christ . . . [is] simple: we can fear less tomorrow than we do today. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What are three situations that could depress you or make you anxious today? Give them to God in prayer. Ask God to help you not be afraid, trust Him, and have the strength to do His will.

EXPLORATION

Strength Through Prayer—Matthew 21:21, 22; James 1:5, 6.

O Rock, You have marked them for correction.
13 *You are* of purer eyes than to behold evil,
And cannot look on wickedness.
Why do You look on those who deal treacherously,
And hold Your tongue when the wicked devours
A *person* more righteous than he?
14 *Why* do You make men like fish of the sea,
Like creeping things *that have* no ruler over them?

15 They take up all of them with a hook,
They catch them in their net,
And gather them in their dragnet.
Therefore they rejoice and are glad.
16 Therefore they sacrifice to their net,
And burn incense to their dragnet;
Because by them their share *is* sumptuous
And their food plentiful.
17 Shall they therefore empty their net,
And continue to slay nations without pity?

2 I will stand my watch
And set myself on the rampart,
And watch to see what He will say to me,
And what I will answer when I am corrected.

The Just Live by Faith

2 Then the Lord answered me and said:

"Write the vision
And make *it* plain on tablets,
That he may run who reads it.
3 For the vision *is* yet for an appointed time;
But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie.
Though it tarries, wait for it;
Because it will surely come,
It will not tarry.

4 "Behold the proud,
His soul is not upright in him;
But the just shall live by his faith.

Woe to the Wicked

5 "Indeed, because he transgresses by wine,
He is a proud man,
And he does not stay at home.
Because he enlarges his desire as hell,[a]
And he *is* like death, and cannot be satisfied,
He gathers to himself all nations
And heaps up for himself all peoples.

6 "Will not all these take up a proverb against him,

2:5 [a]Or *Sheol*

And a taunting riddle against him, and say,
'Woe to him who increases
What is not his—how long?
And to him who loads himself with many pledges'?[a]
7 Will not your creditors[a] rise up suddenly?
Will they not awaken who oppress you?
And you will become their booty.
8 Because you have plundered many nations,
All the remnant of the people shall plunder you,
Because of men's blood
And the violence of the land *and* the city,
And of all who dwell in it.

9 "Woe to him who covets evil gain for his house,
That he may set his nest on high,
That he may be delivered from the power of disaster!
10 You give shameful counsel to your house,
Cutting off many peoples,
And sin *against* your soul.
11 For the stone will cry out from the wall,
And the beam from the timbers will answer it.

12 "Woe to him who builds a town with bloodshed,
Who establishes a city by iniquity!
13 Behold, *is it* not of the Lord of hosts
That the peoples labor to feed the fire,[a]
And nations weary themselves in vain?
14 For the earth will be filled
With the knowledge of the glory of the Lord,
As the waters cover the sea.

15 "Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbor,
Pressing[a] *him to* your bottle,
Even to make *him* drunk,
That you may look on his nakedness!
16 You are filled with shame instead of glory.
You also—drink!
And be exposed as uncircumcised![a]
The cup of the Lord's right hand *will be* turned against you,
And utter shame will be on your glory.
17 For the violence *done to* Lebanon will cover you,
And the plunder of beasts *which* made them afraid,
Because of men's blood
And the violence of the land *and* the city,
And of all who dwell in it.

18 "What profit is the image, that its maker should carve it,
The molded image, a teacher of lies,
That the maker of its mold should trust in it,
To make mute idols?
19 Woe to him who says to wood, 'Awake!'
To silent stone, 'Arise! It shall teach!'
Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver,
Yet in it there is no breath at all.

20 "But the Lord is in His holy temple.
Let all the earth keep silence before Him."

The Prophet's Prayer

3 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on Shigionoth.[a]

2 O Lord, I have heard Your speech *and* was afraid;
O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years!
In the midst of the years make *it* known;
In wrath remember mercy.

3 God came from Teman,
The Holy One from Mount Paran. *Selah*

His glory covered the heavens,
And the earth was full of His praise.
4 *His* brightness was like the light;
He had rays *flashing* from His hand,
And there His power *was* hidden.
5 Before Him went pestilence,
And fever followed at His feet.

2:6 [a]Syriac and Vulgate read *thick clay.* **2:7** [a]Literally *those who bite you* **2:13** [a]Literally *for what satisfies fire,* that is, for what is of no lasting value **2:15** [a]Literally *Attaching* or *Joining* **2:16** [a]Dead Sea Scrolls and Septuagint read *And reel!;* Syriac and Vulgate read *And fall fast asleep!* **3:1** [a]Exact meaning unknown

6 He stood and measured the earth;
He looked and startled the nations.
And the everlasting mountains were scattered,
The perpetual hills bowed.
His ways *are* everlasting.
7 I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction;
The curtains of the land of Midian trembled.

8 O Lord, were *You* displeased with the rivers,
Was Your anger against the rivers,
Was Your wrath against the sea,
That You rode on Your horses,
Your chariots of salvation?
9 Your bow was made quite ready;
Oaths were sworn over *Your* arrows.[a]
Selah

You divided the earth with rivers.
10 The mountains saw You *and* trembled;
The overflowing of the water passed by.
The deep uttered its voice,
And lifted its hands on high.
11 The sun and moon stood still in their habitation;
At the light of Your arrows they went,
At the shining of Your glittering spear.

12 You marched through the land in indignation;
You trampled the nations in anger.
13 You went forth for the salvation of Your people,
For salvation with Your Anointed.
You struck the head from the house of the wicked,
By laying bare from foundation to neck.
Selah

14 You thrust through with his own arrows
The head of his villages.
They came out like a whirlwind to scatter me;
Their rejoicing was like feasting on the poor in secret.
15 You walked through the sea with Your horses,
Through the heap of great waters.

16 When I heard, my body trembled;
My lips quivered at *the* voice;
Rottenness entered my bones;
And I trembled in myself,
That I might rest in the day of trouble.
When he comes up to the people,
He will invade them with his troops.

A Hymn of Faith

17 Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines;
Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
And there be no herd in the stalls—
18 Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.

19 The Lord God[a] is my strength;
He will make my feet like deer's *feet,*
And He will make me walk on my high hills.

To the Chief Musician. With my stringed instruments.

3:9 [a]Literally *rods* or *tribes* (compare verse 14) **3:19** [a]Hebrew *YHWH Adonai*

THE BOOK OF

ZEPHANIAH

INTRODUCTION

Rain can be depressing—constant dripping, wet clothes, mud, gray skies, and distant thunder. After many days of rain, we listen intently for positive clues in weather reports and search the skies for a sunny break in the clouds. We look for signs of change.

God's spokesman, Zephaniah, had nothing but doom and gloom to tell the people of Judah. Most of his prophecies, and thus most of this book (two and one-half chapters to be exact), tell of God's terrible judgment upon the nations, including Judah herself. His words, like the steady pounding of rain, continued to beat the depressing truth that God was not happy with the way people had flaunted His laws and had worshiped idols and He would punish their sin, wiping out entire nations.

That constant negative, and truthful, message would be enough to depress even the most positive optimist.

Suddenly, a ray of hope broke through the clouds. Check out the last eleven verses of the book. God says: "'At that time I will bring you back, even at the time I gather you; for I will give you fame and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I return your captives before your eyes,' says the LORD" (3:20).

Hear God's Word through His faithful prophet—surely He will judge sin. But there is hope, deliverance, and salvation for those who trust in Him.

The storm is over; take a walk in the sun!

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: The prophet Zephaniah

Date Written: 650–600 B.C.

Key Themes:

- God's judgment, a day of reckoning, is inevitable.
- It is never too late to seek God and turn to Him.
- God will judge both those who claim to have faith and those who don't.

Key Verse:

"Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the LORD's anger" (Zephaniah 2:3).

Contents:

I. God's Judgment on Judah 1:1–18

II. God's Judgment on the Other Nations 2:1—3:8

III. The Day of the Lord 3:9–20

Life Lessons

Zephaniah 1:1—3:20

SITUATION
Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah and warned the Israelites that their sins would bring God's approaching judgment.

OBSERVATION
After prophecies involving judgment, Zephaniah spoke of future blessings.

INSPIRATION
To whom was He [God] speaking when He said, "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3)? Was He playing games when He said, "Nothing . . . will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ" (Romans 8:39 NCV)? Buried in the seldom-quarried mines of the minor prophets is this jewel:

"The Lord your God is with you; the mighty One will save you. He will rejoice over you. You will rest in his love; he will sing and be joyful about you" (Zephaniah 3:17 NCV).

Don't move too quickly through that verse. Read it again and prepare yourself for a surprise.

"The Lord your God is with you; the mighty One will save you. He will rejoice over you. You will rest in his love; he will sing and be joyful about you."

Note who is active and who is passive. Who is singing, and who is resting? Who is rejoicing over his loved one, and who is being rejoiced over?

We tend to think we are the singers and God is the "singee." Most certainly that is often the case. But apparently there are times

The word of the Lord which came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah.

The Great Day of the Lord

2 "I will utterly consume everything
From the face of the land,"
Says the Lord;
3 "I will consume man and beast;
I will consume the birds of the heavens,
The fish of the sea,
And the stumbling blocks[a] along with the wicked.
I will cut off man from the face of the land,"
Says the Lord.

4 "I will stretch out My hand against Judah,
And against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem.
I will cut off every trace of Baal from this place,
The names of the idolatrous priests[a] with the *pagan* priests—
5 Those who worship the host of heaven on the housetops;
Those who worship and swear *oaths* by the Lord,
But who *also* swear by Milcom;[a]
6 Those who have turned back from *following* the Lord,
And have not sought the Lord, nor inquired of Him."

7 Be silent in the presence of the Lord God;
For the day of the Lord *is* at hand,
For the Lord has prepared a sacrifice;
He has invited[a] His guests.

8 "And it shall be,
In the day of the Lord's sacrifice,
That I will punish the princes and the king's children,
And all such as are clothed with foreign apparel.
9 In the same day I will punish
All those who leap over the threshold,[a]
Who fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit.

10 "And there shall be on that day," says the Lord,
"The sound of a mournful cry from the Fish Gate,
A wailing from the Second Quarter,
And a loud crashing from the hills.
11 Wail, you inhabitants of Maktesh![a]
For all the merchant people are cut down;
All those who handle money are cut off.

12 "And it shall come to pass at that time
That I will search Jerusalem with lamps,

1:3 [a]Figurative of idols **1:4** [a]Hebrew *chemarim* **1:5** [a]Or *Malcam*, an Ammonite god, also called *Molech* (compare Leviticus 18:21) **1:7** [a]Literally *set apart, consecrated* **1:9** [a]Compare 1 Samuel 5:5 **1:11** [a]Literally *Mortar*, a market district of Jerusalem

And punish the men
Who are settled in complacency,[a]
Who say in their heart,
'The Lord will not do good,
Nor will He do evil.'
13 Therefore their goods shall become booty,
And their houses a desolation;
They shall build houses, but not inhabit *them;*
They shall plant vineyards, but not drink their wine."

14 The great day of the Lord *is* near;
It is near and hastens quickly.
The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter;
There the mighty men shall cry out.
15 That day *is* a day of wrath,
A day of trouble and distress,
A day of devastation and desolation,
A day of darkness and gloominess,
A day of clouds and thick darkness,
16 A day of trumpet and alarm
Against the fortified cities
And against the high towers.

17 "I will bring distress upon men,
And they shall walk like blind men,
Because they have sinned against the Lord;
Their blood shall be poured out like dust,
And their flesh like refuse."

18 Neither their silver nor their gold
Shall be able to deliver them
In the day of the Lord's wrath;
But the whole land shall be devoured
By the fire of His jealousy,
For He will make speedy riddance
Of all those who dwell in the land.

A Call to Repentance

2 Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together,
O undesirable[a] nation,
2 Before the decree is issued,
Or the day passes like chaff,
Before the Lord's fierce anger comes upon you,
Before the day of the Lord's anger comes upon you!
3 Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth,
Who have upheld His justice.
Seek righteousness, seek humility.
It may be that you will be hidden
In the day of the Lord's anger.

1:12 [a]Literally *on their lees,* that is, settled like the dregs of wine **2:1** [a]Or *shameless*

when God wishes we would just be still and (what a stunning thought!) let Him sing over us.

I can see you squirming. You say you aren't worthy of such affection? Neither was Judas, but Jesus washed his feet. Neither was Peter, but Jesus fixed him breakfast. Neither were the Emmaus-bound disciples, but Jesus took time to sit at their table.

Besides, who are we to determine if we are worthy? Our job is simply to be still long enough to let Him have us and let Him love us. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you feel unworthy of God's love? Allow yourself to bask in His love, His rest, and yes, even His song for you! Take time today to sit quietly before the Lord and ask Him to show you how much He cares personally about you.

EXPLORATION

God's Love—Psalm 36; John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 8:39; Ephesians 1:4, 5; 1 John 4:10, 11.

Judgment on Nations

4 For Gaza shall be forsaken,
And Ashkelon desolate;
They shall drive out Ashdod at noonday,
And Ekron shall be uprooted.
5 Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoast,
The nation of the Cherethites!
The word of the Lord *is* against you,
O Canaan, land of the Philistines:
"I will destroy you;
So there shall be no inhabitant."

6 The seacoast shall be pastures,
With shelters[a] for shepherds and folds for flocks.
7 The coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah;
They shall feed *their* flocks there;
In the houses of Ashkelon they shall lie down at evening.
For the Lord their God will intervene for them,
And return their captives.

8 "I have heard the reproach of Moab,
And the insults of the people of Ammon,
With which they have reproached My people,
And made arrogant threats against their borders.
9 Therefore, as I live,"
Says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel,
"Surely Moab shall be like Sodom,
And the people of Ammon like Gomorrah—
Overrun with weeds and saltpits,
And a perpetual desolation.
The residue of My people shall plunder them,
And the remnant of My people shall possess them."

10 This they shall have for their pride,
Because they have reproached and made arrogant threats
Against the people of the Lord of hosts.
11 The Lord *will be* awesome to them,
For He will reduce to nothing all the gods of the earth;
People shall worship Him,
Each one from his place,
Indeed all the shores of the nations.

12 "You Ethiopians also,
You shall be slain by My sword."

13 And He will stretch out His hand against the north,
Destroy Assyria,
And make Nineveh a desolation,
As dry as the wilderness.
14 The herds shall lie down in her midst,
Every beast of the nation.
Both the pelican and the bittern
Shall lodge on the capitals *of* her *pillars;*
Their voice shall sing in the windows;
Desolation *shall be* at the threshold;
For He will lay bare the cedar work.
15 This is the rejoicing city
That dwelt securely,
That said in her heart,
"I *am it,* and *there is* none besides me."
How has she become a desolation,
A place for beasts to lie down!
Everyone who passes by her
Shall hiss and shake his fist.

The Wickedness of Jerusalem

3 Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted,
To the oppressing city!
2 She has not obeyed *His* voice,
She has not received correction;
She has not trusted in the Lord,
She has not drawn near to her God.

3 Her princes in her midst *are* roaring lions;
Her judges *are* evening wolves
That leave not a bone till morning.
4 Her prophets are insolent, treacherous people;
Her priests have polluted the sanctuary,
They have done violence to the law.
5 The Lord *is* righteous in her midst,
He will do no unrighteousness.
Every morning He brings His justice to light;
He never fails,
But the unjust knows no shame.

2:6 [a]Literally *excavations,* either underground huts or cisterns

6 "I have cut off nations,
Their fortresses are devastated;
I have made their streets desolate,
With none passing by.
Their cities are destroyed;
There is no one, no inhabitant.
7 I said, 'Surely you will fear Me,
You will receive instruction'—
So that her dwelling would not be cut off,
Despite everything for which I punished her.
But they rose early and corrupted all their deeds.

A Faithful Remnant

8 "Therefore wait for Me," says the Lord,
"Until the day I rise up for plunder;[a]
My determination *is* to gather the nations
To My assembly of kingdoms,
To pour on them My indignation,
All My fierce anger;
All the earth shall be devoured
With the fire of My jealousy.

9 "For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language,
That they all may call on the name of the Lord,
To serve Him with one accord.
10 From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia
My worshipers,
The daughter of My dispersed ones,
Shall bring My offering.
11 In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds
In which you transgress against Me;
For then I will take away from your midst
Those who rejoice in your pride,
And you shall no longer be haughty
In My holy mountain.
12 I will leave in your midst
A meek and humble people,
And they shall trust in the name of the Lord.
13 The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness
And speak no lies,
Nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth;
For they shall feed *their* flocks and lie down,
And no one shall make *them* afraid."

Joy in God's Faithfulness

14 Sing, O daughter of Zion!
Shout, O Israel!
Be glad and rejoice with all *your* heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!
15 The Lord has taken away your judgments,
He has cast out your enemy.
The King of Israel, the Lord, *is* in your midst;
You shall see[a] disaster no more.

16 In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
"Do not fear;
Zion, let not your hands be weak.
17 The Lord your God in your midst,
The Mighty One, will save;
He will rejoice over you with gladness,
He will quiet *you* with His love,
He will rejoice over you with singing."

18 "I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly,
Who are among you,
To whom its reproach *is* a burden.
19 Behold, at that time
I will deal with all who afflict you;
I will save the lame,
And gather those who were driven out;
I will appoint them for praise and fame
In every land where they were put to shame.
20 At that time I will bring you back,
Even at the time I gather you;
For I will give you fame and praise
Among all the peoples of the earth,
When I return your captives before your eyes,"
Says the Lord.

3:8 [a]Septuagint and Syriac read *for witness;* Targum reads *for the day of My revelation for judgment;* Vulgate reads *for the day of My resurrection that is to come.* **3:15** [a]Some Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, and Bomberg read *see;* Masoretic Text and Vulgate read *fear.*

THE BOOK OF

HAGGAI

INTRODUCTION

C.S. Lewis wrote, "You can't get second things by putting them first; you can get second things only by putting first things first" (God in the Dock). Wise advice about setting priorities. Unfortunately, it's easy to focus on second, third, fourth, fifth, or sixth "things" instead.

What should be first? A person's relationship with God.

God's message through the prophet Haggai hit the Jews where it hurt—right in their priorities. They had returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon with the challenge of rebuilding the temple. They had begun the work but somewhere along the line had left the task.

The temple was not just another building or church edifice; it was the holy place where sacrifices were made and people met with God. And it symbolized the nation's close relationship with the Almighty.

A shabby temple indicated a break in that relationship. And that's exactly what had happened—the people had built fine homes for themselves while leaving God's house in ruins.

Priorities. Values. God's people had it wrong.

Have you made a value check lately? Discover what God told the Jerusalem Jews through Haggai, and make sure you are putting first things first.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Haggai

Date Written: c. 520 B.C.

Key Themes:

- The people needed to complete the temple in order to show their priority on worship.
- God will judge evil, both in His own people and in those who reject Him.
- God has blessings in store for those who believe in Him.

Key Verse:

"Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Consider your ways!'" (Haggai 1:7).

Contents:

I. Completing the Temple 1:1–15

II. God's Blessing and the Temple 2:1–19

III. The Lord's Promise to Zerubbabel 2:20–23

The Command to Build God's House

In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, 2 "Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, saying: 'This people says, "The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." ' "

3 Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, 4 "*Is it* time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple[a] *to lie* in ruins?" 5 Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: "Consider your ways!

6 "You have sown much, and bring in little;
You eat, but do not have enough;
You drink, but you are not filled with drink;
You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm;
And he who earns wages,
Earns wages *to put* into a bag with holes."

7 Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Consider your ways! 8 Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the Lord. 9 "*You* looked for much, but indeed *it came to* little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the Lord of hosts. "Because of My house that *is in* ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house. 10 Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. 11 For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of *your* hands."

The People's Obedience

12 Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him; and the people feared the presence of the Lord. 13 Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, spoke the Lord's message to the people, saying, "I *am* with you, says the Lord." 14 So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, 15 on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, in the second year of King Darius.

The Coming Glory of God's House

2 In the seventh *month,* on the twenty-first of the month, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying: 2 "Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, saying: 3 'Who is left among you who saw this temple[a] in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, *is this* not

1:4 [a]Literally *house,* and so in verse 8 **2:3** [a]Literally *house,* and so in verses 7 and 9

Life LESSONS

Haggai 1:1—2:23

SITUATION
Twenty years passed since Israel's return from Babylon. But the people quickly forgot the lessons exile had taught them. They worked hard, but their crops failed. They earned money, but it was never enough.

OBSERVATION
Sometimes having much can make people lose track of what is most important.

INSPIRATION
Are you "rich in this present age"? If you have the resources and education to read this [Bible], you are. . . .

The abundance of possessions has a way of eclipsing God, no matter how meager those possessions may be. There is a predictable progression from poverty to pride. The poor man prays and works; God hears and blesses. The humble man becomes rich and forgets God. The faithful, poor man becomes the proud, rich man. As God said through Hosea, "When they had pasture, they were filled; they were filled and their heart was exalted; therefore they forgot Me" (Hosea 13:6). The proud, rich man falls under God's judgment. How can we avoid this? How can a person survive prosperity?

Do not be haughty. Do not think for a moment that you had anything to do with your accumulation. Scripture makes one thing clear. Your stocks, cash, and 401(k)? They are not yours.

"Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the Lord your God, also the

earth with all that is in it" (Deuteronomy 10:14).

"Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted as head over all" (1 Chronicles 29:11).

"'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the Lord of hosts" (Haggai 2:8). (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

List your top ten priorities for today. Where does Bible reading and prayer fall on the list? Is your "stuff" getting in the way of focusing on God? Shift and sort your priorities until your schedule reflects His desires.

EXPLORATION

Priorities—2 Chronicles 1:11, 12; Malachi 2:1, 2; Matthew 6:33; 8:21, 22; Revelation 3:17.

in your eyes as nothing? 4 Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,' says the Lord; 'and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land,' says the Lord, 'and work; for I *am* with you,' says the Lord of hosts. 5 '*According to* the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!'

6 "For thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Once more (it *is* a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; 7 and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations,[a] and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the Lord of hosts. 8 'The silver *is* Mine, and the gold *is* Mine,' says the Lord of hosts. 9 'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the Lord of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the Lord of hosts."

The People Are Defiled

10 On the twenty-fourth *day* of the ninth *month,* in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, 11 "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Now, ask the priests *concerning the* law, saying, 12 "If one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and with the edge he touches bread or stew, wine or oil, or any food, will it become holy?" ' "

Then the priests answered and said, "No."

13 And Haggai said, "If *one who is* unclean *because* of a dead body touches any of these, will it be unclean?"

So the priests answered and said, "It shall be unclean."

14 Then Haggai answered and said, " 'So is this people, and so is this nation before Me,' says the Lord, 'and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean.

Promised Blessing

15 'And now, carefully consider from this day forward: from before stone was laid upon stone in the temple of the Lord— 16 since those *days,* when *one* came to a heap of twenty ephahs, there were *but* ten; when *one* came to the wine vat to draw out fifty baths from the press, there were *but* twenty. 17 I struck you with blight and mildew and hail in all the labors of your hands; yet you did not *turn* to Me,' says the Lord. 18 'Consider now from this day forward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid—consider it: 19 Is the seed still in the barn? As yet the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yielded *fruit. But* from this day I will bless *you.*' "

Zerubbabel Chosen as a Signet

20 And again the word of the Lord came to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, saying, 21 "Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying:

'I will shake heaven and earth.
22 I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms;
I will destroy the strength of the Gentile kingdoms.

2:7 [a] Or *the desire of all nations*

I will overthrow the chariots
And those who ride in them;
The horses and their riders shall come
down,
Every one by the sword of his brother.

23 "In that day," says the Lord of hosts, 'I will
take you, Zerubbabel My servant, the son of
Shealtiel,' says the Lord, 'and will make you
like a signet *ring;* for I have chosen you,' says
the Lord of hosts."

THE BOOK OF

ZECHARIAH

INTRODUCTION

You wake with a start, sweating profusely. You aren't sure what the dream was about, you just know it was bad. You remember trying to run in the dream, but not being able to move your legs. It was pure fantasy, but it felt real and it was enough to wake you up.

Dreams can be caused by indigestion, anxiety, desires, concerns, and other mental and emotional conditions. Dreams can be fun, entertaining, and even enlightening. But they can also invoke fear, stress, and outright terror.

Zechariah, God's prophet in Jerusalem more than five hundred years before Christ, had a series of nighttime experiences that kept him awake for a week. More than mere dreams, these were visions of God's future plans for His people, including a description of the Messiah. Through these visions God gave His message to Zechariah, who then faithfully relayed them to his family, friends, neighbors, countrymen . . . and us.

As you read Zechariah, take hope in knowing that God controls the future, *your* future, and that the King is coming. Then get a good night's sleep.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Zechariah

Date Written: 520–480 B.C.

Key Themes:

- The Jews who had reinhabited Jerusalem still needed to complete the temple, putting worship in the proper perspective.
- The Messiah is coming, but He will not be accepted by all of His people.

Key Verse:

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9).

Contents:

I. Zechariah's Eight Visions 1:1—6:15

II. Four Sermons 7:1—8:23

III. Two Burdens Regarding the Messiah 9:1—14:21

A Call to Repentance

In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying, 2 "The Lord has been very angry with your fathers. 3 Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Return to Me," says the Lord of hosts, "and I will return to you," says the Lord of hosts. 4 "Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets preached, saying, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Turn now from your evil ways and your evil deeds."' But they did not hear nor heed Me," says the Lord.

5 "Your fathers, where *are* they?
And the prophets, do they live forever?
6 Yet surely My words and My statutes,
Which I commanded My servants the prophets,
Did they not overtake your fathers?

"So they returned and said:

'Just as the Lord of hosts determined to do to us,
According to our ways and according to our deeds,
So He has dealt with us.'"'"

Vision of the Horses

7 On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, which is the month Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet: 8 I saw by night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse, and it stood among the myrtle trees in the hollow; and behind him *were* horses: red, sorrel, and white. 9 Then I said, "My lord, what *are* these?" So the angel who talked with me said to me, "I will show you what they *are*."

10 And the man who stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, "These *are the ones* whom the Lord has sent to walk to and fro throughout the earth."

11 So they answered the Angel of the Lord, who stood among the myrtle trees, and said, "We have walked to and fro throughout the earth, and behold, all the earth is resting quietly."

The Lord Will Comfort Zion

12 Then the Angel of the Lord answered and said, "O Lord of hosts, how long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which You were angry these seventy years?"

13 And the Lord answered the angel who talked to me, *with* good *and* comforting words. 14 So the angel who spoke with me said to me, "Proclaim, saying, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts:

"I am zealous for Jerusalem
And for Zion with great zeal.
15 I am exceedingly angry with the nations at ease;
For I was a little angry,
And they helped—*but* with evil *intent.*"

Life Lessons

Zechariah 1:1—6:8

SITUATION

The exiles returned from Babylon to rebuild the temple. Enemies, however, thwarted and stalled the project. Zechariah motivated the people and encouraged them to resume their work.

OBSERVATION

God provides the strength we need to accomplish great deeds for Him. When opportunities present themselves, seek His guidance and then be strong to do what He calls you to do.

INSPIRATION

Don't make a decision, whether large or small, without sitting before God with open Bible, open heart, open ears, imitating the prayer of Samuel: "Speak, for Your servant hears" (1 Samuel 3:10).

You have a Bible? Read it. You have a family of faith? Consult it.

Others have asked your question. You aren't the first to face your problem. Others have stood where you stand and wondered what you wonder. Seek their advice. "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct" (Hebrews 13:7).

Is your marriage tough? Find a strong one. Wrestling with business ethics? Seek sage advice from a Christian businessperson. Battling midlife decisions? Before you abandon your family and cash in your retirement, take time to get counsel. "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But he

who heeds counsel is wise" (Proverbs 12:15).

You don't need an ephod to wear or stones to consult; you have God's family. He will speak to you through it. And He will speak to you through your own conscience.

You have a heart for God? Heed it. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you have many opportunities before you and you don't know which way to go? God promises His guidance to show you what He wants you to do, and then the strength to do it.

EXPLORATION

The Need for Vision—Proverbs 29:18. Faithfulness—2 Timothy 1:3–7.

He lived among us. He donned the costliest of robes: a human body. He made a throne out of a manger and a royal court out of some cows. He took a common name—Jesus—and made it holy. He took common people and made them the same.

—Max Lucado (When Christ Comes)

16 "Therefore thus says the Lord:

"I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy;
My house shall be built in it," says the Lord of hosts,
"And a *surveyor's* line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem."'

17 "Again proclaim, saying, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts:

"My cities shall again spread out through prosperity;
The Lord will again comfort Zion,
And will again choose Jerusalem."'"

Vision of the Horns

18 Then I raised my eyes and looked, and there *were* four horns.
19 And I said to the angel who talked with me, "What *are* these?"

So he answered me, "These *are* the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem."

20 Then the Lord showed me four craftsmen. 21 And I said, "What are these coming to do?"

So he said, "These *are* the horns that scattered Judah, so that no one could lift up his head; but the craftsmen[a] are coming to terrify them, to cast out the horns of the nations that lifted up *their* horn against the land of Judah to scatter it."

Vision of the Measuring Line

2 Then I raised my eyes and looked, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand. 2 So I said, "Where are you going?"

And he said to me, "To measure Jerusalem, to see what *is* its width and what *is* its length."

3 And there *was* the angel who talked with me, going out; and another angel was coming out to meet him, 4 who said to him, "Run, speak to this young man, saying: 'Jerusalem shall be inhabited *as* towns without walls, because of the multitude of men and livestock in it. 5 For I,' says the Lord, 'will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst.'"

Future Joy of Zion and Many Nations

6 "Up, up! Flee from the land of the north," says the Lord; "for I have spread you abroad like the four winds of heaven," says the Lord. 7 "Up, Zion! Escape, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon."

8 For thus says the Lord of hosts: "He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye. 9 For surely I will shake My hand against them, and they shall become spoil for their servants. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me.

10 "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," says the Lord. 11 "Many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and they shall become My people. And I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you. 12 And the Lord will take possession of Judah

1:21 [a] Literally *these*

as His inheritance in the Holy Land, and will again choose Jerusalem. 13 Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord, for He is aroused from His holy habitation!"

Vision of the High Priest

3 Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him. 2 And the Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! *Is* this not a brand plucked from the fire?"

3 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel.

4 Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes."

5 And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head."

So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him. And the Angel of the Lord stood by.

The Coming Branch

6 Then the Angel of the Lord admonished Joshua, saying, 7 "Thus says the Lord of hosts:

'If you will walk in My ways,
And if you will keep My command,
Then you shall also judge My house,
And likewise have charge of My courts;
I will give you places to walk
Among these who stand here.

8 'Hear, O Joshua, the high priest,
You and your companions who sit before you,
For they are a wondrous sign;
For behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH.
9 For behold, the stone
That I have laid before Joshua:
Upon the stone *are* seven eyes.
Behold, I will engrave its inscription,'
Says the Lord of hosts,
'And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.
10 In that day,' says the Lord of hosts,
'Everyone will invite his neighbor
Under his vine and under his fig tree.' "

Vision of the Lampstand and Olive Trees

4 Now the angel who talked with me came back and wakened me, as a man who is wakened out of his sleep. 2 And he said to me, "What do you see?"

So I said, "I am looking, and there *is* a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the *stand* seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. 3 Two olive trees *are* by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left." 4 So I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, "What *are* these, my lord?"

5 Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?"

And I said, "No, my lord."

6 So he answered and said to me:

"This *is* the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel:
'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,'
Says the Lord of hosts.
7 'Who *are* you, O great mountain?
Before Zerubbabel *you shall become* a plain!
And he shall bring forth the capstone
With shouts of "Grace, grace to it!" ' "

8 Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying:

9 "The hands of Zerubbabel
Have laid the foundation of this temple;[a]
His hands shall also finish *it.*
Then you will know
That the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you.
10 For who has despised the day of small things?
For these seven rejoice to see
The plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.
They are the eyes of the Lord,
Which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth."

4:9 [a] Literally *house*

Life Lessons

Zechariah 6:9—8:23

SITUATION
God wanted His people to enjoy life. He gave many encouraging promises that would allow Israel to rejoice because of God's love for them.

OBSERVATION
Religious ceremonies, while sacred and orderly, are meant to make us rejoice in God.

INSPIRATION
In 1976 tremors devastated the highlands of Guatemala. Thousands of people were killed, and tens of thousands were left homeless. A philanthropist offered to sponsor a relief team from our college. This flyer was posted in our dormitory: "Needed: students willing to use their spring break to build cinder-block homes in Quetzaltenango." I applied, was accepted, and began attending the orientation sessions.

There were twelve of us in all. Mostly ministry students. All of us, it seemed, loved to discuss theology. We were young enough in our faith to believe we knew all the answers. This made for lively discussions. We bantered about a covey of controversies. I can't remember the list. It likely included the usual suspects of charismatic gifts, end times, worship styles, and church strategy. By the time we reached Guatemala, we'd covered the controversies and revealed our true colors. I'd discerned the faithful from the infidels, the healthy from the heretics. I knew who was in and who was out.

11 Then I answered and said to him, "What *are* these two olive
trees—at the right of the lampstand and at its left?" 12 And I further
answered and said to him, "What *are these* two olive branches that
drip into the receptacles[a] of the two gold pipes from which the golden
oil drains?"
13 Then he answered me and said, "Do you not know what these
are?"
And I said, "No, my lord."
14 So he said, "These *are* the two anointed ones, who stand beside
the Lord of the whole earth."

Vision of the Flying Scroll

5 Then I turned and raised my eyes, and saw there a flying scroll.
2 And he said to me, "What do you see?"
So I answered, "I see a flying scroll. Its length *is* twenty cubits and
its width ten cubits."
3 Then he said to me, "This *is* the curse that goes out over the face
of the whole earth: 'Every thief shall be expelled,' according *to* this
side of *the scroll;* and, 'Every perjurer shall be expelled,' according *to*
that side of it."

4 "I will send out *the curse,*" says the Lord of hosts;
"It shall enter the house of the thief
And the house of the one who swears falsely by My name.
It shall remain in the midst of his house
And consume it, with its timber and stones."

Vision of the Woman in a Basket

5 Then the angel who talked with me came out and said to me, "Lift
your eyes now, and see what this *is* that goes forth."
6 So I asked, "What *is* it?" And he said, "It *is* a basket[a] that is going
forth."
He also said, "This *is* their resemblance throughout the earth:
7 Here *is* a lead disc lifted up, and this *is* a woman sitting inside the
basket"; 8 then he said, "This *is* Wickedness!" And he thrust her down
into the basket, and threw the lead cover[a] over its mouth. 9 Then I
raised my eyes and looked, and there *were* two women, coming with
the wind in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork,
and they lifted up the basket between earth and heaven.
10 So I said to the angel who talked with me, "Where are they car-
rying the basket?"
11 And he said to me, "To build a house for it in the land of Shinar;[a]
when it is ready, *the basket* will be set there on its base."

Vision of the Four Chariots

6 Then I turned and raised my eyes and looked, and behold, four
chariots *were* coming from between two mountains, and the
mountains *were* mountains of bronze. 2 With the first chariot *were* red
horses, with the second chariot black horses, 3 with the third chariot

4:12 [a]Literally *into the hands of* **5:6** [a]Hebrew *ephah,* a measuring container, and so elsewhere **5:8** [a]Literally *stone* **5:11** [a]That is, Babylon

white horses, and with the fourth chariot dappled horses—strong *steeds.* 4Then I answered and said to the angel who talked with me, "What *are* these, my lord?"

5And the angel answered and said to me, "These *are* four spirits of heaven, who go out from *their* station before the Lord of all the earth. 6The one with the black horses is going to the north country, the white are going after them, and the dappled are going toward the south country." 7Then the strong *steeds* went out, eager to go, that they might walk to and fro throughout the earth. And He said, "Go, walk to and fro throughout the earth." So they walked to and fro throughout the earth. 8And He called to me, and spoke to me, saying, "See, those who go toward the north country have given rest to My Spirit in the north country."

The Command to Crown Joshua

9Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 10"Receive *the gift* from the captives—from Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah, who have come from Babylon—and go the same day and enter the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah. 11Take the silver and gold, make an elaborate crown, and set *it* on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. 12Then speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, saying:

"Behold, the Man whose name *is* the BRANCH!
From His place He shall branch out,
And He shall build the temple of the Lord;
13 Yes, He shall build the temple of the Lord.
He shall bear the glory,
And shall sit and rule on His throne;
So He shall be a priest on His throne,
And the counsel of peace shall be between them both."'

14"Now the elaborate crown shall be for a memorial in the temple of the Lord for Helem,[a] Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Hen the son of Zephaniah. 15Even those from afar shall come and build the temple of the Lord. Then you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you. And *this* shall come to pass if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God."

Obedience Better than Fasting

7 Now in the fourth year of King Darius it came to pass *that* the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, on the fourth *day* of the ninth month, Chislev, 2when *the people*[a] sent Sherezer,[b] with Regem-Melech and his men, *to* the house of God,[c] to pray before the Lord, 3*and* to ask the priests who *were* in the house of the Lord of hosts, and the prophets, saying, "Should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years?"

4Then the word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying, 5"Say

6:14 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Syriac reads *for Heldai* (compare verse 10); Septuagint reads *for the patient ones.* **7:2** [a]Literally *they* (compare verse 5) [b]Or *Sar-Ezer* [c]Hebrew *Bethel*

But all of that was soon forgotten. The destruction from the earthquake dwarfed our differences. Entire villages had been leveled. Children were wandering through rubble. Long lines of wounded people awaited medical attention. Our opinions seemed suddenly petty. The disaster demanded teamwork. The challenge created a team.

The task turned rivals into partners. I remember one fellow in particular. He and I had distinctly different opinions regarding the styles of worship music. I—the open-minded, relevant thinker—favored contemporary, upbeat music. He—the stodgy, close-minded caveman—preferred hymns and hymnals. Yet when stacking bricks for houses, guess who worked shoulder to shoulder? As we did, we began to sing together. We sang old songs and new, slow and fast. Only later did the irony of it dawn on me. Our common concern gave us a common song. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What forms of worship do you enjoy most? Are there some forms that bore you? What can you contribute to worship? Let your heart be open to God's direction.

EXPLORATION

Worship—Leviticus 7:38; Numbers 29:1, 2; 2 Kings 17:27–29; Nehemiah 9:2, 3; Psalm 100:4; Jeremiah 7:2, 3; John 4:23, 24.

to all the people of the land, and to the priests: 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh *months* during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me—for Me? 6When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink *for yourselves?* 7*Should you* not *have obeyed* the words which the Lord proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous, and the South[a] and the Lowland were inhabited?' "

Disobedience Resulted in Captivity

8Then the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying, 9"Thus says the Lord of hosts:

'Execute true justice,
Show mercy and compassion
Everyone to his brother.
10 Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless,
The alien or the poor.
Let none of you plan evil in his heart
Against his brother.'

11"But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear. 12Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. Thus great wrath came from the Lord of hosts. 13Therefore it happened, *that* just as He proclaimed and they would not hear, so they called out and I would not listen," says the Lord of hosts. 14"But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they had not known. Thus the land became desolate after them, so that no one passed through or returned; for they made the pleasant land desolate."

Jerusalem, Holy City of the Future

8 Again the word of the Lord of hosts came, saying, 2"Thus says the Lord of hosts:

'I am zealous for Zion with great zeal;
With great fervor I am zealous for her.'

3"Thus says the Lord:

'I will return to Zion,
And dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.
Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth,
The Mountain of the Lord of hosts,
The Holy Mountain.'

4"Thus says the Lord of hosts:

'Old men and old women shall again sit
In the streets of Jerusalem,
Each one with his staff in his hand
Because of great age.
5 The streets of the city
Shall be full of boys and girls
Playing in its streets.'

6"Thus says the Lord of hosts:

'If it is marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days,
Will it also be marvelous in My eyes?'
Says the Lord of hosts.

7"Thus says the Lord of hosts:

'Behold, I will save My people from the land of the east
And from the land of the west;
8 I will bring them *back,*
And they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.
They shall be My people
And I will be their God,
In truth and righteousness.'

9"Thus says the Lord of hosts:

'Let your hands be strong,
You who have been hearing in these days
These words by the mouth of the prophets,
Who *spoke* in the day the foundation was laid
For the house of the Lord of hosts,
That the temple might be built.
10 For before these days

7:7 [a]Hebrew *Negev*

There were no wages for man nor any
hire for beast;
There was no peace from the enemy for
whoever went out or came in;
For I set all men, everyone, against his
neighbor.

11 But now I *will* not *treat* the remnant of this
people as in the former days,' says the Lord
of hosts.

12 'For the seed *shall be* prosperous,
The vine shall give its fruit,
The ground shall give her increase,
And the heavens shall give their dew—
I will cause the remnant of this people
To possess all these.
13 And it shall come to pass
That just as you were a curse among the
nations,
O house of Judah and house of Israel,
So I will save you, and you shall be a
blessing.
Do not fear,
Let your hands be strong.'

14 "For thus says the Lord of hosts:

'Just as I determined to punish you
When your fathers provoked Me to
wrath,'
Says the Lord of hosts,
'And I would not relent,
15 So again in these days
I am determined to do good
To Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.
Do not fear.
16 These *are* the things you shall do:
Speak each man the truth to his
neighbor;
Give judgment in your gates for truth,
justice, and peace;
17 Let none of you think evil in your[a] heart
against your neighbor;
And do not love a false oath.
For all these *are things* that I hate,'
Says the Lord."

18 Then the word of the Lord of hosts came
to me, saying, 19 "Thus says the Lord of hosts:

'The fast of the fourth *month,*
The fast of the fifth,
The fast of the seventh,
And the fast of the tenth,
Shall be joy and gladness and cheerful
feasts
For the house of Judah.
Therefore love truth and peace.'

20 "Thus says the Lord of hosts:

'Peoples shall yet come,
Inhabitants of many cities;
21 The inhabitants of one *city* shall go to
another, saying,
"Let us continue to go and pray before the
Lord,
And seek the Lord of hosts.
I myself will go also."
22 Yes, many peoples and strong nations
Shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in
Jerusalem,
And to pray before the Lord.'

23 "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'In those
days ten men from every language of the
nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man,
saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard
that God *is* with you."' "

Israel Defended Against Enemies

9 The burden[a] of the word of the Lord
Against the land of Hadrach,
And Damascus its resting place
(For the eyes of men
And all the tribes of Israel
Are on the Lord);
2 Also *against* Hamath, *which* borders on it,
And *against* Tyre and Sidon, though they
are very wise.

3 For Tyre built herself a tower,
Heaped up silver like the dust,
And gold like the mire of the streets.
4 Behold, the Lord will cast her out;
He will destroy her power in the sea,
And she will be devoured by fire.

5 Ashkelon shall see *it* and fear;
Gaza also shall be very sorrowful;

8:17 [a]Literally *his* **9:1** [a]Or *oracle*

And Ekron, for He dried up her expectation.
The king shall perish from Gaza,
And Ashkelon shall not be inhabited.

6 "A mixed race shall settle in Ashdod,
And I will cut off the pride of the Philistines.
7 I will take away the blood from his mouth,
And the abominations from between his teeth.
But he who remains, even he *shall be* for our God,
And shall be like a leader in Judah,
And Ekron like a Jebusite.
8 I will camp around My house
Because of the army,
Because of him who passes by and him who returns.
No more shall an oppressor pass through them,
For now I have seen with My eyes.

The Coming King

9 "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your King is coming to you;
He *is* just and having salvation,
Lowly and riding on a donkey,
A colt, the foal of a donkey.
10 I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
And the horse from Jerusalem;
The battle bow shall be cut off.
He shall speak peace to the nations;
His dominion *shall be* 'from sea to sea,
And from the River to the ends of the earth.'[a]

God Will Save His People

11 "As for you also,
Because of the blood of your covenant,
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.
12 Return to the stronghold,
You prisoners of hope.
Even today I declare
That I will restore double to you.
13 For I have bent Judah, My *bow,*
Fitted the bow with Ephraim,
And raised up your sons, O Zion,
Against your sons, O Greece,
And made you like the sword of a mighty man."

14 Then the Lord will be seen over them,
And His arrow will go forth like lightning.
The Lord God will blow the trumpet,

9:10 [a]Psalm 72:8

Life Lessons

Zechariah 9:1—14:21

SITUATION
Zechariah prophesied that the key to Israel's future was the coming Messiah, whose gentle leadership would triumph through suffering.

OBSERVATION
In 12:10 the prophet foretold a future outpouring of the Holy Spirit as repentant people seek His grace.

INSPIRATION
Where the grace of God is missed, bitterness is born. But where the grace of God is embraced, forgiveness flourishes. In what many believe to be Paul's final letter, he urges Timothy to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:1).

How insightful is this last exhortation. Paul doesn't urge Timothy to be strong in prayer or Bible study or benevolence, as vital as each may be. He wants his son in the faith to major in grace. Claim this territory. Dwell on this truth. If you miss anything, don't miss the grace of God.

The longer we walk in the garden, the more likely we are to smell like flowers. The more we immerse ourselves in grace, the more likely we are to give grace. Could this be the clue for coping with anger? Could it be the secret is not in demanding payment but in pondering the payment of your Savior?

Your friend broke his promises? Your boss didn't keep her word? I'm sorry, but before you take action, answer this question: How did God react when you broke your promises to him?

You've been lied to? It

And go with whirlwinds from the south.
15 The Lord of hosts will defend them;
They shall devour and subdue with slingstones.
They shall drink *and* roar as if with wine;
They shall be filled *with blood* like basins,
Like the corners of the altar.
16 The Lord their God will save them in that day,
As the flock of His people.

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: The Coming King

His Majesty. The emperor of Judah. The soaring eagle of eternity. The noble admiral of the Kingdom. All the splendor of heaven revealed in a human body. For a period ever so brief, the doors to the throne room were open and God came near. His Majesty was seen. Heaven touched the earth and, as a result, earth can know heaven. In astounding tandem a human body housed divinity. Holiness and earthliness intertwined.

This is no run-of-the-mill messiah. His story was extraordinary. He called Himself divine, yet allowed a minimum-wage Roman soldier to drive a nail into His wrist. He demanded purity, yet stood for the rights of a repentant whore. He called men to march, yet refused to allow them to call Him King. He sent men into all the world, yet equipped them with only bended knees and memories of a resurrected carpenter. . . .

Let's follow His sandalprints. Let's sit on the cold, hard floor of the cave in which He was born. Let's smell the sawdust of the carpentry shop. Let's hear His sandals slap the hard trails of Galilee. Let's sigh as we touch the healed sores of the leper. Let's smile as we see His compassion with the woman at the well. Let's cringe as we hear the hissing of hell's Satan. Let's let our voices soar with the praises of the multitudes. Let's try to see Him.

One warning. Something happens to a person who has witnessed His Majesty. He becomes addicted. One glimpse of the King and you are consumed by a desire to see more of Him and say more about Him. Pew-warming is no longer an option. Junk religion will no longer suffice. Sensation-seeking is needless. Once you have seen His face you will forever long to see it again. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1293.

hurts to be deceived. But before you double your fists, think: How did God respond when you lied to Him?

You've been neglected? Forgotten? Left behind? Rejection hurts. But before you get even, get honest with yourself. Have you ever neglected God? Have you always been attentive to His will? None of us have. How did He react when you neglected Him?

The key to forgiving others is to quit focusing on what they did to you and start focusing on what God did for you.

But, Max, that's not fair! Somebody has to pay for what he did.

I agree. Someone must pay, and Someone already has.

You don't understand, Max, this guy doesn't deserve grace. He doesn't deserve mercy. He's not worthy of forgiveness.

I'm not saying he is. But are you? (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

In what ways has God showered His grace on you? Take time to thank Him for this undeserved gift. Now, think of the people in your life—whether a friend, a family member, a co-worker, or a neighbor—who need grace from you. Write down how you specifically can show grace to them this week.

EXPLORATION

God's Grace—Ephesians 3:7; Hebrews 4:14–16. Misuse of God's Grace—Romans 6:1–4; Galatians 5:4; Jude 4.

For they *shall be like* the jewels of a
crown,
Lifted like a banner over His land—
17 For how great is its[a] goodness
And how great its[b] beauty!
Grain shall make the young men thrive,
And new wine the young women.

Restoration of Judah and Israel

10 Ask the Lord for rain
In the time of the latter rain.[a]
The Lord will make flashing clouds;
He will give them showers of rain,
Grass in the field for everyone.

2 For the idols[a] speak delusion;
The diviners envision lies,
And tell false dreams;
They comfort in vain.
Therefore *the people* wend their way like
sheep;
They are in trouble because *there is* no
shepherd.

3 "My anger is kindled against the
shepherds,
And I will punish the goatherds.
For the Lord of hosts will visit His flock,
The house of Judah,
And will make them as His royal horse in
the battle.
4 From him comes the cornerstone,
From him the tent peg,
From him the battle bow,
From him every ruler[a] together.
5 They shall be like mighty men,
Who tread down *their enemies*
In the mire of the streets in the battle.
They shall fight because the Lord is with
them,
And the riders on horses shall be put to
shame.

6 "I will strengthen the house of Judah,
And I will save the house of Joseph.
I will bring them back,
Because I have mercy on them.
They shall be as though I had not cast
them aside;
For I *am* the Lord their God,
And I will hear them.
7 *Those of* Ephraim shall be like a mighty
man,
And their heart shall rejoice as if with
wine.
Yes, their children shall see *it* and be glad;
Their heart shall rejoice in the Lord.
8 I will whistle for them and gather them,
For I will redeem them;
And they shall increase as they once
increased.

9 "I will sow them among the peoples,
And they shall remember Me in far
countries;
They shall live, together with their
children,
And they shall return.
10 I will also bring them back from the land
of Egypt,
And gather them from Assyria.
I will bring them into the land of Gilead
and Lebanon,
Until no *more room* is found for them.
11 He shall pass through the sea with
affliction,
And strike the waves of the sea:
All the depths of the River[a] shall dry up.
Then the pride of Assyria shall be brought
down,
And the scepter of Egypt shall depart.

12 "So I will strengthen them in the Lord,
And they shall walk up and down in His
name,"
Says the Lord.

Desolation of Israel

11 Open your doors, O Lebanon,
That fire may devour your cedars.
2 Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen,
Because the mighty *trees* are ruined.
Wail, O oaks of Bashan,
For the thick forest has come down.
3 *There is* the sound of wailing shepherds!
For their glory is in ruins.
There is the sound of roaring lions!
For the pride[a] of the Jordan is in ruins.

9:17 [a]Or *His* [b]Or *His* **10:1** [a]That is, spring rain **10:2** [a]Hebrew *teraphim* **10:4** [a]Or *despot* **10:11** [a]That is, the Nile **11:3** [a]Or *floodplain, thicket*

Prophecy of the Shepherds

4 Thus says the Lord my God, "Feed the
flock for slaughter, 5 whose owners slaughter
them and feel no guilt; those who sell them
say, 'Blessed be the Lord, for I am rich'; and
their shepherds do not pity them. 6 For I will
no longer pity the inhabitants of the land,"
says the Lord. "But indeed I will give everyone
into his neighbor's hand and into the hand of
his king. They shall attack the land, and I will
not deliver *them* from their hand."

7 So I fed the flock for slaughter, in particular the poor of the flock.[a] I took for myself two
staffs: the one I called Beauty,[b] and the other I
called Bonds;[c] and I fed the flock. 8 I dismissed
the three shepherds in one month. My soul
loathed them, and their soul also abhorred
me. 9 Then I said, "I will not feed you. Let what
is dying die, and what is perishing perish.
Let those that are left eat each other's flesh."
10 And I took my staff, Beauty, and cut it in
two, that I might break the covenant which
I had made with all the peoples. 11 So it was
broken on that day. Thus the poor[a] of the flock,
who were watching me, knew that it *was* the
word of the Lord. 12 Then I said to them, "If
it is agreeable to you, give *me* my wages; and
if not, refrain." So they weighed out for my
wages thirty *pieces* of silver.

13 And the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the
potter"—that princely price they set on me.
So I took the thirty *pieces* of silver and threw
them into the house of the Lord for the potter.
14 Then I cut in two my other staff, Bonds, that
I might break the brotherhood between Judah
and Israel.

15 And the Lord said to me, "Next, take for
yourself the implements of a foolish shepherd.
16 For indeed I will raise up a shepherd in the
land *who* will not care for those who are cut
off, nor seek the young, nor heal those that
are broken, nor feed those that still stand. But
he will eat the flesh of the fat and tear their
hooves in pieces.

17 "Woe to the worthless shepherd,
Who leaves the flock!
A sword *shall be* against his arm
And against his right eye;
His arm shall completely wither,
And his right eye shall be totally blinded."

The Coming Deliverance of Judah

12 The burden[a] of the word of the Lord
against Israel. Thus says the Lord, who
stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation
of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within
him: 2 "Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of
drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples,
when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. 3 And it shall happen in that day that
I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for
all peoples; all who would heave it away will
surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of
the earth are gathered against it. 4 In that day,"
says the Lord, "I will strike every horse with
confusion, and its rider with madness; I will
open My eyes on the house of Judah, and will
strike every horse of the peoples with blindness. 5 And the governors of Judah shall say in
their heart, 'The inhabitants of Jerusalem *are*
my strength in the Lord of hosts, their God.'
6 In that day I will make the governors of Judah
like a firepan in the woodpile, and like a fiery
torch in the sheaves; they shall devour all the
surrounding peoples on the right hand and on
the left, but Jerusalem shall be inhabited again
in her own place—Jerusalem.

7 "The Lord will save the tents of Judah first,
so that the glory of the house of David and the
glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall not
become greater than that of Judah. 8 In that
day the Lord will defend the inhabitants of
Jerusalem; the one who is feeble among them
in that day shall be like David, and the house
of David *shall be* like God, like the Angel of the
Lord before them. 9 It shall be in that day *that*
I will seek to destroy all the nations that come
against Jerusalem.

Mourning for the Pierced One

10 "And I will pour on the house of David
and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit
of grace and supplication; then they will
look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will
mourn for Him as one mourns for *his* only

11:7 [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *for the Canaanites.* [b]Or *Grace,* and so in verse 10 [c]Or *Unity,* and so in verse 14 **11:11** [a]Following Masoretic Text, Targum, and Vulgate; Septuagint reads *the Canaanites.* **12:1** [a]Or *oracle*

son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. 11 In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo.[a] 12 And the land shall mourn, every family by itself: the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; 13 the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of Shimei by itself, and their wives by themselves; 14 all the families that remain, every family by itself, and their wives by themselves.

Idolatry Cut Off

13 "In that day a fountain shall be opened
for the house of David and for the
inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for
uncleanness.

2 "It shall be in that day," says the Lord of hosts, "*that* I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered. I will also cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to depart from the land. 3 It shall come to pass *that* if anyone still prophesies, then his father and mother who begot him will say to him, 'You shall not live, because you have spoken lies in the name of the Lord.' And his father and mother who begot him shall thrust him through when he prophesies.

4 "And it shall be in that day *that* every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies; they will not wear a robe of coarse hair to deceive. 5 But he will say, 'I *am* no prophet, I *am* a farmer; for a man taught me to keep cattle from my youth.' 6 And *one* will say to him, 'What are these wounds between your arms?' [a] Then he will answer, '*Those* with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.'

The Shepherd Savior

7 "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd,
Against the Man who is My
Companion,"
Says the Lord of hosts.
"Strike the Shepherd,
And the sheep will be scattered;
Then I will turn My hand against the little
ones.
8 And it shall come to pass in all the land,"
Says the Lord,
"*That* two-thirds in it shall be cut off *and*
die,
But *one*-third shall be left in it:
9 I will bring the *one*-third through the fire,
Will refine them as silver is refined,
And test them as gold is tested.
They will call on My name,
And I will answer them.
I will say, 'This *is* My people';
And each one will say, 'The Lord *is* my
God.' "

The Day of the Lord

14 Behold, the day of the Lord is coming,
And your spoil will be divided in your
midst.
2 For I will gather all the nations to battle
against Jerusalem;
The city shall be taken,
The houses rifled,
And the women ravished.
Half of the city shall go into captivity,
But the remnant of the people shall not
be cut off from the city.

3 Then the Lord will go forth
And fight against those nations,
As He fights in the day of battle.
4 And in that day His feet will stand on the
Mount of Olives,
Which faces Jerusalem on the east.
And the Mount of Olives shall be split in
two,
From east to west,
Making a very large valley;
Half of the mountain shall move toward
the north
And half of it toward the south.

5 Then you shall flee *through* My mountain
valley,
For the mountain valley shall reach to
Azal.
Yes, you shall flee
As you fled from the earthquake
In the days of Uzziah king of Judah.

12:11 [a]Hebrew *Megiddon* **13:6** [a]Or *hands*

Thus the Lord my God will come,
And all the saints with You.[a]

6 It shall come to pass in that day
That there will be no light;
The lights will diminish.
7 It shall be one day
Which is known to the Lord—
Neither day nor night.
But at evening time it shall happen
That it will be light.

8 And in that day it shall be
That living waters shall flow from
Jerusalem,
Half of them toward the eastern sea
And half of them toward the western sea;
In both summer and winter it shall
occur.
9 And the Lord shall be King over all the
earth.
In that day it shall be—
"The Lord *is* one,"[a]
And His name one.

10 All the land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. *Jerusalem*[a] shall be raised up and inhabited in her place from Benjamin's Gate to the place of the First Gate and the Corner Gate, and *from* the Tower of Hananel to the king's winepresses.

11 *The people* shall dwell in it;
And no longer shall there be utter
destruction,
But Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited.

12 And this shall be the plague with which the Lord will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem:

Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand
on their feet,
Their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets,
And their tongues shall dissolve in their
mouths.

13 It shall come to pass in that day
That a great panic from the Lord will be
among them.
Everyone will seize the hand of his
neighbor,
And raise his hand against his neighbor's
hand;
14 Judah also will fight at Jerusalem.
And the wealth of all the surrounding
nations
Shall be gathered together:
Gold, silver, and apparel in great
abundance.

15 Such also shall be the plague
On the horse *and* the mule,
On the camel and the donkey,
And on all the cattle that will be in those
camps.
So *shall* this plague *be*.

The Nations Worship the King

16 And it shall come to pass *that* everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. 17 And it shall be *that* whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, on them there will be no rain. 18 If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they *shall have* no *rain;* they shall receive the plague with which the Lord strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. 19 This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

20 In that day "HOLINESS TO THE LORD" shall be *engraved* on the bells of the horses. The pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. 21 Yes, every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holiness to the Lord of hosts.[a] Everyone who sacrifices shall come and take them and cook in them. In that day there shall no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts.

14:5 [a]Or *you;* Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate read *Him.* **14:9** [a]Compare Deuteronomy 6:4 **14:10** [a]Literally *She* **14:21** [a]Or *on every pot . . . shall be (engraved) "HOLINESS TO THE LORD OF HOSTS"*

THE BOOK OF

MALACHI

INTRODUCTION

"You offer defiled food on My altar. . . . by saying, 'The table of the Lord is contemptible'" (1:7).

The image is vivid. A family on their way to the temple realizes they have forgotten the sheep. He turns to her and says "Did you bring a sacrifice?" "No I thought you did," she replies. He stops the wagon and says, "You go ahead and take the kids, I'll go back."

He goes back to the pen and begins to sort through the sheep looking for the one to be sacrificed. He picks up a big fat one with thick wool, "Too valuable," he decides and puts it down. He picks up another fat one, "No, I want to enter this one in a contest." He finds another healthy one, "No, I need to save this one for breeding."

Finally comes upon a frail lamb with a broken leg and spotted wool. "Ahh," he says. "This will be a good one to get rid of . . . "

What the fellow doesn't know is that God has been watching the process. God has been observing the choosing. What God has heard the man say is, "I will give a token, but I won't give my heart."

Such an attitude angers God. And such anger is found in this, the last book of the Old Testament.

"You bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?" (1:13).

We don't offer sheep, but every Sunday we have an opportunity to give. Some people arrive at the altar with no thought given at all to their financial responsibility before God. As the plate comes she elbows him and says, "What do you want to give?"

He says, "Let me see what I've got."

Wallets come out and the process of proclamation begins. We begin to sort through the sheep pen. We consider that big sheep with the picture of Franklin, no, that's too much. We think about writing a check with a couple of zeros. "Better not," we decide.

We forget that the process itself is a statement.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Malachi

Date Written: c. 430 B.C.

Key Themes:

- Church leadership has more to do with the heart than ceremony.
- God's people must serve Him carefully.
- God has asked for a portion of the gifts we receive in life.
- The coming of the Messiah is a promise of God.

Key Verse:

"'If you will not hear, and if you will not take it to heart, to give glory to My name,' says the Lord of hosts, 'I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already, because you do not take it to heart'" (Malachi 2:2).

Contents:

I. Israel and Her Priests 1:1—2:9

II. The Sins of the People 2:10—3:15

III. The Future 3:16—4:6

INTRODUCTION
THE BOOK OF MALACHI

We forget that God is watching.

We forget that God has challenged us to challenge Him.

"'Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,' says the Lord of hosts, 'If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it" (3:10).

The Book of Malachi is a challenge to take God seriously, not just in giving but in every aspect of life.

The burden[a] of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.

Israel Beloved of God

2 "I have loved you," says the LORD.
"Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?'
Was not Esau Jacob's brother?"
Says the LORD.
"Yet Jacob I have loved;
3 But Esau I have hated,
And laid waste his mountains and his heritage
For the jackals of the wilderness."

4 Even though Edom has said,
"We have been impoverished,
But we will return and build the desolate places,"

Thus says the LORD of hosts:

"They may build, but I will throw down;
They shall be called the Territory of Wickedness,
And the people against whom the LORD will have indignation forever.
5 Your eyes shall see,
And you shall say,
'The LORD is magnified beyond the border of Israel.'

Polluted Offerings

6 "A son honors *his* father,
And a servant *his* master.
If then I am the Father,
Where *is* My honor?
And if I *am* a Master,
Where *is* My reverence?

1:1 [a]Or *oracle*

Life Lessons

MALACHI 1:1—4:6

SITUATION
God condemned Israel's complacent and contemptuous attitude toward Him. The priests withheld their best animals from the sacrifice, and the people got tired of waiting for the Messiah.

OBSERVATION
We can learn the most from God when we give Him our undivided attention.

INSPIRATION
For years I owned an elegant suit complete with coat, trousers, even a hat. I considered myself quite dapper in the outfit and was confident others agreed. . . .

Surely God is impressed with my garments, I often thought. Occasionally I strutted into His presence so He could compliment the self-tailored wear. He never spoke. *His silence must mean admiration,* I convinced myself.

But then my wardrobe began to suffer. The fabric of my trousers grew thin. My best works started coming unstitched. I began leaving more undone than

done, and what little I did was nothing to boast about.

No problem, I thought. *I'll work harder.*

But working harder was a problem. There was a hole in my coat of convictions. My resolve was threadbare. A cold wind cut into my chest. I reached up to pull my hat down firmly, and the brim ripped off in my hands.

Over a period of a few months, my wardrobe of self-righteousness completely unraveled. I went from tailored gentlemen's apparel to beggars' rags. Fearful that God might be angry at my tattered suit, I did my best to stitch it together and cover my mistakes. But the cloth was so worn. And the wind was so icy. I gave up. I went back to God. (Where else could I go?)

On a wintry Thursday afternoon, I stepped into His presence, not for applause, but for warmth. My prayer was feeble.

"I feel naked."

"You are. And you have been for a long time."

What He did next I'll never forget. "I have something to give you," He said. He gently removed the remaining threads and then picked up a robe, a regal robe, the clothing of His own goodness. He wrapped it around my shoulders. His words to me were tender. "My son, you are now clothed with Christ" (see Galatians 3:27). (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What steals your attention during worship? Do your thoughts wander toward the day's demands? Do you become preoccupied with later activities? What are some strategies you could employ to help keep your mind focused?

Says the Lord of hosts
To you priests who despise My name.
Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?'

7 "You offer defiled food on My altar,
But say,
'In what way have we defiled You?'
By saying,
'The table of the Lord is contemptible.'
8 And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice,
Is it not evil?
And when you offer the lame and sick,
Is it not evil?
Offer it then to your governor!
Would he be pleased with you?
Would he accept you favorably?"
Says the Lord of hosts.

9 "But now entreat God's favor,
That He may be gracious to us.
While this is being *done* by your hands,
Will He accept you favorably?"
Says the Lord of hosts.
10 "Who *is there* even among you who would shut the doors,
So that you would not kindle fire *on* My altar in vain?
I have no pleasure in you,"
Says the Lord of hosts,
"Nor will I accept an offering from your hands.
11 For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down,
My name *shall be* great among the Gentiles;
In every place incense *shall be* offered to My name,
And a pure offering;
For My name shall be great among the nations,"
Says the Lord of hosts.

12 "But you profane it,
In that you say,
'The table of the Lord[a] is defiled;
And its fruit, its food, *is* contemptible.'
13 You also say,
'Oh, what a weariness!'
And you sneer at it,"
Says the Lord of hosts.
"And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick;
Thus you bring an offering!
Should I accept this from your hand?"
Says the Lord.
14 "But cursed *be* the deceiver
Who has in his flock a male,
And takes a vow,

1:12 [a]Following Bomberg; Masoretic Text reads *Lord.*

But sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished—
For I *am* a great King,"
Says the Lord of hosts,
"And My name *is to be* feared among the nations.

EXPLORATION
Faithful Worship—Joshua 22:27; Psalm 95:6; Daniel 3:16–18; John 4:23, 24.

Corrupt Priests

2 "And now, O priests, this commandment is for you.
2 If you will not hear,
And if you will not take *it* to heart,
To give glory to My name,"
Says the Lord of hosts,
"I will send a curse upon you,
And I will curse your blessings.
Yes, I have cursed them already,
Because you do not take *it* to heart.

3 "Behold, I will rebuke your descendants
And spread refuse on your faces,
The refuse of your solemn feasts;
And *one* will take you away with it.
4 Then you shall know that I have sent this commandment to you,
That My covenant with Levi may continue,"
Says the Lord of hosts.
5 "My covenant was with him, *one* of life and peace,
And I gave them to him *that he might* fear *Me;*
So he feared Me
And was reverent before My name.
6 The law of truth[a] was in his mouth,
And injustice was not found on his lips.
He walked with Me in peace and equity,
And turned many away from iniquity.

7 "For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge,
And *people* should seek the law from his mouth;
For he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.
8 But you have departed from the way;
You have caused many to stumble at the law.
You have corrupted the covenant of Levi,"
Says the Lord of hosts.
9 "Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base
Before all the people,
Because you have not kept My ways
But have shown partiality in the law."

Treachery of Infidelity

10 Have we not all one Father?
Has not one God created us?
Why do we deal treacherously with one another
By profaning the covenant of the fathers?

2:6 [a] Or *true instruction*

11 Judah has dealt treacherously,
And an abomination has been committed
in Israel and in Jerusalem,
For Judah has profaned
The Lord's holy *institution* which He
loves:
He has married the daughter of a foreign
god.
12 May the Lord cut off from the tents of
Jacob
The man who does this, being awake and
aware,[a]
Yet who brings an offering to the Lord of
hosts!

13 And this is the second thing you do:
You cover the altar of the Lord with tears,
With weeping and crying;
So He does not regard the offering
anymore,
Nor receive *it* with goodwill from your
hands.
14 Yet you say, "For what reason?"
Because the Lord has been witness
Between you and the wife of your youth,
With whom you have dealt treacherously;
Yet she is your companion
And your wife by covenant.
15 But did He not make *them* one,
Having a remnant of the Spirit?
And why one?
He seeks godly offspring.
Therefore take heed to your spirit,
And let none deal treacherously with the
wife of his youth.

16 "For the Lord God of Israel says
That He hates divorce,
For it covers one's garment with
violence,"
Says the Lord of hosts.
"Therefore take heed to your spirit,
That you do not deal treacherously."

17 You have wearied the Lord with your words;
Yet you say,
"In what way have we wearied *Him?*"
In that you say,
"Everyone who does evil
Is good in the sight of the Lord,
And He delights in them,"
Or, "Where *is* the God of justice?"

The Coming Messenger

3 "Behold, I send My messenger,
And he will prepare the way before Me.
And the Lord, whom you seek,
Will suddenly come to His temple,
Even the Messenger of the covenant,
In whom you delight.
Behold, He is coming,"
Says the Lord of hosts.

2 "But who can endure the day of His
coming?
And who can stand when He appears?
For He *is* like a refiner's fire
And like launderers' soap.
3 He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of
silver;
He will purify the sons of Levi,
And purge them as gold and silver,
That they may offer to the Lord
An offering in righteousness.

4 "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem
Will be pleasant to the Lord,
As in the days of old,
As in former years.
5 And I will come near you for judgment;
I will be a swift witness
Against sorcerers,
Against adulterers,
Against perjurers,
Against those who exploit wage earners
and widows and orphans,
And against those who turn away an alien—
Because they do not fear Me,"
Says the Lord of hosts.

6 "For I *am* the Lord, I do not change;
Therefore you are not consumed, O sons
of Jacob.
7 Yet from the days of your fathers
You have gone away from My ordinances
And have not kept *them.*
Return to Me, and I will return to you,"
Says the Lord of hosts.
"But you said,
'In what way shall we return?'

2:12 [a]Talmud and Vulgate read *teacher and student.*

Do Not Rob God

8 "Will a man rob God?
Yet you have robbed Me!
But you say,
'In what way have we robbed You?'
In tithes and offerings.
9 You are cursed with a curse,
For you have robbed Me,
Even this whole nation.
10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse,
That there may be food in My house,
And try Me now in this,"
Says the Lord of hosts,
"If I will not open for you the windows of heaven
And pour out for you *such* blessing
That *there will* not *be room* enough *to receive it.*

11 "And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes,
So that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground,
Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field,"
Says the Lord of hosts;
12 "And all nations will call you blessed,
For you will be a delightful land,"
Says the Lord of hosts.

The People Complain Harshly

13 "Your words have been harsh against Me,"
Says the Lord,
"Yet you say,
'What have we spoken against You?'
14 You have said,
'It is useless to serve God;
What profit *is it* that we have kept His ordinance,
And that we have walked as mourners
Before the Lord of hosts?
15 So now we call the proud blessed,
For those who do wickedness are raised up;
They even tempt God and go free.'"

A Book of Remembrance

16 Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another,
And the Lord listened and heard *them;*
So a book of remembrance was written before Him
For those who fear the Lord
And who meditate on His name.

17 "They shall be Mine," says the Lord of hosts,
"On the day that I make them My jewels.[a]
And I will spare them
As a man spares his own son who serves him."
18 Then you shall again discern
Between the righteous and the wicked,
Between one who serves God
And one who does not serve Him.

The Great Day of God

4 "For behold, the day is coming,
Burning like an oven,
And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble.
And the day which is coming shall burn them up,"
Says the Lord of hosts,
"That will leave them neither root nor branch.
2 But to you who fear My name
The Sun of Righteousness shall arise
With healing in His wings;
And you shall go out
And grow fat like stall-fed calves.
3 You shall trample the wicked,
For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet
On the day that I do *this,*"
Says the Lord of hosts.

4 "Remember the Law of Moses, My servant,
Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel,
With the statutes and judgments.
5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet
Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.
6 And he will turn
The hearts of the fathers to the children,
And the hearts of the children to their fathers,
Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

3:17 [a]Literally *special treasure*

NEW TESTAMENT

THE BOOK OF

MATTHEW

INTRODUCTION

You gotta wonder what Jesus saw in Matthew.

He was a tax collector. The profession hasn't been too popular in any era, but especially not in the days of Christ. Tax collectors were the quislings of Palestine. They took from their own people and gave to Rome. As long as they met their quota, they could tax whatever they wanted and as much as they wanted.

People ducked when they saw these guys coming.

Not only was Matthew a tax collector, he was a public tax collector. Some collectors did their business underground. They hired runners to do their dirty work. Matthew did his own. He was the leech at the bottom of the pit. He pulled his stretch limo right into the greasiest parts of town and set up his table and held out his hand.

That's where he was when Jesus called him.

You gotta wonder what Jesus saw in Matthew. At the same time, you gotta wonder what Matthew saw in Jesus. I mean, look at Him. Dirt under His nails. Calloused hands. Holes in His sandals. No headquarters. No office. No committee. No clout with the local church.

The clergy won't give Him the time of day. His followers look more like dockhands or pool sharks than seminarians.

This guy claims to be the Messiah?

Quite a pair, these two. You gotta wonder what they saw in each other. Whatever it was, it must've been something. Matthew heard the call and never went back. He spent the rest of his life convincing folks that the carpenter was the King. Jesus gave the call and never took it back. He spent His life dying for people like Matthew, convincing a lot of us that if He had a place for Matthew, He just might have a place for us.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Matthew, the tax collector, who later became Jesus' disciple

Date Written: c. A.D. 60

Key Themes:

- God kept His promise of a deliverer for His people.
- God's ideas about His kingdom are often different from His people's ideas of the same kingdom.
- Jesus lived fully as a human and as God.
- Jesus' ministry and sacrifice changed the world forever.

Key Verse:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

Contents:

I. The Birth and Preparation of the Messiah 1:1—4:11

II. Jesus' Ministry in Galilee 4:12—20:29

III. Jesus' Last Days on Earth 21:1—28:20

Life LESSONS

Matthew 1:1–25

SITUATION
Because Matthew wrote for a Jewish audience, he began his Gospel by showing through family records that Jesus was a descendant of both King David and Abraham.

OBSERVATION
Joseph found it difficult to understand the supernatural conception and birth of Jesus Christ.

INSPIRATION
Matthew describes Jesus' earthly father as a carpenter (Matthew 13:55). He lives in Nazareth: a single-camel map dot on the edge of boredom. Is he the right choice? Doesn't God have better options? An eloquent priest from Jerusalem or a scholar from the Pharisees? Why Joseph? A major part of the answer lies in his reputation: he gives it up for Jesus. "Then Joseph [Mary's] husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly" (Matthew 1:19).

With the phrase "a just man," Matthew recognizes the status of Joseph. Nazareth viewed him as we might view an elder, deacon, or Bible class teacher. Joseph likely took pride in his standing, but Mary's announcement jeopardized it. *I'm pregnant.*

Now what? His fiancée is blemished, tainted . . . he is righteous, godly. On one hand, he has the law. On the other, he has his love. The law says, stone her. Love says, forgive her. Joseph is caught in the middle.

Then comes the angel.

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:

2 Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah
and his brothers. 3 Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez be-
got Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. 4 Ram begot Amminadab, Ammin-
adab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon. 5 Salmon begot Boaz
by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, 6 and Jesse
begot David the king.

David the king begot Solomon by her *who had been the wife*[a] of
Uriah. 7 Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, and
Abijah begot Asa.[a] 8 Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram,
and Joram begot Uzziah. 9 Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz,
and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. 10 Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh
begot Amon,[a] and Amon begot Josiah. 11 Josiah begot Jeconiah and his
brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon.

12 And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel,
and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel. 13 Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud be-
got Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. 14 Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot
Achim, and Achim begot Eliud. 15 Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot
Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob. 16 And Jacob begot Joseph the hus-
band of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ.

17 So all the generations from Abraham to David *are* fourteen
generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon *are* fourteen
generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ *are*
fourteen generations.

Christ Born of Mary

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother
Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was
found with child of the Holy Spirit. 19 Then Joseph her husband,
being a just *man,* and not wanting to make her a public example, was
minded to put her away secretly. 20 But while he thought about these
things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, say-
ing, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your
wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 And she
will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will
save His people from their sins."

22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken
by the Lord through the prophet, saying: 23 *"Behold, the virgin shall be
with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,"*[a]
which is translated, "God with us."

24 Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the
Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, 25 and did not know
her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son.[a] And he called His
name Jesus.

1:6 [a]Words in italic type have been added for clarity. They are not found in the original Greek. **1:7** [a]NU-Text reads *Asaph.* **1:10** [a]NU-Text reads *Amos.* **1:23** [a]Isaiah 7:14. Words in oblique type in the New Testament are quoted from the Old Testament. **1:25** [a]NU-Text reads *a Son.*

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: He Came as One of Us

Most families keep their family secrets a secret. Most don't talk about the swindling uncle or the streetwalking great-aunt. Such stories remain unmentioned at the family reunion and unrecorded in the family Bible.

That is unless you are the God-man. Jesus displays the bad apples of His family tree in the first chapter of the New Testament. You've barely dipped a toe into Matthew's Gospel when you realize Jesus hails from the Tilted-Halo Society. Rahab was a Jericho harlot. Grandpa Jacob was slippery enough to warrant an electric ankle bracelet. David had a personality as irregular as a Picasso painting—one day writing psalms, another day seducing his captain's wife. But did Jesus erase His name from the list? Not at all.

You'd think He would have. *Entertainment Tonight* could quarry a season of gossip out of these stories. Why did Jesus hang His family's dirty laundry on the neighborhood clothesline?

Because your family has some too. An uncle with a prison record. The dad who never came home. The grandparent who ran away with the coworker. If your family tree has bruised fruit, then Jesus wants you to know, "I've been there."

The phrase "I've been there" is in the chorus of Christ's theme song. To the lonely, Jesus whispers, "I've been there." To the discouraged, Christ nods His head and sighs, "I've been there." . . .

Questionable pedigree. Raised in an overlooked nation among oppressed people in an obscure village. Simple home. Single mom. An ordinary laborer with ordinary looks. Can you spot Him? See the adobe house with the thatched roof? Yes, the one with the chickens in the yard and the gangly teenager repairing chairs in the shed. Word has it He can fix your plumbing as well.

He's been there.

"He had to enter into every detail of human life. Then, when he came before God as high priest to get rid of the people's sins, he would have already experienced it all himself—all the pain, all the testing—and would be able to help where help was needed" (Hebrews 2:17,18 MSG). (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1304.

Mary's growing belly gives no cause for concern, but reason to rejoice. "She carries the Son of God in her womb," the angel announces. But who would believe it?

A bead of sweat forms beneath Joseph's beard. He faces a dilemma. Make up a lie and preserve his place in the community, or tell the truth and kiss his reputation good-bye. He makes his decision. "Joseph . . . took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son" (Matthew 1:24–25).

Joseph swapped his Torah studies for a pregnant fiancée and an illegitimate son and made the big decision of discipleship. He placed God's plan ahead of his own. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God's plan encompasses your personality, your talents, and your future. Ask God today to help you be a witness, open to new assignments, and eager to grow in faith.

EXPLORATION

Jesus' Family History—Ruth 4:18–22; 1 Chronicles 3:10–17; Luke 3:23–38. Virgin Birth of Jesus—Isaiah 7:14.

Life Lessons

Matthew 2:1–23

SITUATION
Jesus was born a descendant of King David during the reign of King Herod. The Roman Senate had appointed Herod to rule Judea.

OBSERVATION
Reaction to Jesus' birth was mixed. The wise men came to worship Jesus, while King Herod tried to kill Him.

INSPIRATION
Perhaps changes are in the air right now. Maybe you're in the midst of a decision. It's disrupting, isn't it? You like your branch. . . . You've been a pretty good branch-sitter. And then you hear the call. "I need you to go out on the limb and

. . . move. Take your family and move overseas, I have a special work for you."

. . . forgive. It doesn't matter who hurt who first. What matters is that you go and build the bridge."

. . . evangelize. That new family down the block? They don't know anyone in town. Go meet them."

. . . sacrifice. The orphanage has a mortgage payment due this month. They can't meet it. Remember the bonus you received last week?"

Regardless of the nature of the call, the consequences are the same: civil war. Though your heart may say yes, your feet say no. Excuses blow numerously as golden leaves in an autumn wind. "That's not my talent." "It's time for someone else to take charge." "Not now. I'll get to it tomorrow."

But eventually you're left

Wise Men from the East

2 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

3 When Herod the king heard *this,* he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

6 *'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,*
Are not the least among the rulers of Judah;
For out of you shall come a Ruler
Who will shepherd My people Israel.'" [a]

7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found *Him,* bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

9 When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. 11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

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

The Flight into Egypt

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

14 When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, 15 and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, *"Out of Egypt I called My Son."* [a]

Massacre of the Innocents

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying:

2:6 [a]Micah 5:2 **2:15** [a]Hosea 11:1

18 *"A voice was heard in Ramah,*
Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children,
Refusing to be comforted,
Because they are no more."[a]

The Home in Nazareth

19 Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord
appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, "Arise, take the
young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those
who sought the young Child's life are dead." 21 Then he arose, took the
young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.

22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea
instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being
warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Gali-
lee. 23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might
be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a
Nazarene."

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

3 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness
of Judea, 2 and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at
hand!" 3 For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying:

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord;
Make His paths straight.'"[a]

4 Now John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt
around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then
Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to
him 6 and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming
to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to
flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repen-
tance, 9 and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as
our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to
Abraham from these stones. 10 And even now the ax is laid to the root
of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is
cut down and thrown into the fire. 11 I indeed baptize you with water
unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I,
whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the
Holy Spirit and fire.[a] 12 His winnowing fan *is* in His hand, and He will
thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into
the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

John Baptizes Jesus

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be bap-
tized by him. 14 And John *tried to* prevent Him, saying, "I need to be
baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"

2:18 [a]Jeremiah 31:15 **3:3** [a]Isaiah 40:3 **3:11** [a]M-Text omits *and fire.*

staring at a bare tree and a hard choice: His will or yours? (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
How do I respond to Jesus, the King? Do I worship Him? Do I celebrate His birth, life, death, and resurrection? What do I bring to give to Him? Bring a gift to Jesus in your prayer, worship, or service.

EXPLORATION
Prophecies About Jesus—Jeremiah 31:15; Micah 5:2.

Life Lessons

Matthew 3:1–17

SITUATION
Two major religious groups existed in Israel at the time of Jesus. The Pharisees were more religiously minded, while the Sadducees were more politically minded. These groups were united in their hatred of Jesus.

OBSERVATION
True repentance prepares the way for Jesus in our lives.

INSPIRATION
Nothing in His appearance separates Him from the crowd. Like the rest, He is standing in line, waiting His turn. He, like the others, can hear the voice of the preacher in the distance.

Between baptisms, John the Baptist is prone to preach. Impetuous. Fiery. Bronzed face, unshorn locks. He stands waist-deep in the cobalt-colored Jordan. He makes a point of calling all people to the water. "He went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Luke 3:3).

Baptism wasn't a new

practice. It was a required rite for any Gentile seeking to become a Jew. Baptism was for the moldy, second-class, unchosen people, not the clean, top-of-the-line class favorites—the Jews. Herein lies the rub. John refuses to delineate between Jew and Gentile. In his book, every heart needs a detail job.

Every heart, that is, except one. That's why John is stunned when that one wades into the river.

John's reluctance is understandable. A baptismal ceremony is an odd place to find the Son of God. He should be the baptizer not the baptizee. Why would Christ want to be baptized? Why would He need to be baptized?

Here's why: Since you and I cannot pay, Christ did. We've broken commandments, promises, and, worst of all, we've broken God's heart.

But Christ sees our plight. We owe God a perfect life. Perfect obedience to every command. Not just the command of baptism, but the commands of humility, honesty, integrity. We can't deliver. Might as well charge us for the property of Manhattan. But Christ can and He did. His plunge into the Jordan is a picture of His plunge into our sin. His baptism announces, "Let me pay."

Your baptism responds, "You bet I will." (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Have you followed this example of Jesus through baptism? Give it prayerful consideration.

EXPLORATION

Jesus' Baptism—Mark 1:1–11; Luke 3:21, 22.

15 But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit *it to be so* now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him.

16 When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He[a] saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. 17 And suddenly a voice *came* from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Satan Tempts Jesus

4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. 3 Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

4 But He answered and said, "It is written, *'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"*[a]

5 Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written:

'He shall give His angels charge over you,'

and,

'In their hands they shall bear you up,
Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"[a]

7 Jesus said to him, "It is written again, *'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"*[a]

8 Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."

10 Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you,[a] Satan! For it is written, *'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"*[b]

11 Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

Jesus Begins His Galilean Ministry

12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. 13 And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:

15 *"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,*
By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,

3:16 [a]Or *he* **4:4** [a]Deuteronomy 8:3 **4:6** [a]Psalm 91:11, 12 **4:7** [a]Deuteronomy 6:16
4:10 [a]M-Text reads *Get behind Me.* [b]Deuteronomy 6:13

Galilee of the Gentiles:
16 *The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light,*
And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death
Light has dawned."[a]

17 From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Four Fishermen Called as Disciples

18 And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19 Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." 20 They immediately left *their* nets and followed Him.

21 Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James *the son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, 22 and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

Jesus Heals a Great Multitude

23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. 24 Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. 25 Great multitudes followed Him—from Galilee, and *from* Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

The Beatitudes

5 And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. 2 Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

3 "Blessed *are* the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4 Blessed *are* those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.
5 Blessed *are* the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.
6 Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.
7 Blessed *are* the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.
8 Blessed *are* the pure in heart,
For they shall see God.
9 Blessed *are* the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.
10 Blessed *are* those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4:16 [a]Isaiah 9:1, 2

Life Lessons

Matthew 4:1–25

SITUATION
Jesus told John the Baptist, "It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). Jesus followed God's will by resisting the devil's temptations and by teaching, preaching, and healing.

OBSERVATION
Jesus gave His disciples the most rewarding job. He taught them to reach out to people with the Good News of God.

INSPIRATION
When I was in high school, our family used to fish every year during spring break. One year my brother and my mom couldn't go, so my dad let me invite a friend. I asked Mark. He was a good pal and a great sport. He got permission from his parents, and we began planning our trip. . . .

We loaded our camper and set out for the lake.

We arrived late at night, unfolded the camper, and went to bed—dreaming of tomorrow's day in the sun. But during the night, an unseasonably strong norther blew in. It got cold fast! The wind was so strong that we could barely open the camper door the next morning. The sky was gray. The lake was a mountain range of white-topped waves. There was no way we could fish in that weather.

"No problem," we said. "We'll spend the day in the camper. After all, we have Monopoly. We have *Reader's Digest*. We all know a few jokes. It's not what we came to do, but

New Creation

Matthew 5 describes God's radical reconstruction of the heart. Observe the sequence. First, we recognize we are in need (we're poor in spirit). Next, we repent of our self-sufficiency (we mourn). We quit calling the shots and surrender control to God (we're meek). So grateful are we for His presence that we yearn for more of Him (we hunger and thirst). As we grow closer to Him, we become more like Him. We forgive others (we're merciful). We change our outlook (we're pure in heart). We love others (we're peacemakers). We endure injustice (we're persecuted).

It's no casual shift of attitude. It is a demolition of the old structure and a creation of the new. The more radical the change, the greater the joy. And it's worth every effort, for this is the joy of God.

And though your heart isn't perfect, it isn't rotten. And though you aren't invincible, at least you're plugged in. And you can bet that He who made you knows just how to purify you—from the inside out.

Study Guide

Read Matthew 5:2–12.

- Why is it difficult to make lasting changes in life?
- If we say we trust God, then why do we hesitate to allow Him to change our hearts?
- Describe the methods God uses to reconstruct a person's heart.
- Describe the difference between changing from the inside out and changing from the outside in.
- List some ways to change bad habits.
- How can we be more receptive to God's changing work in our hearts?
- What can we learn from the way children trust and learn differently than adults?
- What area of your life do you need to surrender to God's transforming work?

11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all
kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceed-
ingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted
the prophets who were before you.

Believers Are Salt and Light

13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how
shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out
and trampled underfoot by men.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be
hidden. 15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on
a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. 16 Let your
light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glo-
rify your Father in heaven.

Christ Fulfills the Law

17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I
did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 For assuredly, I say to you, till
heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means
pass from the law till all is fulfilled. 19 Whoever therefore breaks one
of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be
called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches
them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I say
to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of
the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom
of heaven.

Murder Begins in the Heart

21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, *'You shall not
murder,*[a] and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'
22 But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a
cause[a] shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his
brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says,
'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire. 23 Therefore if you bring your
gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something
against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way.
First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.
25 Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with
him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you
over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. 26 Assuredly, I say
to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the
last penny.

Adultery in the Heart

27 "You have heard that it was said to those of old,[a] *'You shall not
commit adultery.'*[b] 28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman
to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
29 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you;
for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish,

5:21 [a]Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17 **5:22** [a]NU-Text omits *without a cause.*
5:27 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *to those of old.* [b]Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18

we'll make the best of it and fish tomorrow."

We were in for a surprise. The next morning it wasn't the wind that made the door hard to open, it was the ice!

It was a long day. It was a long, cold night.

When we awoke the next morning to the sound of sleet slapping the canvas, we didn't even pretend to be cheerful. We were flat-out grumpy. Mark became more of a jerk with each passing moment; I wondered what spell of ignorance I must have been in when I invited him. Dad couldn't do anything right; I wondered how someone so irritable could have such an even-tempered son. We sat in misery the whole day, our fishing equipment still unpacked.

The next day was even colder. "We're going home" were my father's first words. No one objected.

I learned a hard lesson that week. Not about fishing, but about people.

When those who are called to fish don't fish, they fight.

But note the other side of this fish tale: When those who are called to fish, fish—they flourish! (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you a faithful worker in God's service? Is it easier for you to share your faith or argue with another Christian? Ask God to help you become a successful fisher of people.

EXPLORATION

Temptation of Jesus—Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1–13. Jesus' Preaching—Mark 12:14, 15; Luke 4:14, 15; John 4:42–45. Jesus' Followers—Mark 1:16–20.

than for your whole body to be cast into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

Marriage Is Sacred and Binding

31 "Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' 32 But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality[a] causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

Jesus Forbids Oaths

33 "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' 34 But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

Go the Second Mile

38 "You have heard that it was said, *'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'*[a] 39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have *your* cloak also. 41 And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.

Love Your Enemies

43 "You have heard that it was said, *'You shall love your neighbor*[a] and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,[a] 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren[a] only, what do you do more *than others?* Do not even the tax collectors[b] do so? 48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Do Good to Please God

6 "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. 2 Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not

5:32 [a]Or *fornication* **5:38** [a]Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21 **5:43** [a]Compare Leviticus 19:18 **5:44** [a]NU-Text omits three clauses from this verse, leaving, *"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."* **5:47** [a]M-Text reads *friends.* [b]NU-Text reads *Gentiles.*

Life LESSONS

MATTHEW 5:1–48

SITUATION
Jesus gave this sermon (chapters 5—7) on a hillside near the town of Capernaum. Matthew presented four other great discourses of Jesus (chapters 10; 13; 18; 24, 25).

OBSERVATION
Jesus did not come to destroy the law of Moses or the teaching of the prophets, but to fulfill what they said. Jesus told us to be perfect, just as our Father in heaven is perfect.

INSPIRATION
Sacred delight is good news coming through the back door of your heart. It's what you'd always dreamed but never expected. It's the too-good-to-be-true coming true. It's having God as your pinch-hitter, your lawyer, your dad, your biggest fan, and your best friend. God on your side, in your heart, out in front, and protecting your back. It's hope where you least expected it: a flower in life's sidewalk.

It is *sacred* because only God can grant it. It is a *delight* because it thrills. Since it is sacred, it can't be stolen. And since it is delightful, it can't be predicted.

It was this gladness that danced through the Red Sea. It was this joy that blew the trumpet at Jericho. It was this secret that made Mary sing. It was this surprise that put the springtime into Easter morning. . . .

It is this sacred delight that Jesus promises in the Sermon on the Mount.

Nine times He promises

sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 3 But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.[a]

The Model Prayer

5 "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 6 But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place;* and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.[a] 7 And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen *do.* For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

8 "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. 9 In this manner, therefore, pray:

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
10 Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as *it is* in heaven.
11 Give us this day our daily bread.
12 And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
13 And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.[a]

14 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Fasting to Be Seen Only by God

16 "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who *is* in the secret *place;* and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.[a]

Lay Up Treasures in Heaven

19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys

6:4 [a]NU-Text omits *openly.* **6:6** [a]NU-Text omits *openly.* **6:13** [a]NU-Text omits *For Yours* through *Amen.* **6:18** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *openly.*

it. And He promises it to an unlikely crowd:

"The poor in spirit . . . Those who mourn . . . The meek . . . Those who hunger and thirst . . . The merciful . . . The pure in heart . . . The peacemakers . . . The persecuted . . . "

It is to this band of pilgrims that God promises a special blessing. A heavenly joy. A sacred delight. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
How are you fulfilling Jesus' command to be perfect before God? Do you fall short by lying, lusting, cheating, coveting, or gossiping? When you battle one of these temptations, instead of giving in, pray, sing a worshipful song, or think of a memorized verse. Praise God instead of giving in.

EXPLORATION
Happiness—Luke 6:17–49.
The Law—Exodus 19—24.

Matthew 6:1–34

SITUATION
After teaching about happiness and honoring the law, Jesus taught about giving, praying, and worshiping.

OBSERVATION
The Lord's Prayer, a model prayer, is really the disciples' prayer.

INSPIRATION
When David says, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6), he's not saying he wants to get away from people. He's saying that he yearns to be in God's presence, wherever he is.

David longs to be in God's house.

I know what you're thinking: Sure, Max, but he was David. He was the poet and the prince and giant-killer. He didn't have carpools and diapers and a boss who breathes deadlines like a dragon breathes fire. I'd love to live in God's house, too, but for the time being, I'm stuck in the real world.

Forgive me, but I beg to differ. You aren't stuck in the real world. Just the opposite, you are one step away from the house of God. Wherever you are. Whatever time it is. Whether in the office on Thursday or at soccer practice on Saturday, you are only a decision away from the presence of your Father. You need never leave the house of God. You don't need to change your zip code or your neighborhood; all you need to change is your perception.

When your car is stuck in traffic, you can step into the chapel. When the gust of temptation unbalances your stride, step behind the wall of His strength. When the employees belittle you, take a seat in the porch swing next to your Father; He'll comfort you. Remember, this is no house of stone. You won't find it on a map. You won't find it described in a realtor journal.

But you will find it in your Bible. You've seen the blueprint before. You've read the names of the rooms and recited the layout. You're familiar with the design. But chances are you never considered it to be a house plan. You viewed the verses as a prayer.

Indeed they are. The Lord's Prayer. It would be difficult to find someone who hasn't quoted the

and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The Lamp of the Body

22 "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great *is* that darkness!

You Cannot Serve God and Riches

24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Do Not Worry

25 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

28 "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, *will He* not much more *clothe* you, O you of little faith?

31 "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day *is* its own trouble.

Do Not Judge

7 "Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. 3 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank *is* in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

6 "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.

Keep Asking, Seeking, Knocking

7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he

Details

What matters to you, matters to God.

You probably think that's true when it comes to the big stuff. When it comes to the major-league difficulties like death, disease, sin, and disaster—you know that God cares.

But what about the smaller things? What about grouchy bosses or flat tires or lost dogs? What about broken dishes, late flights, toothaches, or a crashed hard disk? Do these matter to God?

He's got a universe to run. He's got the planets to keep balanced and presidents and kings to watch over. He's got wars to worry with and famines to fix.

"Who am I to tell Him about my ingrown toenail?"

I'm glad you asked. Let me tell you who you are. In fact, let me proclaim who you are.

You are an heir of God.

You are eternal.

You have a crown.

You are a holy priest.

You were chosen before the creation.

But more than any of the above—more significant than any title or position—is the simple fact that you are God's child. "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1).

I love that last phrase! "We really are His children." It's as if John knew some of us would shake our heads and say, "Naw, not me. Mother Teresa, maybe. Billy Graham, all right. But not me." If those are your feelings, John added that phrase for you.

"We really are His children."

As a result, if something is important to you, it's important to God.

So go ahead. Tell God what hurts. Talk to Him. He won't turn you away. He won't think it's silly. "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:15, 16).

Does God care about the little things in our lives? You better believe it.

If it matters to you, it matters to Him.

Study Guide

Read Matthew 6:25–32.

- Describe one seemingly insignificant thing that can wreck your entire day.
- Name two things that you really, really believe might be too small for God to be concerned with.
- Which of life's basic needs do you think people worry about the most?
- Why is it sometimes difficult to believe that God cares about the small details of our lives?
- If God knows our needs, why do we worry about them?
- Explain what it means to you to know that you were chosen by God before creation.
- How does believing that you matter to God impact your attitude about your basic needs?
- What amazes you the most about God's concern for your life?
- If you were a child sitting on God's lap, what hurts would you tell Him about?

Christ Through The Bible

The Acceptance of Jesus

Labels. A fellow gave me one the other day. We got into a lively discussion about some ethical issues. Somewhere in our conversation he asked me what kind of work I was in. I told him I was minister, and he said, "Oh, I see," and grew silent.

I wanted to say, "No, you don't. Don't you put me in that box. I'm not a minister. I am Max-who-ministers. Don't you put me in that box with all those hucksters and hypocrites you may know. That's not fair."

Labels. So convenient. Stick them on a person, and you know what pantry to use.

What if God did that with us? What if God judged us by our outward appearance? What if He judged us based on where we grew up? Or what we do for a living? Or the mistakes we made when we were young? He wouldn't do that, would He?

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you" (Matthew 7:1, 2).

Be careful when you judge. That doesn't mean we shouldn't discern. That does mean we shouldn't pass the verdict. The amount of grace you give is the amount you get.

Jesus had another view of the man born blind. Rather than see him as an opportunity for discussion, He saw him as an opportunity for God. Why was he blind? "That the works of God should be revealed in him" (John 9:3).

What a perspective! The man wasn't a victim of fate; he was a miracle waiting to happen. Jesus didn't label him. He helped him. Jesus was more concerned about the future than the past.

Who do you best relate to in this story? Some of you relate to the man born blind. You have been the topic of conversation. You have been left on the outside looking in. You've been labeled.

If so, learn what this man learned: When everyone else rejects you, Christ accepts you. When everyone else leaves you, Christ finds you. When no one else wants you, Christ claims you. When no one else will give you the time of day, Jesus will give you the words of eternity.

Others of you will relate to the observers. You've judged. You've labeled. You've slammed the gavel and proclaimed the guilt before knowing the facts. If that is you, go back to John 9:4 and understand what the work of God is: "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work."

What is the work of God? Accepting people. Loving before judging. Caring before condemning.

Look before you label. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1324.

who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! 12 Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

The Narrow Way

13 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because[a] narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

You Will Know Them by Their Fruits

15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

I Never Knew You

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

Build on the Rock

24 "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 25 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

26 "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: 27 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

28 And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, 29 for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Jesus Cleanses a Leper

8 When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. 2 And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."

3 Then Jesus put out *His* hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

7:14 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *How . . . !*

prayer or read the words. . . .

Children memorize it. Parishioners recite it. Students study it . . . but I want to challenge us to do something different. I want us to live in it . . . to view it as the floor plan to our spiritual house. In these verses Christ has provided more than a model for prayer, He has provided a model for living. These words do more than tell us what to say to God; they tell us how to exist with God. These words describe a grand house in which God's children were intended to live . . . with Him, forever. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Take each section of the Lord's Prayer and recast it in your own words. Consider what it means to you to have a Father in heaven. What aspects of God's kingdom can you help to build this week? Who do you need to forgive today? What "food" do you need for today? Live in the Lord's Prayer today!

EXPLORATION

Jesus' Example—Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:46; Luke 6:12; 9:28, 29.

Life Lessons

Matthew 7:1–29

SITUATION

Matthew recorded the ending of Jesus' sermon. Jesus called His hearers to put His teaching into practice.

OBSERVATION

Jesus said that the true way which leads to life is based on an internal transformation, not on external deeds.

INSPIRATION
You want to make a difference in your world? Live a holy life:

Be faithful to your spouse.

Be the one at the office who refuses to cheat.

Be the neighbor who acts neighborly.

Be the employee who does the work and doesn't complain.

Pay your bills.

Do your part and enjoy life.

Don't speak one message and live another.

Note the last line of Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 4:11, 12, "Aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing."

A peaceful life leads nonbelievers to respect believers. What if John's life had not matched his words? What if he'd preached repentance and lived in immorality? What if he'd called for holiness and yet had a reputation for dishonesty? If John's life had not matched his words, his message would have fallen on deaf ears.

So will ours.

People are watching the way we act more than they are listening to what we say.

Saint Francis of Assisi once invited a young monk to accompany him to town to preach. The novice was honored at the opportunity. The two set out for the city, then walked up and down the main street, then several side streets. They chatted with peddlers and greeted the citizens. After some time they returned by another route to the abbey.

The younger man reminded Francis of his original intent. "You have

4 And Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant

5 Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, 6 saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented."

7 And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him."

8 The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this *one,* 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does *it.*"

10 When Jesus heard *it,* He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! 11 And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." 13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way; and as you have believed, *so* let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that same hour.

Peter's Mother-in-Law Healed

14 Now when Jesus had come into Peter's house, He saw his wife's mother lying sick with a fever. 15 So He touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and served them.[a]

Many Healed in the Evening

16 When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, 17 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:

"He Himself took our infirmities
And bore our sicknesses."[a]

The Cost of Discipleship

18 And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side. 19 Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go."

20 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay *His* head."

21 Then another of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."

22 But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

Wind and Wave Obey Jesus

23 Now when He got into a boat, His disciples followed Him. 24 And suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea, so that the boat was cov-

8:15 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *Him.* **8:17** [a]Isaiah 53:4

ered with the waves. But He was asleep. 25 Then His disciples came to *Him* and awoke Him, saying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!"

26 But He said to them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. 27 So the men marveled, saying, "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?"

Two Demon-Possessed Men Healed

28 When He had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes,[a] there met Him two demon-possessed *men,* coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way. 29 And suddenly they cried out, saying, "What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?"

30 Now a good way off from them there was a herd of many swine feeding. 31 So the demons begged Him, saying, "If You cast us out, permit us to go away[a] into the herd of swine."

32 And He said to them, "Go." So when they had come out, they went into the herd of swine. And suddenly the whole herd of swine ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and perished in the water.

33 Then those who kept *them* fled; and they went away into the city and told everything, including what *had happened* to the demon-possessed *men.* 34 And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw Him, they begged *Him* to depart from their region.

Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic

9 So He got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city. 2 Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you."

3 And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, "This Man blasphemes!"

4 But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? 5 For which is easier, to say, *'Your* sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk'? 6 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." 7 And he arose and departed to his house.

8 Now when the multitudes saw *it,* they marveled[a] and glorified God, who had given such power to men.

Matthew the Tax Collector

9 As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him.

10 Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, *that* behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. 11 And when the Pharisees saw *it,* they said

8:28 [a]NU-Text reads *Gadarenes.* **8:31** [a]NU-Text reads *send us.* **9:8** [a]NU-Text reads *were afraid.*

forgotten, Father, that we went to town to preach."

"My son," he replied, "we have preached. We have been seen by many. Our behavior was closely watched. Our attitudes were closely measured. Our words have been overheard. It was by thus that we preached our morning sermon."

John was a voice for Christ with more than his voice. His life matched his words. When a person's ways and words are the same, the fusion is explosive. But when a person says one thing and lives another, the result is destructive. People will know we are Christians, not because we bear the name, but because we live the life. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What would others say about your life? What kind of fruit are you producing? Think of three specific steps you can take to live the life of a Christian.

EXPLORATION
Producing Fruit—Isaiah 3:10; Matthew 3:8; 21:43; John 15:1–17; Colossians 1:10; James 3:18.

Life LESSONS

Matthew 8:1–34

SITUATION
Matthew recorded Jesus' miracles involving people who were sick and diseased.

OBSERVATION
Jesus' display of power over nature was one way that the Lord revealed Himself to His disciples. It illustrates faith and peace.

INSPIRATION
If you lose your faith,

you will probably do so gradually. In tiny increments you will get spiritually sloppy. You will let a few days slip by without consulting your compass. Your sails will go untrimmed. Your rigging will go unprepared. And worst of all, you will forget to anchor your boat. And, before you know it, you'll be bouncing from wave to wave in stormy seas. . . .

Stability in the storm comes not from seeking a new message, but from understanding an old one. The most reliable anchor points are not recent discoveries, but are time-tested truths that have held their ground against the winds of change. . . .

Attach your soul to these boulders and no wave is big enough to wash you under. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How faithfully do you pray, read the Bible, attend church? Are prayer and Bible study regular parts of your life, or do you just resort to them in emergency situations? Ask God to help you become more faithful in anchoring your life in Jesus, even when there are no storms on the horizon.

EXPLORATION

Spiritual Discipline—
1 Corinthians 9:25–27;
1 Timothy 4:7, 8; Hebrews 12:1–3.

Life LESSONS

Matthew 9:1–38

SITUATION

Although He was neither rude nor arrogant, Jesus aggravated the teachers of the law when He exercised His privileges as Son of

to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

12 When Jesus heard *that,* He said to them, "Those who are well
have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13 But go and
learn what *this* means: *'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'*[a] For I did not
come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."[b]

Jesus Is Questioned About Fasting

14 Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and
the Pharisees fast often,[a] but Your disciples do not fast?"

15 And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom
mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will
come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then
they will fast. 16 No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old
garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear
is made worse. 17 Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or
else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are
ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are
preserved."

A Girl Restored to Life and a Woman Healed

18 While He spoke these things to them, behold, a ruler came and
worshiped Him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and
lay Your hand on her and she will live." 19 So Jesus arose and followed
him, and so *did* His disciples.

20 And suddenly, a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years
came from behind and touched the hem of His garment. 21 For she
said to herself, "If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well."
22 But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, "Be of good
cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well." And the woman was
made well from that hour.

23 When Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the flute players
and the noisy crowd wailing, 24 He said to them, "Make room, for the
girl is not dead, but sleeping." And they ridiculed Him. 25 But when the
crowd was put outside, He went in and took her by the hand, and the
girl arose. 26 And the report of this went out into all that land.

Two Blind Men Healed

27 When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him,
crying out and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!"

28 And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to
Him. And Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do
this?"

They said to Him, "Yes, Lord."

29 Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith let
it be to you." 30 And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned
them, saying, "See *that* no one knows *it.*" 31 But when they had
departed, they spread the news about Him in all that country.

9:13 [a]Hosea 6:6 [b]NU-Text omits *to repentance.* **9:14** [a]NU-Text brackets *often* as disputed.

A Mute Man Speaks

32 As they went out, behold, they brought to Him a man, mute and demon-possessed. 33 And when the demon was cast out, the mute spoke. And the multitudes marveled, saying, "It was never seen like this in Israel!"

34 But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons."

The Compassion of Jesus

35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.[a] 36 But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary[a] and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. 37 Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly *is* plentiful, but the laborers *are* few. 38 Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

The Twelve Apostles

10 And when He had called His twelve disciples to *Him,* He gave them power *over* unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease. 2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the *son* of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was[a] Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Cananite,[a] and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.

Sending Out the Twelve

5 These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. 6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' 8 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead,[a] cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. 9 Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, 10 nor bag for *your* journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food.

11 "Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out. 12 And when you go into a household, greet it. 13 If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. 14 And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. 15 Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!

9:35 [a]NU-Text omits *among the people.* **9:36** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *harassed.* **10:3** [a]NU-Text omits *Lebbaeus, whose surname was.* **10:4** [a]NU-Text reads *Cananaean.* **10:8** [a]NU-Text reads *raise the dead, cleanse the lepers;* M-Text omits *raise the dead.*

God. When He forgave sins, mingled with sinners, raised the dead, and healed the sick, the teachers thought His actions were either inappropriate or unexplainable.

OBSERVATION

The kingdom of God had come. Jesus used His power over sickness and death to show His compassion for needy humanity. As a true friend, He meets the needs we bring Him. He asks us to join His mission and reach out to those around us.

INSPIRATION

Tell me, why are these stories in the Bible? Why are the Gospels full of such people? Such hopeless people? Though their situations vary, their conditions don't. They are trapped. Estranged. Rejected. They have nowhere to turn. On their lips, a desperate prayer. In their hearts, desolate dreams. And in their hands, a broken rope. But before their eyes a never-say-die Galilean who majors in stepping in when everyone else steps out.

Surprisingly simple, the actions of this man. Just words of mercy or touches of kindness. Fingers on sightless eyes. A hand on a weary shoulder. Words for sad hearts . . . all fulfilling the prophecy: "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out" (Isaiah 42:3 NIV).

Again I ask. Why are these portraits in the Bible? . . . Why did God leave us one tale after another of wounded lives being restored? So we could be grateful for the past? So we could look back with amazement at what Jesus did?

No. No. No. A thousand times no. The purpose of

these stories is not to tell us what Jesus *did*. Their purpose is to tell us what Jesus *does*.

"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning," Paul penned, "that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

These are not just Sunday school stories. Not romantic fables. Not somewhere-over-the-rainbow illusions. They are historic moments in which a real God met real pain so we could answer the question, "Where is God when I hurt?"

How does God react to dashed hopes? Read the story of Jairus. How does the Father feel about those who are ill? Stand with Him at the pool of Bethesda. Do you long for God to speak to your lonely heart? Then listen as He speaks to the Emmaus-bound disciples. What is God's word for the shameful? Watch as His finger draws in the dirt of the Jerusalem courtyard.

He's not doing it just for them. He's doing it for me. He's doing it for you. . . .

I know there used to be a stone in front of a tomb. And I do know it was moved. And I also know that there are stones in your path. Stones that trip and stones that trap. Stones too big for you.

Please remember, the goal of these stories is not to help us look back with amazement, but forward with faith. The God who spoke still speaks. The God who forgave still forgives. The God who came still comes. He comes into our world. He comes into your world. He comes to do what you can't. He comes to move the stones you can't budge.

Stones are no match for

Persecutions Are Coming

16 "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. 17 But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. 18 You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. 19 But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; 20 for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

21 "Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father *his* child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. 22 And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. 23 When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

24 "A disciple is not above *his* teacher, nor a servant above his master. 25 It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub,[a] how much more *will they call* those of his household! 26 Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.

Jesus Teaches the Fear of God

27 "Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. 28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. 30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Confess Christ Before Men

32 "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. 33 But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

Christ Brings Division

34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. 35 For I have come to *'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law';* 36 and *'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.'*[a] 37 He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

A Cup of Cold Water

40 "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. 41 He who receives a prophet in the name

10:25 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *Beelzebul*. **10:36** [a]Micah 7:6

of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. 42 And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold *water* in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward."

John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus

11 Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples, that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities.

2 And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of [a]his disciples 3 and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"

4 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: 5 *The* blind see and *the* lame walk; *the* lepers are cleansed and *the* deaf hear; *the* dead are raised up and *the* poor have the gospel preached to them. 6 And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

7 As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft *clothing* are in kings' houses. 9 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. 10 For this is *he* of whom it is written:

'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You.' [a]

11 "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. 13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. 14 And if you are willing to receive *it,* he is Elijah who is to come. 15 He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

16 "But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, 17 and saying:

'We played the flute for you,
And you did not dance;
We mourned to you,
And you did not lament.'

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children." [a]

Woe to the Impenitent Cities

20 Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: 21 "Woe to you,

11:2 [a]NU-Text reads *by* for *two of.* **11:10** [a]Malachi 3:1 **11:19** [a]NU-Text reads *works.*

God. Not then and not now. He still moves stones. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Do you see Jesus as a close friend or far away? Jesus desires to relate to us as a friend. Talk with Him. Tell Him all of your needs.

EXPLORATION
God Cares—Deuteronomy 7:9; Nehemiah 1:5; Psalm 67:4; Habakkuk 3:17–19.

Life Lessons

Matthew 10:1—11:19

SITUATION
The Jews viewed suffering as God's punishment. The disciples could not understand Jesus' message that they would suffer for being obedient.

OBSERVATION
Although believers will be persecuted, they can trust that God has a plan for all difficult circumstances.

INSPIRATION
Could you use some courage? Are you backing down more than you are standing up? If so, let the Master lead you up the mountain again. Let Him remind you why you should "fear not." Listen to the time Jesus scattered the butterflies out of the stomachs of His nervous disciples and see if His words help you.

We need to remember that the disciples were common men given a compelling task. Before they were the stained-glassed saints in the windows of cathedrals, they were somebody's next-door-neighbors trying to make a living and raise a family. They weren't cut from theological cloth or raised

on supernatural milk. But they were an ounce more devoted than they were afraid and, as a result, did some extraordinary things. . . .

Earthly fears are no fears at all. All the mystery is revealed. The final destination is guaranteed. Answer the big question of eternity, and the little questions of life fall into perspective. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Jesus promised hard times, but He also promised comfort. Are you experiencing opposition for being a Christian but neglecting to accept His comfort? Look forward to the day when you will no longer be persecuted but will be rewarded for persevering. Let the reality of that reward encourage you.

EXPLORATION

Do Not Be Afraid—Joshua 1:9; 2 Kings 6:15–17; Psalm 37:7, 13, 28; Isaiah 41:10; 43:1, 2; Luke 12:32; Hebrews 13:6; 1 Peter 5:7.

Life LESSONS

Matthew 11:20—12:50

SITUATION

Fourteen hundred years before Jesus' birth, Israel received God's command to keep the Sabbath holy. In their zeal to obey this command, the Jewish leaders gradually developed many rules and traditions to avoid working on the Sabbath. Jesus overruled the traditions and focused on God's purpose in establishing this command.

OBSERVATION

When God commanded the

Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be[a] brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. 24 But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

Jesus Gives True Rest

25 At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. 26 Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. 27 All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and *the one* to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him.* 28 Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light."

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath

12 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. 2 And when the Pharisees saw *it,* they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!"

3 But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: 4 how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? 5 Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? 6 Yet I say to you that in this place there is *One* greater than the temple. 7 But if you had known what *this* means, *'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,'*[a] you would not have condemned the guiltless. 8 For the Son of Man is Lord even[a] of the Sabbath."

Healing on the Sabbath

9 Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue. 10 And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—that they might accuse Him.

11 Then He said to them, "What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift *it* out? 12 Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." 13 Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched *it* out, and

11:23 [a]NU-Text reads *will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be.* **12:7** [a]Hosea 6:6
12:8 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *even.*

it was restored as whole as the other. 14 Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him.

Behold, My Servant

15 But when Jesus knew *it,* He withdrew from there. And great multitudes[a] followed Him, and He healed them all. 16 Yet He warned them not to make Him known, 17 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:

18 *"Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen,*
My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased!
I will put My Spirit upon Him,
And He will declare justice to the Gentiles.
19 *He will not quarrel nor cry out,*
Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets.
20 *A bruised reed He will not break,*
And smoking flax He will not quench,
Till He sends forth justice to victory;
21 *And in His name Gentiles will trust."*[a]

A House Divided Cannot Stand

22 Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and[a] mute man both spoke and saw. 23 And all the multitudes were amazed and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"

24 Now when the Pharisees heard *it* they said, "This *fellow* does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub,[a] the ruler of the demons."

25 But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. 26 If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? 27 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? Therefore they shall be your judges. 28 But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. 30 He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.

The Unpardonable Sin

31 "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy *against* the Spirit will not be forgiven men. 32 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age* to come.

A Tree Known by Its Fruit

33 "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by *its* fruit. 34 Brood of

12:15 [a]NU-Text brackets *multitudes* as disputed. **12:21** [a]Isaiah 42:1–4
12:22 [a]NU-Text omits *blind and.* **12:24** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *Beelzebul.*

Israelites not to work on the Sabbath, Jesus knew that law was given to relieve the people. Jesus focused on the purpose of the Sabbath. Therefore, He knew it was not sin to take care of one's needs or to help others on the Sabbath. He is Lord of the Sabbath—indeed, He is Lord of all.

INSPIRATION

"He who has seen Me has seen the Father" Jesus claimed (John 14:9). And the epistle to the Hebrews concurs: Christ is "the brightness of [God's] glory and the express image of His person" (1:3).

Jesus occupies the peerless "Christ the Redeemer" pedestal. He claims, not the most authority, but all authority. "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Matthew 11:27).

Don't hurry through those words. They're either the last straw or the ultimate truth. They warrant deliberate thought. . . .

Christ claims ultimate clout. Unshared supremacy. He steers the ship and pilots the plane. When He darts His eyes, oceans swell. When He clears His throat, birds migrate. He banishes bacteria with a single thought, "upholding all things by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3). (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How do you keep the Sabbath command? What makes Sunday a unique day for you? How can you avoid "business as usual" on Sunday? Next Sunday focus on the greatness of God and all he has done

for you—see if that doesn't jumpstart your worship!

EXPLORATION
Sabbath—Exodus 20:8–11; 35:1–3; Deuteronomy 5:12–15; Isaiah 58:13, 14; Luke 6:1–10; 13:10–17; John 7:22–24; 9:13–16; Colossians 2:16, 17.

Life Lessons

Matthew 13:1–58

SITUATION
The Jewish people eagerly looked forward to the kingdom of heaven but also had some mistaken ideas about it. Jesus' teaching told about this kingdom.

OBSERVATION
Jesus taught about the kingdom of heaven through parables in order to clear up wrong ideas. Many explanations in the Gospels show that the kingdom of heaven (or kingdom of God) means we must recognize God's authority and work to do His will.

INSPIRATION
Original readers caught quickly the pictures of this parable. They knew mustard seeds and leaven lumps. Both were small: the seed the size of a freckle, the leaven no larger than the end of your thumb. Yet a tiny mustard seed can erupt and reach for the clouds, growing to three times the average height of the ancient Jew, boasting bushy branches large enough to house a homeless flock of birds. A pinch of fermented dough can feed forty people three meals a day for several days. What begins minutely ends massively.

Maybe the early church needed this reminder. What clout do a tiny manger and a bloody cross carry in a

vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. 35 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart[a] brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. 36 But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. 37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

The Scribes and Pharisees Ask for a Sign

38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You."

39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah *is* here. 42 The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon *is* here.

An Unclean Spirit Returns

43 "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. 44 Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds *it* empty, swept, and put in order. 45 Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation."

Jesus' Mother and Brothers Send for Him

46 While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. 47 Then one said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You."

48 But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" 49 And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! 50 For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."

The Parable of the Sower

13 On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. 2 And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.

3 Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold,

12:35 [a] NU-Text and M-Text omit *of his heart.*

a sower went out to sow. 4And as he sowed, some *seed* fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. 5Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. 6But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. 7And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. 8But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

The Purpose of Parables

10And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"

11He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. 12For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. 13Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:

'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,
And seeing you will see and not perceive;
15 *For the hearts of this people have grown dull.*
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should[a] *heal them.'*[b]

16But blessed *are* your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; 17for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous *men* desired to see what you see, and did not see *it,* and to hear what you hear, and did not hear *it.*

The Parable of the Sower Explained

18"Therefore hear the parable of the sower: 19When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it,* then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. 20But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. 22Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. 23But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands *it,* who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

13:15 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *would.* [b]Isaiah 6:9, 10

forest of Jewish tradition and Greek philosophy? How can a backwoods movement headed by a rural carpenter gain traction in a religious world dominated by Epicureans, Stoics, and Gnostics? This is a kid on a skateboard entering the Daytona 500.

Don't we need a reminder today? We, at times, fear the smallness of Jesus' story. Our fear might keep us from seed sowing. Can the Sunday school account of Jesus hold its own in the Ivy League? Do terms like "sin," "salvation," and "redemption" stand a chance in this sophisticated day of humanism and relativism?

Apparently they do. Where are the Romans who crucified Christ? The Epicureans who demeaned and debated Paul? The Gnostics who mocked the early church? And the great temples of Corinth? They dwarfed the infant church. Do worshipers still sacrifice to Zeus?

No, but they still sing to Jesus.

God does uncommon works through common deeds. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

In what ways are you supporting God's kingdom? Are you looking for God's plan and following it? Or are you following your own plan and asking God to bless it? Allow God to adjust your dreams to match His plans. Let Him cause uncommon results from your common deeds.

EXPLORATION

Kingdom of Heaven—Isaiah 24:23; Daniel 2:44; Matthew 3:2; 6:9, 10, 33; Mark 10:14, 15, 23–25; Luke 9:61, 62; 12:31; 17:20, 21; John 3:3; 18:36.

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares

24 Another parable He put forth to them,
saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man
who sowed good seed in his field; 25 but while
men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares
among the wheat and went his way. 26 But
when the grain had sprouted and produced
a crop, then the tares also appeared. 27 So the
servants of the owner came and said to him,
'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field?
How then does it have tares?' 28 He said to
them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants
said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and
gather them up?' 29 But he said, 'No, lest while
you gather up the tares you also uproot the
wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together
until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I
will say to the reapers, "First gather together
the tares and bind them in bundles to burn
them, but gather the wheat into my barn."' "

New Life In Christ

"It has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven."—Matthew 13:11

God Speaks Our Language

God speaks all languages—including yours. Has he not said, "I will . . . teach you in the way you should go" (Psalm 32:8)? Are you not urged to "lay up His words in your heart" (Job 22:22)? What language is God speaking to you?

And aren't you glad He is speaking? Aren't you grateful that He cares enough to talk? Isn't it good to know that "secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him" (Psalm 25:14)?

My Uncle Carl was grateful that someone spoke to him. A childhood case of the measles left him unable to hear or speak. Nearly all of his sixty-plus years were lived in stony silence. Few people spoke his language.

My father was one of them. Being the older brother, maybe he felt protective. After their father died, perhaps he felt he should take over. Whatever the reason, my dad learned sign language. Dad wasn't an avid student. He never finished high school. Never went to college. Never saw the need to learn Spanish or French. But he did take the time to learn the language of his brother.

Let Dad enter the room, and Carl's face would brighten. The two would find a corner, and the hands would fly, and they would have a great time. And though I never heard Carl say thanks (he couldn't), his huge smile left no doubt that he was grateful. My dad had learned his language.

Your Father has learned to speak your language as well. "It has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 13:11). Think a word of thanks to Him would be appropriate? And while you're at it, ask Him if you might be missing any signs He is sending your way.

It's one thing to miss a message from your wife about cleaning up a room. It's something else entirely to miss one from God about the destiny of your life. (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

Question: What can you do this week to thank God for speaking your language?

For more on "New Life in Christ," see page 1434.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

31 Another parable He put forth to them,
saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mus-
tard seed, which a man took and sowed in
his field, 32 which indeed is the least of all the
seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than
the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds
of the air come and nest in its branches."

The Parable of the Leaven

33 Another parable He spoke to them: "The
kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a
woman took and hid in three measures[a] of
meal till it was all leavened."

Prophecy and the Parables

34 All these things Jesus spoke to the multi-
tude in parables; and without a parable He did
not speak to them, 35 that it might be fulfilled
which was spoken by the prophet, saying:

"I will open My mouth in parables;
I will utter things kept secret from the
foundation of the world."[a]

The Parable of the Tares Explained

36 Then Jesus sent the multitude away and
went into the house. And His disciples came to
Him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the
tares of the field."

37 He answered and said to them: "He who
sows the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The
field is the world, the good seeds are the sons
of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons
of the wicked *one.* 39 The enemy who sowed
them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the
age, and the reapers are the angels. 40 There-
fore as the tares are gathered and burned in
the fire, so it will be at the end of this age.
41 The Son of Man will send out His angels, and
they will gather out of His kingdom all things
that offend, and those who practice lawless-
ness, 42 and will cast them into the furnace
of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of
teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine forth as
the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who
has ears to hear, let him hear!

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

44 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like
treasure hidden in a field, which a man found
and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all
that he has and buys that field.

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price

45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like
a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, 46 who,
when he had found one pearl of great price,
went and sold all that he had and bought it.

The Parable of the Dragnet

47 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a
dragnet that was cast into the sea and gath-
ered some of every kind, 48 which, when it was
full, they drew to shore; and they sat down
and gathered the good into vessels, but threw
the bad away. 49 So it will be at the end of the
age. The angels will come forth, separate the
wicked from among the just, 50 and cast them
into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing
and gnashing of teeth."

51 Jesus said to them,[a] "Have you under-
stood all these things?"

They said to Him, "Yes, Lord."[b]

52 Then He said to them, "Therefore every
scribe instructed concerning[a] the kingdom of
heaven is like a householder who brings out of
his treasure *things* new and old."

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth

53 Now it came to pass, when Jesus had fin-
ished these parables, that He departed from
there. 54 When He had come to His own coun-
try, He taught them in their synagogue, so that
they were astonished and said, "Where did
this *Man* get this wisdom and *these* mighty
works? 55 Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not
His mother called Mary? And His brothers
James, Joses,[a] Simon, and Judas? 56 And His
sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did
this *Man* get all these things?" 57 So they were
offended at Him.

But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not
without honor except in his own country and
in his own house." 58 Now He did not do many
mighty works there because of their unbelief.

13:33 [a]Greek *sata,* approximately two pecks in all **13:35** [a]Psalm 78:2 **13:51** [a]NU-Text omits *Jesus said to them.* [b]NU-Text omits *Lord.* **13:52** [a]Or *for* **13:55** [a]NU-Text reads *Joseph.*

Life Lessons

Matthew 14:1–36

SITUATION
Jesus demonstrated His power over the laws of nature when He fed the five thousand and walked on the water.

OBSERVATION
John's unfair execution disturbed Jesus deeply, but He could not escape either the crowds of people or His disciples. Yet, Jesus showed compassion on the people and met their needs.

INSPIRATION
"Come on" is the invitation.

And Peter doesn't have to be told twice. It's not every day that you walk on water through waves that are taller than you are. . . .

The first few steps go well. But a few strides out onto the water, and he forgets to look to the One who got him there in the first place, and down he plunges. . . .

Peter knows better than to bite the hand that can save him. His response may lack class—it probably wouldn't get him on the cover of *Gentleman's Quarterly* or even *Sports Illustrated*—but it gets him out of some deep water:

"Help me!"

And since Peter would rather swallow pride than water, a hand comes through the rain and pulls him up.

The message is clear.

As long as Jesus is one of many options, He is no option. As long as you can carry your burdens alone, you don't need a burden bearer. As long as your situation brings you no grief, you will receive no comfort. And as long as you

John the Baptist Beheaded

14 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus
2 and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he is risen
from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him."
3 For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put *him* in prison for
the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. 4 Because John had said
to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." 5 And although he wanted
to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted
him as a prophet.

6 But when Herod's birthday was celebrated, the daughter of
Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. 7 Therefore he
promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask.

8 So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, "Give me John
the Baptist's head here on a platter."

9 And the king was sorry; nevertheless, because of the oaths and
because of those who sat with him, he commanded *it* to be given to
her. 10 So he sent and had John beheaded in prison. 11 And his head
was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought *it* to
her mother. 12 Then his disciples came and took away the body and
buried it, and went and told Jesus.

Feeding the Five Thousand

13 When Jesus heard *it,* He departed from there by boat to a
deserted place by Himself. But when the multitudes heard it, they
followed Him on foot from the cities. 14 And when Jesus went out He
saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them,
and healed their sick. 15 When it was evening, His disciples came to
Him, saying, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late.
Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy
themselves food."

16 But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. You give
them something to eat."

17 And they said to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two
fish."

18 He said, "Bring them here to Me." 19 Then He commanded the
multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and
the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave
the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes.
20 So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of
the fragments that remained. 21 Now those who had eaten were about
five thousand men, besides women and children.

Jesus Walks on the Sea

22 Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go
before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away.
23 And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the
mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone
there. 24 But the boat was now in the middle of the sea,[a] tossed by the
waves, for the wind was contrary.

25 Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walk-

14:24 [a] NU-Text reads *many furlongs away from the land.*

Fear

Faith is often the child of fear.

Fear propelled Peter out of the boat. He'd ridden these waves before. He knew what these storms could do. He'd heard the stories. He'd seen the wreckage. He knew the widows. He knew the storm could kill. And he wanted out…

Look into his eyes tonight and see fear—a suffocating, heart-racing fear of a man who has no way out.

But out of this fear would be born an act of faith, for faith is often the child of fear.

If Peter had seen Jesus walking on the water during a calm, peaceful day, do you think that he would have walked out to Him?

Nor do I.

Had the lake been carpet smooth and the journey pleasant, do you think that Peter would have begged Jesus to take him on a stroll across the top of the water? Doubtful.

But give a man a choice between sure death and a crazy chance, and he'll take the chance…every time.

Great acts of faith are seldom born out of calm calculation.

It wasn't logic that caused Moses to raise his staff on the bank of the Red Sea.

It wasn't medical research that convinced Naaman to dip seven times in the river.

It wasn't common sense that caused Paul to abandon the Law and embrace grace.

And it wasn't a confident committee that prayed in a small room in Jerusalem for Peter's release from prison. It was a fearful, desperate, band of backed-into-a-corner believers. It was a church with no options. A congregation of have-nots pleading for help.

And never were they stronger.

At the beginning of every act of faith, there is often a seed of fear.

Study Guide

Read Matthew 14:22–33.

- Describe a time when something very unexpected terrified you.
- In what ways do you think our desperation fuels our faith?
- Describe the ways that fear can both prompt our faith and destroy our faith.
- What kinds of things do you fear in life?
- What convinces you, as Peter was convinced, that getting to God is better than sitting in your fear?
- As you compare your fears to Peter's fear for safety, what would be your equivalent of walking on water (that risk you would take to get to where God is)?
- What do you think Peter brought out of the storm experience that the other disciples (who stayed in the boat) didn't?
- What does prayer have to do with our ability to bring God into the midst of our fears?

can take Him or leave Him, you might as well leave Him, because He won't be taken half-heartedly. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Imitate Christ's compassion by putting the needs of others ahead of your own. Be willing to stay up late with a disappointed friend rather than getting your sleep. Let your schedule be interrupted to comfort or listen to somebody else.

EXPLORATION
Jesus' Compassion—Matthew 20:30–34; 23:37; Mark 1:40–42; 8:1–3; Luke 7:12–15; John 11:33–36.

Life Lessons

Matthew 15:1–39

SITUATION
Although Pharisees were experts in God's law, they lacked proper understanding of the purpose of the law. Most importantly, they lacked faith in God.

OBSERVATION
The Pharisees had faith in the religious system. Jesus pointed to God who was beyond the system.

INSPIRATION
The disciples are annoyed. As Jesus sits in silence, they grow more smug. "Send her away," they demand. The spotlight is put on Jesus. He looks at the disciples, then looks at the woman. And what follows is one of the most intriguing dialogues in the New Testament.

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel," He says.

"Lord, help me!"

"It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs," He answers.

ing on the sea. 26 And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear.

27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

28 And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

29 So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. 30 But when he saw that the wind *was* boisterous,[a] he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"

31 And immediately Jesus stretched out *His* hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

33 Then those who were in the boat came and[a] worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."

Many Touch Him and Are Made Well

34 When they had crossed over, they came to the land of[a] Gennesaret. 35 And when the men of that place recognized Him, they sent out into all that surrounding region, brought to Him all who were sick, 36 and begged Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched *it* were made perfectly well.

Defilement Comes from Within

15 Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, 2 "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."

3 He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? 4 For God commanded, saying, *'Honor your father and your mother';*[a] and, *'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'*[b] 5 But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me *is* a gift *to God*"— 6 then he need not honor his father or mother.'[a] Thus you have made the commandment[b] of God of no effect by your tradition. 7 Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

8 *'These people draw near to Me with their mouth,*
And[a] *honor Me with their lips,*
But their heart is far from Me.
9 *And in vain they worship Me,*
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"[a]

10 When He had called the multitude to *Himself*, He said to them, "Hear and understand: 11 Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man."

14:30 [a]NU-Text brackets *that* and *boisterous* as disputed. **14:33** [a]NU-Text omits *came and.* **14:34** [a]NU-Text reads *came to land at.* **15:4** [a]Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16 [b]Exodus 21:17 **15:6** [a]NU-Text omits *or mother.* [b]NU-Text reads *word.* **15:8** [a]NU-Text omits *draw near to Me with their mouth, And.* **15:9** [a]Isaiah 29:13

12 Then His disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the
Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?"
13 But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly
Father has not planted will be uprooted. 14 Let them alone. They are
blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will
fall into a ditch."
15 Then Peter answered and said to Him, "Explain this parable to
us."
16 So Jesus said, "Are you also still without understanding? 17 Do
you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the
stomach and is eliminated? 18 But those things which proceed out of
the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. 19 For out of
the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications,
thefts, false witness, blasphemies. 20 These are *the things* which defile
a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

A Gentile Shows Her Faith

21 Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of
Tyre and Sidon. 22 And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that
region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son
of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed."
23 But He answered her not a word.
And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for
she cries out after us."
24 But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost
sheep of the house of Israel."
25 Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!"
26 But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's
bread and throw *it* to the little dogs."
27 And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs
which fall from their masters' table."
28 Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great *is* your
faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed
from that very hour.

Jesus Heals Great Multitudes

29 Jesus departed from there, skirted the Sea of Galilee, and went up
on the mountain and sat down there. 30 Then great multitudes came
to Him, having with them *the* lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many
others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them.
31 So the multitude marveled when they saw *the* mute speaking, *the*
maimed made whole, *the* lame walking, and *the* blind seeing; and
they glorified the God of Israel.

Feeding the Four Thousand

32 Now Jesus called His disciples to *Himself* and said, "I have com-
passion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me
three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them
away hungry, lest they faint on the way."
33 Then His disciples said to Him, "Where could we get enough
bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?"
34 Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?"

"But even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' tables," she responds.

Is Jesus being rude? Is He worn-out? Is He frustrated? Is He calling this woman a dog? How do we explain this dialogue? . . .

Could it be that Jesus' tongue is poking His cheek? Could it be that He and the woman are engaging in satirical banter? Is it wry exchange in which God's unlimited grace is being highlighted? Could Jesus be so delighted to have found one who is not bartering with a religious system or proud of a heritage that He can't resist a bit of satire?

He knows He can heal her daughter. He knows He isn't bound by a plan. He knows her heart is good. So He decides to engage in a humorous moment with a faithful woman. In essence, here's what they said:

"Now, you know that God only cares about Jews," He says smiling.

And when she catches on, she volleys back, "But your bread is so precious, I'll be happy to eat the crumbs."

In a spirit of exuberance, He bursts out, "Never have I seen such faith! Your daughter is healed."

This story does not portray a contemptuous God. It portrays a willing One who delights in a sincere seeker.

Aren't you glad He does? (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

When you obey certain rules today, think through *why* you obey. "I don't speed because. . . . " "I don't falsify expense reports because. . . . " "I honor my parents because. . . . "

EXPLORATION

The Spirit and Letter

Good Enough?

One would think that the Creator would not be easily impressed. But something about this woman brought a sparkle to His eyes and, most likely, a smile to His face.

The woman is desperate. Her daughter is demon possessed.

The Canaanite woman has no right to ask anything of Jesus. She is not a Jew. She is not a disciple. She offers no money. . . . But that doesn't slow her down. She persists in her plea.

"Have mercy on me!"

Matthew notes that Jesus says nothing at first. Nothing. He doesn't open His mouth. Why?

I think that He was admiring her. I think that it did His heart good to see some spunky faith for a change. I think that it refreshed Him to see someone asking Him to do the very thing He came to do—give great gifts to unworthy children.

How strange that we don't allow Him to do it more often for us.

Perhaps the most amazing response to God's gift is our reluctance to accept it. We want it. But on our terms. For some odd reason, we feel better if we earn it. So we create religious hoops and hop through them—making God a trainer, us His pets, and religion a circus.

The Canaanite woman knew better. She had no resume. She claimed no heritage. She had no earned degrees. She knew only two things: Her daughter was weak and Jesus was strong.

We prefer to get salvation the old-fashioned way: We earn it. To accept grace is to admit failure, a step we are hesitant to take. We opt to impress God with how good we are rather than confessing how great He is. We dizzy ourselves with doctrine. Burden ourselves with rules. Think that God will smile on our efforts.

He doesn't.

God's smile is not for the healthy hiker who boasts that he made the journey alone. It is instead, for the crippled leper who begs God for a back on which to ride.

Study Guide

Matthew 15:22–28

- Why do you think "helplessness" is a repulsive concept to our culture?
- In what ways do we pray differently when we pray out of helplessness?
- How do you think desperation affects faith?
- If we aren't approaching God from a position of helplessness, then how are we usually approaching Him?
- What are the worst things about feeling inadequate?
- Describe the process of making peace with your own weaknesses.
- Why is it sometimes easier to reach out on behalf of someone else who is helpless than for ourselves when we are helpless?
- How does God's perspective on helplessness or inadequacy differ from ours?

And they said, "Seven, and a few little fish."

35 So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. 36 And He took the seven loaves and the fish and gave thanks, broke *them* and gave *them* to His disciples; and the disciples *gave* to the multitude. 37 So they all ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left. 38 Now those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. 39 And He sent away the multitude, got into the boat, and came to the region of Magdala.[a]

The Pharisees and Sadducees Seek a Sign

16 Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. 2 He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, *'It will be* fair weather, for the sky is red'; 3 and in the morning, *'It will be* foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites![a] You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot *discern* the signs of the times. 4 A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet[a] Jonah." And He left them and departed.

The Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees

5 Now when His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. 6 Then Jesus said to them, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees."

7 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, *"It is* because we have taken no bread."

8 But Jesus, being aware of *it,* said to them, "O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread?[a] 9 Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? 10 Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up? 11 How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?—*but* to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 12 Then they understood that He did not tell *them* to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ

13 When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

14 So they said, "Some *say* John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

16 Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

17 Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not pre-

15:39 [a]NU-Text reads *Magadan.* **16:3** [a]NU-Text omits *Hypocrites.* **16:4** [a]NU-Text omits *the prophet.* **16:8** [a]NU-Text reads *you have no bread.*

of the Law—1 Samuel 15:22; Psalm 51:17; Isaiah 1:13–17; 29:13; Hosea 6:6; Matthew 23:23; Mark 12:29–31; Acts 15:5–11; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Galatians 2:16; 3:2–5; 6:2.

Life LESSONS

Matthew 16:1–28

SITUATION

The Pharisees and the Sadducees were two prestigious groups of Jewish teachers who jockeyed for influence and power. Leaders in both groups failed to recognize Jesus as the Messiah.

OBSERVATION

Jesus did not seek to have earthly power like the Pharisees and Sadducees. He sought to build a kingdom that would last into eternity. He told His followers that by giving their lives to Him, they would find true life.

INSPIRATION

My wife loves antiques. I don't. (I find them a bit old.) But because I love my wife, I occasionally find myself guiding three children through an antique store while Denalyn shops.

Such is the price of love.

The secret to survival in a shop of relics is to find a chair and an old book and settle down for the long haul. . . . After cautioning the kids to look with their eyes and not with their hands, I sat down in an overstuffed rocker with some *Life* magazines from the fifties.

That's when I heard the music. Piano music. Beautiful music. Vintage Rogders and Hammerstein. The hills were alive with the

sound of someone's skill at the keyboard. . . .

Our seven-year-old was at the piano, her hands racing up and down the keyboard. I was stunned. What gift of heaven is this that she can play in such a way? Must be a time-released gene she got from my side of the family. But as I drew closer, I saw the real reason. My daughter, Andrea, was "playing" a player piano. She wasn't making the music; she was following it. She wasn't commanding the keyboard; she was trying to keep up with it. Though it appeared she was playing the song, in reality, she was only trying to keep up with one already written. When a key would dip, her hands would dash.

Oh, but if you could have seen her little face, delighted with laughter! Eyes dancing as would her feet had she been able to stand and play at the same time.

I could see why she was so happy. She sat down to attempt "Chopsticks" but instead played "The Sound of Music." What's more, she couldn't fail. One greater than she was dictating the sound. Andrea was free to play as much as she wanted, knowing the music would never suffer.

It's no wonder she rejoiced. She had every reason to. And so do we.

Hasn't God promised the same to us? We sit at the keyboard, willing to play the only song we know, only to discover a new song. A sublime song. And nobody is more surprised than we are when our meager efforts are converted into melodious moments.

You have one, you know, a song all your own. Each of us does. The only question is, will you play it? (From

vail against it. 19 And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed[a] in heaven."

16:19 [a] Or *will have been bound . . . will have been loosed*

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: The Foundation of the Church

Could someone build a temple and forget why? Could someone construct a palace, yet forget the king? Could someone sculpt a tribute and forget the hero?

You answer those questions. Answer them in a church. The next time you enter an assembly of worship, position yourself where you can see the people. Then decide.

You can tell the ones who remember the slain one. They're wide-eyed and expectant. They're children watching the unwrapping of a gift. They're servants standing still as a King passes. You don't doze in the presence of royalty. And you don't yawn while receiving a gift, especially when the giver is the King Himself!

You can also tell the ones who see only the temple. Their eyes wander. Their feet shuffle. Their hands doodle, and their mouths open—not to sing, but to yawn. For no matter how hard they try to stay amazed, their eyes start to glaze over. All temples, even the Taj Mahal, lose their luster after a while.

The temple gazers don't mean to be bored. They love the church. They can cite its programs and praise its pastors. They don't mean to grow stale. They put on hats and hose and coats and ties and come every week. But still, something is missing. The one they once planned to honor hasn't been seen in a while.

But those who have seen Him can't seem to forget Him. They find Him, often in spite of the temple rather than because of it. They brush the dust away and stand ever impressed before His tomb—His empty tomb.

The temple builders and the Savior seekers. You'll find them both in the same church, on the same pew—at times, even in the same suit. One sees the structure and says, "O What a great church." The other sees the Savior and says, "O What a great Christ!"

Which do you see? (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1330.

20 Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.

Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection

21 From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.

22 Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"

23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him

24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.

28 Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

Jesus Transfigured on the Mount

17 Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; 2 and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. 4 Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us[a] make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

5 While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" 6 And when the disciples heard *it,* they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. 7 But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." 8 When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

9 Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead."

10 And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

11 Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first[a] and will restore all things. 12 But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands." 13 Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.

17:4 [a]NU-Text reads *I will.* **17:11** [a]NU-Text omits *first.*

When God Whispers Your Name by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What has Jesus asked you to give up in order to follow Him? Jesus promised, "Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (16:25). In what ways have you seen this to be true in your own life?

EXPLORATION
False Teaching—Jeremiah 50:6; Matthew 7:15–20; Romans 16:17, 18; 2 Corinthians 11:13–15; 1 Timothy 1:6, 7; 4:1, 2; 2 Timothy 4:3, 4; 2 Peter 2:1–3.

Life Lessons

Matthew 17:1—18:14

SITUATION
Jesus' followers took a risk when they believed that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God.

OBSERVATION
Though they had seen Jesus' power and authority daily, this transformation of Jesus proved that Jesus was God's Son—the Messiah.

INSPIRATION
Light spilled out of Him. Brilliant. Explosive. Shocking. Brightness poured through every pore of His skin and stitch of His robe. Jesus on fire. To look at His face was to look squarely into Alpha Centauri. Mark wants us to know that Jesus' "clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them" (Mark 9:3).

This radiance was not the work of a laundry; it was the presence of God. Scripture habitually equates God with light and light

with holiness. "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). He dwells in "unapproachable light" (1 Timothy 6:16). The transfigured Christ, then, is Christ in His purest form.

It's also Christ as His truest self, wearing His pre-Bethlehem and post-Resurrection wardrobe . . . One who is "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Hebrews 7:26). A diamond with no flaw, a rose with no bruise, a song on perfect pitch, and a poem with impeccable rhyme. . . .

They were gripped deep in their gut that God was, at once, everywhere and here. The very sight of the glowing Galilean sucked all air and arrogance out of them, leaving them appropriately prostrate. Face-first on the ground. "They fell on their faces and were greatly afraid" (Matthew 17:6). . . .

In the end we respond like the apostles. We, too, fall on our faces and worship. And when we do, the hand of the carpenter extends through the tongue of towering fire and touches us. "Arise, and do not be afraid" (17:7). (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

When did God open your eyes to accept Him? Recount the experience when God took your heart and made it new. Thank Him for his grace. In your daily routine today, look for a way to tell someone your story.

EXPLORATION

Jesus Glorified—Mark 9:2–8; 16:19; Luke 9:28–36; John 1:14; 17:5, 24; Ephesians 1:21, 22; Philippians 2:9, 10; Colossians 1:15–18; 1 Peter 3:22; Revelation 5:7–14; 19:11–16.

A Boy Is Healed

14 And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him,
kneeling down to Him and saying, 15 "Lord, have mercy on my son,
for he is an epileptic[a] and suffers severely; for he often falls into the
fire and often into the water. 16 So I brought him to Your disciples, but
they could not cure him."

17 Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse genera-
tion, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?
Bring him here to Me." 18 And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came
out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour.

19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could
we not cast it out?"

20 So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief;[a] for assuredly,
I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this
mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and noth-
ing will be impossible for you. 21 However, this kind does not go out
except by prayer and fasting."[a]

Jesus Again Predicts His Death and Resurrection

22 Now while they were staying[a] in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The
Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, 23 and they
will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up." And they were
exceedingly sorrowful.

Peter and His Master Pay Their Taxes

24 When they had come to Capernaum,[a] those who received the
temple tax came to Peter and said, "Does your Teacher not pay the
temple tax?"

25 He said, "Yes."

And when he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him, say-
ing, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth
take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?"

26 Peter said to Him, "From strangers."

Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free. 27 Nevertheless, lest we
offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes
up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of
money;[a] take that and give it to them for Me and you."

Who Is the Greatest?

18 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is
greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

2 Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of
them, 3 and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and
become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of
heaven. 4 Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the
greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 Whoever receives one little child
like this in My name receives Me.

17:15 [a]Literally *moonstruck* **17:20** [a]NU-Text reads *little faith.* **17:21** [a]NU-Text omits this verse. **17:22** [a]NU-Text reads *gathering together.* **17:24** [a]NU-Text reads *Capharnaum* (here and elsewhere). **17:27** [a]Greek *stater,* the exact amount to pay the temple tax (didrachma) for two

Jesus Warns of Offenses

6 "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to
sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his
neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe to the world
because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by
whom the offense comes!
8 "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from
you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than
having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. 9 And
if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you. It is
better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two
eyes, to be cast into hell fire.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

10 "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I
say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father
who is in heaven. 11 For the Son of Man has come to save that which
was lost.[a]
12 "What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of
them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the
mountains to seek the one that is straying? 13 And if he should find it,
assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that *sheep* than over the
ninety-nine that did not go astray. 14 Even so it is not the will of your
Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

Dealing with a Sinning Brother

15 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his
fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained
your brother. 16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more,
that *'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be estab-
lished.'*[a] 17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if
he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen
and a tax collector.
18 "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be
bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in
heaven.
19 "Again I say[a] to you that if two of you agree on earth concern-
ing anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in
heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I
am there in the midst of them."

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

21 Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my
brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"
22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up
to seventy times seven. 23 Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a
certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 And
when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who
owed him ten thousand talents. 25 But as he was not able to pay, his

18:11 [a]NU-Text omits this verse. **18:16** [a]Deuteronomy 19:15 **18:19** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *Again, assuredly, I say.*

Life Lessons

Matthew 18:15—19:30

SITUATION
Jesus crossed the Jordan River into Perea before coming back through Jericho to Jerusalem. Herod imprisoned and killed John the Baptist for expressing his opinion publicly on Herod's marriage. The Jews hoped to trap Jesus also.

OBSERVATION
Jesus taught about the demands of discipleship. Disciples must honor marriage vows, have childlike humility, and refuse to be dominated by wealth. It can also be considered as just being normal people, living normal lives by God's grace.

INSPIRATION
Some time ago I was asked to play a game of golf. The foursome included two preachers, a church leader, and a "Matthew, B.C." The thought of four hours with three Christians, two of whom were pulpiteers, did not appeal to him. His best friend, a Christ follower and his boss, insisted, so he agreed. I'm happy to report that he proclaimed the experience painless. On the ninth hole he turned to one of us and said, smiling, "I'm so glad you guys are normal." I think he meant this: "I'm glad you didn't get in my face or club me with a King James driver. Thanks for laughing at my jokes and telling a few yourself. Thanks for being normal." We didn't lower standards. But neither did we saddle a high horse. We were nice. Normal and nice.

Discipleship is sometimes defined by being normal.

(From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Judge yourself: How are you being Jesus' disciple? While it can be demanding, Jesus basically calls us to love God and love our neighbor—really not that complex at all.

EXPLORATION
Humility—Luke 14:7–11; Romans 12:3; Ephesians 4:2; Philippians 2:3, 4.

Is your heart hard? Take it to your Father. You're only a prayer away from tenderness. You live in a hard world, but you don't have to live with a hard heart.

—Max Lucado (3:16)

master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. 26 The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' 27 Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

28 "But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took *him* by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' 29 So his fellow servant fell down at his feet[a] and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.'[b] 30 And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. 31 So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. 32 Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' 34 And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

35 "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."[a]

Marriage and Divorce

19 Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these sayings, *that* He departed from Galilee and came to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. 2 And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there.

3 The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for *just* any reason?"

4 And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made[a] *them* at the beginning *'made them male and female,'*[b] 5 and said, *'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'*?[a] 6 So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

7 They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?"

8 He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality,[a] and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."

10 His disciples said to Him, "If such is the case of the man with *his* wife, it is better not to marry."

Jesus Teaches on Celibacy

11 But He said to them, "All cannot accept this saying, but only *those* to whom it has been given: 12 For there are eunuchs who were born thus from *their* mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were

18:29 [a]NU-Text omits *at his feet.* [b]NU-Text and M-Text omit *all.* **18:35** [a]NU-Text omits *his trespasses.* **19:4** [a]NU-Text reads *created.* [b]Genesis 1:27; 5:2
19:5 [a]Genesis 2:24 **19:9** [a]Or *fornication*

Old Wounds

Do you have a hole in your heart?

Perhaps the wound is old . . . and you're angry.

Or perhaps the wound is fresh . . . and you're hurt.

Part of you is broken, and the other part is bitter. Part of you wants to cry, and part of you wants to fight. The tears you cry are hot because they come from your heart, and there is a fire burning in your heart. It's the fire of anger. It's blazing. It's consuming. Its flames leap up under a steaming pot of revenge.

And you are left with a decision: "Do I put the fire out or heat it up? Do I get over it or get even? Do I release it or resent it? Do I let my hurts heal, or do I let hurt turn into hate?"

Are you allowing your hurts to turn into hates? If so, ask yourself: Is it working? Has your hatred done you any good? Has your resentment brought you any relief, any peace? Has it granted you any joy?

Allow the hole in your heart to heal.

Study Guide

Read Matthew 18:23–35.

- Describe the struggle between releasing or resenting someone after they've hurt you.
- Explain how it benefits us to show mercy to others.
- Why do you think God puts such a priority on our willingness to show mercy?
- How should God's mercy to us impact the way we treat others?
- In your own words, define judgment without mercy.
- What most often stands in the way of our showing mercy?
- What does showing mercy bring into our lives?
- To whom do I need to show mercy? How?

made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept *it,* let him accept *it.*"

Jesus Blesses Little Children

13 Then little children were brought to Him that He might put *His* hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. 14 But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." 15 And He laid *His* hands on them and departed from there.

Jesus Counsels the Rich Young Ruler

16 Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good[a] Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"

17 So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good?[a] No one *is* good but One, *that is,* God.[b] But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."

18 He said to Him, "Which ones?"

Jesus said, "'*You shall not murder,*' '*You shall not commit adultery,*' '*You shall not steal,*' '*You shall not bear false witness,*'

19:16 [a]NU-Text omits *Good.* **19:17** [a]NU-Text reads *Why do you ask Me about what is good?* [b]NU-Text reads *There is One who is good.*

Christ Through The Bible

The Compassion of Christ

Would you do what Jesus did? He swapped a spotless castle for a grimy stable. He exchanged the worship of angels for the company of killers. He could hold the universe in His palm but gave it up to float in the womb of a maiden.

If you were God, would you sleep on straw, nurse from a breast, and be clothed in a diaper? I wouldn't, but Christ did.

If you knew that those you loved would laugh in your face, would you still care? . . . Christ did.

He humbled Himself. He went from commanding angels to sleeping in the straw. From holding stars to clutching Mary's finger. The palm that held the universe took the nail of a soldier.

Why? Because that's what love does. It puts the beloved before itself.

Love goes the distance . . . and Christ traveled from limitless eternity to be confined by time in order to become one of us. He didn't have to. He could have given up. At any step along the way, He could have called it quits.

When He saw the size of the womb, He could have stopped.

When He saw how tiny His hand would be, how soft His voice would be, how hungry His tummy would be, He could have stopped. At the first whiff of the stinky stable, at the first gust of cold air. The first time He scraped His knee or blew His nose or tasted burnt bagels, He could have turned and walked out.

When He saw the dirt floor of his Nazareth house. When Joseph gave Him a chore to do. When His fellow students were dozing off during the reading of the Torah, his Torah. At any point Jesus could have said, "That's it! That's enough! I'm going home." But He didn't.

He didn't, because He is love. (From *3:16,* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1369.

19 *'Honor your father and your mother,'*[a] and, *'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"*[b]

20 The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth.[a] What do I still lack?"

21 Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

With God All Things Are Possible

23 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

25 When His disciples heard *it,* they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"

26 But Jesus looked at *them* and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

27 Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?"

28 So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife[a] or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. 30 But many *who are* first will be last, and the last first.

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

20 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2 Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, 4 and said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' So they went. 5 Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. 6 And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle,[a] and said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day?' 7 They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.'[a]

8 "So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the laborers and give them *their* wages, beginning with the last to the first.' 9 And when those came who *were hired* about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. 10 But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. 11 And when they had received *it,* they com-

19:19 [a]Exodus 20:12–16; Deuteronomy 5:16–20 [b]Leviticus 19:18 **19:20** [a]NU-Text omits *from my youth.* **19:29** [a]NU-Text omits *or wife.* **20:6** [a]NU-Text omits *idle.* **20:7** [a]NU-Text omits the last clause of this verse.

Life Lessons

Matthew 20:1–34

SITUATION

Jesus traveled toward Jerusalem for the last time. He refuted the Jewish leaders' ideas that their heritage would ensure them membership in heaven. His disciples were also slow to learn and argued over kingdom status for themselves.

OBSERVATION

Jesus emphasized that salvation depends on God's love, mercy, and kindness. No one deserves it.

INSPIRATION

A certain landowner needs workers. At 6:00 A.M. he picks his crew, they agree on a wage, and he puts them to work. At 9:00 he is back at the unemployment agency and picks a few more. At noon he is back and at 3:00 in the afternoon he is back and at 5:00, you guessed it. He's back again.

Now, the punchline of the story is the anger the twelve-hour laborers felt when the other guys got the same wage. That's a great message, but we'll save it for another book.

I want to hone in on an often forgotten scene in the story: the choosing. Can you see it? It happened at 9:00. It happened at noon. It happened at 3:00. But most passionately, it happened at 5:00.

Five in the afternoon. Tell me. What is a worker still doing in the yard at 5:00 in the afternoon? The best have long since gone. The mediocre workers went at lunch. The last string went at 3:00. What kind of worker is left at 5:00 P.M.?

All day they get passed

by. They are unskilled. Untrained. Uneducated. They are hanging with one hand from the bottom of the ladder. They are absolutely dependent upon a merciful boss giving them a chance they don't deserve.

So, by the way, were we. Lest we get a bit cocky, we might take Paul's advice and look at what we were when God called us. Do you remember?

Some of us were polished and sharp but papier-mâché thin. Others of us didn't even try to hide our despair. We drank it. We smelled it. We shot it. We sold it. Life was a passion-pursuit. We were on a treasure hunt for an empty chest in a dead-end canyon.

Do you remember how you felt? Do you remember the perspiration on your forehead and the crack in your soul? Do you remember how you tried to hide the loneliness until it got bigger than you and then you just tried to survive?

Hold that picture for a moment. Now answer this. Why did He choose you? Why did He choose me? Honestly. Why? What do we have that He needs?

Intellect? Do we honestly think for one minute that we have—or ever will have—a thought He hasn't had?

Willpower? I can respect that. Some of us are stubborn enough to walk on water if we feel called to do so . . . but to think God's kingdom would have done a belly-up without our determination?

How about money? We came into the kingdom with a nice little nest egg. Perhaps that's why we were chosen. Perhaps the Creator of heaven and earth could use a little of our cash. Maybe the owner of every

plained against the landowner, 12 saying, 'These last *men* have worked *only* one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.' 13 But he answered one of them and said, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? 14 Take *what is* yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man *the same* as to you. 15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?' 16 So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen."[a]

Jesus a Third Time Predicts His Death and Resurrection

17 Now Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples aside on the road and said to them, 18 "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, 19 and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again."

Greatness Is Serving

20 Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him.

21 And He said to her, "What do you wish?"

She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom."

22 But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"[a]

They said to Him, "We are able."

23 So He said to them, "You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with;[a] but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but *it is for those* for whom it is prepared by My Father."

24 And when the ten heard *it,* they were greatly displeased with the two brothers. 25 But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. 26 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. 27 And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Two Blind Men Receive Their Sight

29 Now as they went out of Jericho, a great multitude followed Him. 30 And behold, two blind men sitting by the road, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, cried out, saying, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!"

31 Then the multitude warned them that they should be quiet; but

20:16 [a]NU-Text omits the last sentence of this verse. **20:22** [a]NU-Text omits *and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with.* **20:23** [a]NU-Text omits *and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with.*

they cried out all the more, saying, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!"

32 So Jesus stood still and called them, and said, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

33 They said to Him, "Lord, that our eyes may be opened." 34 So Jesus had compassion and touched their eyes. And immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed Him.

The Triumphal Entry

21 Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage,[a] at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose *them* and bring *them* to Me. 3 And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them."

4 All[a] this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying:

5 *"Tell the daughter of Zion,*
'Behold, your King is coming to you,
Lowly, and sitting on a donkey,
A colt, the foal of a donkey.'"[a]

6 So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set *Him*[a] on them. 8 And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread *them* on the road. 9 Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying:

"Hosanna to the Son of David!
'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*!'*[a]
Hosanna in the highest!"

10 And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?"

11 So the multitudes said, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee."

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

12 Then Jesus went into the temple of God[a] and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. 13 And He said to them, "It is written, *'My house shall be called a house of prayer,'*[a] but you have made it a *'den of thieves.'"*[b]

14 Then *the* blind and *the* lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple

21:1 [a]M-Text reads *Bethsphage.* **21:4** [a]NU-Text omits *All.* **21:5** [a]Zechariah 9:9 **21:7** [a]NU-Text reads *and He sat.* **21:9** [a]Psalm 118:26 **21:12** [a]NU-Text omits *of God.* **21:13** [a]Isaiah 56:7 [b]Jeremiah 7:11

breath and every person and the author of history was getting low on capital and He saw us and our black ink and. . . .

Get the point?

We were chosen for the same reason the five o'clock workers were. You and me? We are the five o'clock workers.

That's us leaning against the orchard fence sucking cigarettes we can't afford and betting beers we'll never buy on a game of penny-toss. Migrant workers with no jobs and no futures. The tattoo on your arm reads "Betty." The one on my biceps is nameless but her hips bounce when I flex. We should have given up and gone home after the lunch whistle but home is a one-bedroom motel with a wife whose first question will be, "Did you get on or not?"

So we wait. The too little, too lates.

And Jesus? Well, Jesus is the guy in the black pickup who owns the hillside acreage. He's the fellow who noticed us as he drove by leaving us in his dust. He's the one who stopped the truck, put it in reverse, and backed up to where we were standing.

He's the one you'll tell your wife about tonight as you walk to the grocery with a jingle in your pocket. "I'd never seen this guy before. He just stopped, rolled down his window, and asked us if we wanted to work. It was already near quitting time, but he said he had some work that wouldn't wait. I swear, Martha, I only worked one hour and he paid me for the full day."

"No, I don't know his name."

"Of course, I'm gonna find out. Too good to be true, that guy."

Why did He pick you? He wanted to. After all, you are His. He made you. He brought you home. He owns you. And once upon a time, He tapped you on the shoulder and reminded you of that fact. No matter how long you'd waited or how much time you'd wasted, you are His and He has a place for you. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
If you are a Christian ask yourself, "What are my special skills or abilities?" List your answers: administration, technical work, or cooking. Now that God has brought you to work in His kingdom, how can you use these gifts for Him?

EXPLORATION
Kingdom Citizens—Matthew 7:13–23; 21:28–32; James 2:5; 1 Corinthians 4:20; 2 Peter 1:5–11.

Life Lessons

Matthew 21:1–46

SITUATION
A week after Jesus entered Jerusalem as a king, the Jews killed Him. Jesus' dynamic entrance into Jerusalem fulfilled prophecy (Zechariah 9:9), affirmed His messianic royalty, and set the stage for His crucifixion.

OBSERVATION
During this last week, Jesus taught about faithful workers in the kingdom of God. He encouraged all to work faithfully without procrastinating.

INSPIRATION
As the husband looks in the jewelry case, he rationalizes, "Sure she would want the watch, but it's too

and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant [16] and said to Him, "Do You hear what these are saying?"

And Jesus said to them, "Yes. Have you never read,

'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants
You have perfected praise'?"[a]

[17] Then He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and He lodged there.

The Fig Tree Withered

[18] Now in the morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry. [19] And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, "Let no fruit grow on you ever again." Immediately the fig tree withered away.

The Lesson of the Withered Fig Tree

[20] And when the disciples saw *it,* they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither away so soon?"

[21] So Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. [22] And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

Jesus' Authority Questioned

[23] Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?"

[24] But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: [25] The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?"

And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' [26] But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet." [27] So they answered Jesus and said, "We do not know."

And He said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

The Parable of the Two Sons

[28] "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.' [29] He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went. [30] Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I *go,* sir,' but he did not go. [31] Which of the two did the will of *his* father?"

They said to Him, "The first."

Jesus said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. [32] For John came to you

21:16 [a] Psalm 8:2

in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw *it,* you did not afterward relent and believe him.

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers

33 "Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. 34 Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. 35 And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. 36 Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. 37 Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 38 But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' 39 So they took him and cast *him* out of the vineyard and killed *him.*

40 "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?"

41 They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease *his* vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons."

42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

'The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone.
This was the Lord*'s doing,*
And it is marvelous in our eyes'?[a]

43 "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. 44 And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."

45 Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. 46 But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.

The Parable of the Wedding Feast

22 And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: 2 "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, 3 and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. 4 Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle *are* killed, and all things *are* ready. Come to the wedding."' 5 But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. 6 And the rest seized his servants, treated *them* spitefully, and killed *them.* 7 But when the king heard *about it,* he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned

21:42 [a] Psalm 118:22, 23

expensive. She's a practical woman, she'll understand. I'll just get the bracelet today. I'll buy the watch . . . someday."

Someday. The enemy of risky love is a snake whose tongue has mastered the talk of deception. "Someday," he hisses.

"Someday, I can take her on the cruise."

"Someday, I will have time to call and chat."

"Someday, the children will understand why I was so busy."

But you know the truth, don't you? You know even before I write it. You could say it better than I.

Some days never come.

And the price of practicality is sometimes higher than extravagance.

But the rewards of risky love are always greater than its cost.

Go to the effort. Invest the time. Write the letter. Make the apology. Take the trip. Purchase the gift. Do it. The seized opportunity renders joy. The neglected brings regret. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

If you died today, would you be happy with the level of service you have given to God's kingdom? If not, plan to be more involved in serving others.

EXPLORATION

Jesus the King—Psalm 118; Zechariah 9:9; Luke 19:28–44; Ephesians 1:19–23; Philippians 2:5–11; Colossians 1:17, 18; 2:10; Revelation 4:9—5:14.

Life LESSONS

Matthew 22:1–46

SITUATION
Three Jewish factions confronted Jesus. The Pharisees opposed Roman occupation of Palestine. The Herodians supported Herod Antipas and Roman policies. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, because they could not find it directly taught in the books of the law.

OBSERVATION
Jesus continued to show that God's Word was superior to the Jewish leaders' human reasoning.

INSPIRATION
No doubt you've had your share of words that wound. You've felt the sting of a well-aimed gibe. Maybe you're still feeling it. Someone you love or respect slams you to the floor with a slur or slip of the tongue. And there you lie, wounded and bleeding. Perhaps the words were intended to hurt you, perhaps not; but that doesn't matter. The wound is deep. The injuries are internal. Broken heart, wounded pride, bruised feelings. Or maybe your wound is old. . . . The old pain flares unpredictably and decisively, reminding you of harsh words yet unforgiven. If you have suffered or are suffering because of someone else's words, you'll be glad to know there is a balm for this laceration. . . .

Did you see what Jesus did not do? He did not retaliate. He did not bite back. He did not say, "I'll get you!" . . . . He left the judging to God. He did not take on the task of seeking

up their city. 8 Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 9 Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' 10 So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding *hall* was filled with guests.

11 "But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. 12 So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and[a] cast *him* into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

14 "For many are called, but few *are* chosen."

The Pharisees: Is It Lawful to Pay Taxes to Caesar?

15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in *His* talk. 16 And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. 17 Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, *you* hypocrites? 19 Show Me the tax money."

So they brought Him a denarius.

20 And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription *is* this?"

21 They said to Him, "Caesar's."

And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." 22 When they had heard *these words,* they marveled, and left Him and went their way.

The Sadducees: What About the Resurrection?

23 The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him, 24 saying: "Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. 25 Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. 26 Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. 27 Last of all the woman died also. 28 Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her."

29 Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. 30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God[a] in heaven. 31 But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 32 *'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'*?[a] God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." 33 And when the multitudes heard *this,* they were astonished at His teaching.

22:13 [a]NU-Text omits *take him away, and.* **22:30** [a]NU-Text omits *of God.* **22:32** [a]Exodus 3:6, 15

The Scribes: Which Is the First Commandment of All?

34 But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees,
they gathered together. 35 Then one of them, a lawyer, asked *Him a*
question, testing Him, and saying, 36 "Teacher, which *is* the great com-
mandment in the law?"

37 Jesus said to him, "*'You shall love the* Lord *your God with all your*
heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'[a] 38 This is *the* first
and great commandment. 39 And *the* second *is* like it: *'You shall love*
your neighbor as yourself.'[a] 40 On these two commandments hang all
the Law and the Prophets."

Jesus: How Can David Call His Descendant Lord?

41 While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,
42 saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?"

They said to Him, "*The Son* of David."

43 He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him
'Lord,' saying:

44 *'The* Lord *said to my Lord,*
"Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"'?[a]

45 If David then calls Him '*Lord,*' how is He his Son?" 46 And no one
was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare
question Him anymore.

Woe to the Scribes and Pharisees

23 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, 2 say-
ing: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. 3 There-
fore whatever they tell you to observe,[a] *that* observe and do, but do
not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. 4 For they
bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay *them* on men's shoulders;
but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers. 5 But
all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacter-
ies broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. 6 They love the
best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, 7 greetings in
the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.' 8 But you,
do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ,[a] and you
are all brethren. 9 Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is
your Father, He who is in heaven. 10 And do not be called teachers; for
One is your Teacher, the Christ. 11 But he who is greatest among you
shall be your servant. 12 And whoever exalts himself will be humbled,
and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut
up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in *your-*
selves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. 14 Woe to you,
scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses,

22:37 [a]Deuteronomy 6:5 **22:39** [a]Leviticus 19:18 **22:44** [a]Psalm 110:1 **23:3** [a]NU-Text omits *to observe.* **23:8** [a]NU-Text omits *the Christ.*

revenge. He demanded no apology. He hired no bounty hunters and sent out no posse. . . . If ever a person deserved a shot at revenge, Jesus did. But He didn't take it. Instead He died for them. How could He do it? I don't know. But I do know that all of a sudden my wounds seem very painless. My grudges and hard feelings are suddenly childish. (From *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
When someone challenges your integrity, disregards your opinion, and ignores your work, how do you respond? Do you lose your temper, hold a grudge, or put the person down? Next time you face criticism, consider how Jesus carefully chose His words and used Scripture to answer His opponents.

EXPLORATION
Jesus' Wisdom—Matthew 11:27; John 2:24, 25; Acts 1:24, 25; 1 Corinthians 4:5; Revelation 2:18, 19.

Life Lessons

Matthew 23:1–39

SITUATION
Human rules, practices, and interpretations became more important than God's law; Jesus condemned the Pharisees as hypocrites.

OBSERVATION
God hates religious hypocrisy.

INSPIRATION
Jesus never spoke to anyone else with such intensity. But when He saw the religious hypocrite, He flipped on the spotlight and exposed every self-righteous mole and pimple. "They love to pray standing in the synagogues

and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men" (Matthew 6:5).

This is the working definition of *hypocrisy*: "to be seen by men." The Greek word for hypocrite, *hypokrites*, originally meant "actor." First-century actors wore masks. A hypocrite, then, is one who puts on a mask, a false face.

Jesus did not say, "Do not do good works." Nor did He instruct, "Do not let your works be seen." We must do good works, and some works, such as benevolence or teaching, must be seen in order to have an impact. So let's be clear. To do a good thing is a good thing. To do good to be seen is not. In fact, to do good to be seen is a serious offense. Here's why.

Hypocrisy turns people away from God. When God-hungry souls walk into a congregation of wannabe superstars, what happens? When God seekers see singers strut like Las Vegas entertainers . . . When they hear the preacher—a man of slick words, dress, and hair—play to the crowd and exclude God . . . When other attendees dress to be seen and make much to-do over their gifts and offerings . . . When people enter a church to see God yet can't see God because of the church, don't think for a second that God doesn't react. "Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don't make a performance out of it. It might be good theater, but the God who made you won't be applauding" (Matthew 6:1 MSG).

Hypocrisy turns people against God. So God has a no-tolerance policy. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.[a]

15 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel
land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him
twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the
temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple,
he is obliged *to perform it.*' 17 Fools and blind! For which is greater, the
gold or the temple that sanctifies[a] the gold? 18 And, 'Whoever swears
by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it,
he is obliged *to perform it.*' 19 Fools and blind! For which is greater,
the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? 20 Therefore he who swears
by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. 21 He who swears by
the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells[a] in it. 22 And he who
swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits
on it.

23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe
of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier
matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to
have done, without leaving the others undone. 24 Blind guides, who
strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse
the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion
and self-indulgence.[a] 26 Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the
cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.

27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like
whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but
inside are full of dead *men's* bones and all uncleanness. 28 Even so you
also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of
hypocrisy and lawlessness.

29 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build
the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous,
30 and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have
been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.'

31 "Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons
of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of
your fathers' *guilt.* 33 Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape
the condemnation of hell? 34 Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets,
wise men, and scribes: *some* of them you will kill and crucify, and
some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from
city to city, 35 that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on
the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah,
son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the
altar. 36 Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this
generation.

Jesus Laments over Jerusalem

37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and
stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your

23:14 [a]NU-Text omits this verse. **23:17** [a]NU-Text reads *sanctified.* **23:21** [a]M-Text reads *dwelt.* **23:25** [a]M-Text reads *unrighteousness.*

children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! 38 See! Your house is left to you desolate; 39 for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, *'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'* "[a]

Jesus Predicts the Destruction of the Temple

24 Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. 2 And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not *one* stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age

3 Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

4 And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. 6 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all[a] *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences,[a] and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these *are* the beginning of sorrows.

9 "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. 10 And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. 11 Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. 12 And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. 13 But he who endures to the end shall be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

The Great Tribulation

15 "Therefore when you see the *'abomination of desolation,'*[a] spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), 16 "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17 Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. 18 And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. 19 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 20 And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. 21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. 22 And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

23 "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here *is* the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe *it.* 24 For false christs and false prophets will rise and

23:39 [a]Psalm 118:26 **24:6** [a]NU-Text omits *all.* **24:7** [a]NU-Text omits *pestilences.* **24:15** [a]Daniel 11:31; 12:11

APPLICATION
Do you practice what you preach? Or do people snicker when you announce a new set of resolutions? Pray for strength to live what you claim to believe.

EXPLORATION
Hypocrisy—Isaiah 29:13; Ezekiel 33:30–32; Malachi 1:6–14; Matthew 16:5–12; Romans 2:17–24; Titus 1:16.

Life Lessons

Matthew 24:1–51

SITUATION
Jesus prophesied about the Second Coming. He delivered this teaching from the Mount of Olives, where the prophet Zechariah predicted that the Messiah would stand when He came to establish His kingdom.

OBSERVATION
Christians need to be watchful and prepare for Jesus' return, because we don't know when it will be.

INSPIRATION
What kind of people should we be? Peter tells us: "You should live holy lives and serve God, as you wait for and [here is that word again] look forward to the coming of the day of God" (2 Peter 3:11, 12 NCV).

Hope of the future is not a license for irresponsibility in the present. Let us wait forwardly, but let us wait.

But for most of us, waiting is not our problem Or, maybe I should state, waiting is our problem. We are so good at waiting that we don't wait forwardly. We forget to look. We are so patient that we become complacent. We are too content. We seldom search the skies. We rarely run to the temple. We seldom, if

ever, allow the Holy Spirit to interrupt our plans and lead us to worship so that we might see Jesus.

It is to those of us who are strong in waiting and weak in watching that our Lord was speaking when He said, "No one knows when that day or time will be, not the angels in heaven, not even the Son. Only the Father knows. . . . So always be ready, because you don't know the day your Lord will come. . . . The Son of Man will come at a time you don't expect him" (Matthew 24:36, 42, 44 NCV).

Simeon reminds us to "wait forwardly." Patiently vigilant. But not so patient that we lose our vigilance. Nor so vigilant that we lose our patience.

In the end, the prayer of Simeon was answered. "Simeon took the baby in his arms and thanked God; 'Now, Lord, you can let me, your servant, die in peace as you said'" (Luke 2:28, 29 NCV).

One look into the face of Jesus, and Simeon knew it was time to go home. And one look into the face of our Savior, and we will know the same. (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

If Jesus were to return today, would you be prepared? If not, what steps should you take to be more prepared? Notice that the Lord first of all asks you to lead a holy life.

EXPLORATION

Jesus' Return—Mark 13:1–23; Luke 21:5–24; Acts 1:10–12; 1 Corinthians 15:50–57; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–10; 2 Timothy 3:1–5; Revelation 19.

show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 25 See, I have told you beforehand.

26 "Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; *or* 'Look, *He is* in the inner rooms!' do not believe *it.* 27 For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 28 For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.

The Coming of the Son of Man

29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

The Parable of the Fig Tree

32 "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer *is* near. 33 So you also, when you see all these things, know that it[a] is near—at the doors! 34 Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

No One Knows the Day or Hour

36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven,[a] but My Father only. 37 But as the days of Noah *were,* so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 38 For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. 40 Then two *men* will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two *women will be* grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. 42 Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour[a] your Lord is coming. 43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. 44 Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

The Faithful Servant and the Evil Servant

45 "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? 46 Blessed *is* that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. 47 Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. 48 But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' [a] 49 and begins to beat *his* fellow servants, and to eat and

24:33 [a]Or *He* **24:36** [a]NU-Text adds *nor the Son.* **24:42** [a]NU-Text reads *day.*
24:48 [a]NU-Text omits *his coming.*

drink with the drunkards, 50 the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for *him* and at an hour that he is not aware of, 51 and will cut him in two and appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins

25 "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Now five of them were wise, and five *were* foolish. 3 Those who *were* foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, 4 but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. 5 But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

6 "And at midnight a cry was *heard:* 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming;[a] go out to meet him!' 7 Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. 8 And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us *some* of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 But the wise answered, saying, '*No,* lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' 10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

11 "Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' 12 But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.'

13 "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour[a] in which the Son of Man is coming.

The Parable of the Talents

14 "For *the kingdom of heaven is* like a man traveling to a far country, *who* called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. 15 And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. 16 Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. 17 And likewise he who *had received* two gained two more also. 18 But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. 19 After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

20 "So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' 21 His lord said to him, 'Well *done,* good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' 22 He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' 23 His lord said to him, 'Well *done,* good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

24 "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 25 And I was afraid, and

25:6 [a]NU-Text omits *is coming.* **25:13** [a]NU-Text omits the rest of this verse.

Life Lessons

Matthew 25:1–46

SITUATION
Jesus used parables to teach His disciples to be ready for His return.

OBSERVATION
Jesus wants His followers to be busy in service and in sharing the good news right up until the day of His return. Watchfulness and active service go hand in hand.

INSPIRATION
How you relate to the master of the house colors everything. Dread him and hate your work. Trust him and love it.

How you feel about the Master of the universe does the same. Do you think God treats you with the sensitivity of an Auschwitz prison guard? This assumption guarantees daily deliveries of dread to your heart. Or do you believe God cherishes you like Stradivarius would his newest violin? He does. Believe it, and extract your strengths with great joy.

Jesus made this point in His dramatic parable of the talents. . . .

Before "talent" meant skill, it meant money. . . . According to the parable of the workers, a denarius represented a day's fair wages (Matthew 20:2). Multiply your daily wage by 10,000, and you discover the value of a talent. If you earn $30,000 a year and you annually work 260 days, you make about $115 a day. A talent in your case is valued at 10,000 times $115, or $1,150,000. . . .

The point? Use your uniqueness to take great risks for God!

Bride of Christ

Look long enough in the eyes of our Savior and, there you will see a bride. . . . He sees her, He awaits her, He longs for her.

And who is that bride? Who is this beauty who occupies the heart of Jesus?

You are. You have captured the heart of God. "As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62:5).

The challenge is to remember that. To meditate on it. To focus on it. To allow His love to change the way you look at you.

You have been chosen by Christ. You are released from your old life in your old house, and He has claimed you as His beloved. "Then where is He?" you might ask. "Why hasn't He come?"

There is only one answer. His bride is not ready. She is still being prepared.

Engaged people are obsessed with preparation. The right dress. The right weight. The right hair and the right tux. They want everything to be right. Why? So their fiancé will marry them? No. Just the opposite. They want to look their best because their fiancé is marrying them.

The same is true for us. We want to look our best for Christ. We want our hearts to be pure and our thoughts to be clean. We want our faces to shine with grace and our eyes to sparkle with love. We want to be prepared.

Why? In hopes that He will love us? No. Just the opposite, because He already does.

You are spoken for. You are engaged, set apart, called out, a holy bride. Forbidden waters hold nothing for you. You have been chosen for His castle. Don't settle for one-night stands in the arms of a stranger. Be obsessed with your wedding date. Guard against forgetfulness. Be intolerant of memory lapses. Write yourself notes. Memorize verses. Do whatever you need to do to remember. "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2). You are engaged to royalty, and your Prince is coming to take you home.

Study Guide

Read Matthew 25:1–13.

- If someone asked you why Jesus would come back to earth for you, how would you respond?
- What keeps us from believing that God longs to be with us?
- In what ways does the church in today's society need to be more prepared to meet her groom, Christ?
- What kind of life do we need to live to be ready for Jesus, our spiritual bridegroom?
- For what reasons do you think God chose to keep the time of Christ's return a secret?
- Does the unexpected nature of Christ's return make you more wary or less wary about His coming?
- Describe the ways that we can keep watch for Christ's return, even though the timing will be unexpected.
- In what ways do you think we can best prepare for seeing Jesus?

went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, *there* you have *what is* yours.'

26 "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. 27 So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. 28 So take the talent from him, and give *it* to him who has ten talents.

29 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. 30 And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

The Son of Man Will Judge the Nations

31 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy[a] angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. 33 And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 I *was* naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You,* or thirsty and give *You* drink? 38 When did we see You a stranger and take *You* in, or naked and clothe *You?* 39 Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me.'

41 "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: 42 for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; 43 I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'

44 "Then they also will answer Him,[a] saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' 45 Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do *it* to one of the least of these, you did not do *it* to Me.' 46 And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

The Plot to Kill Jesus

26 Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, *that* He said to His disciples, 2 "You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified."

3 Then the chief priests, the scribes,[a] and the elders of the people

25:31 [a]NU-Text omits *holy.* **25:44** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *Him.* **26:3** [a]NU-Text omits *the scribes.*

If you're great with kids, volunteer at the orphanage.

If you have a head for business, start a soup kitchen.

If God bent you toward medicine, dedicate a day or a decade to AIDS patients.

The only mistake is not to risk making one.

Such was the error of the one-talent servant. Did the master notice him? Indeed, he did. And from the third servant we learn a sobering lesson. "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours'" (Matthew 25:24, 25).

Contrast the reaction of the third servant with that of the first two.

The faithful servants "went and traded" (v. 16). The fearful one "went and dug" (v. 18).

The first two invested. The last one buried.

The first two went out on a limb. The third hugged the trunk.

He made the most tragic and common mistake of giftedness. He failed to benefit the master with his talent. All people have talents. This parable, indeed Scripture, assures as much. But how many people invest their gifts to profit the Master? (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What talents has God given you? Do you have a tendency to downplay those gifts, thinking you're being humble, or do you hide those gifts, fearing you might fail? Jesus' parable makes it clear that you

should use the gifts He gave you for His glory.

EXPLORATION
Faithfulness to the End—Luke 12:35–40; 1 Timothy 6:12–14; Titus 2:11–13; James 5:7–9; 1 Peter 1:13–15.

Life LESSONS

Matthew 26:1–75

SITUATION
Jesus looked toward the Passover and His death. He prepared His disciples by teaching them and spending time alone in prayer.

OBSERVATION
Jesus willingly obeyed God during the events leading up to His death. This obedience made salvation possible.

INSPIRATION
On the night before His death, a veritable landfill of woes tumbled in on Jesus. Somewhere between the Gethsemane prayer and the mock trial is what has to be the darkest scene in the history of the human drama.

"Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people. . . . They came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him" (Matthew 26:47, 50).

Judas arrived with an angry crowd. John is even more specific. The term he employs is the Greek word *speira,* or a "detachment of troops" (John 18:3). At minimum, *speira* depicts a group of two hundred soldiers.

Surely in a group this size there is one person who will defend Jesus. He came to the aid of so many. All those sermons. All those miracles.

assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, 4 and plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill *Him.* 5 But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people."

The Anointing at Bethany

6 And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, 7 a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured *it* on His head as He sat *at the table.* 8 But when His disciples saw *it,* they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? 9 For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to *the* poor."

10 But when Jesus was aware of *it,* He said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. 11 For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always. 12 For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did *it* for My burial. 13 Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her."

Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus

14 Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests 15 and said, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?" And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. 16 So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him.

Jesus Celebrates Passover with His Disciples

17 Now on the first *day of the Feast* of the Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?"

18 And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples."' "

19 So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover.

20 When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve. 21 Now as they were eating, He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me."

22 And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and each of them began to say to Him, "Lord, is it I?"

23 He answered and said, "He who dipped *his* hand with Me in the dish will betray Me. 24 The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born."

25 Then Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, "Rabbi, is it I?"

He said to him, "You have said it."

Jesus Institutes the Lord's Supper

26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed[a] and broke *it,* and gave *it* to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."

26:26 [a] M-Text reads *gave thanks for.*

27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 For this is My blood of the new[a] covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. 29 But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

30 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

31 Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written:

'I will strike the Shepherd,
And the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'[a]

32 But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."

33 Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble."

34 Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."

35 Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!"

And so said all the disciples.

The Prayer in the Garden

36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." 37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. 38 Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me."

39 He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*."

40 Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? 41 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak."

42 Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless[a] I drink it, Your will be done." 43 And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy.

44 So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. 45 Then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are *you* still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand."

26:28 [a]NU-Text omits *new.* **26:31** [a]Zechariah 13:7 **26:42** [a]NU-Text reads *if this may not pass away unless.*

We wait for the one person who will declare, "Jesus is an innocent man!" But no one does. The people He came to save have turned against Him.

We can almost forgive the crowd. Their contact with Jesus was too brief, too casual. Perhaps they didn't know better. But the disciples did. They knew better. They knew *Him* better. But did they defend Jesus? Hardly. The most bitter pill Jesus had to swallow was the unbelievable betrayal by the disciples. "All the disciples forsook Him and fled" (Matthew 26:56).

From a human point of view, Jesus' world had collapsed. No help from the people, no loyalty from His friends. But that's not how Jesus saw it. He saw something else entirely. He wasn't oblivious to the circumstances; He just wasn't limited to them. Somehow He was able to see good in the bad, the purpose in the pain, and God's presence in the problem. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you really want to follow Christ's example by doing the will of the Father? Are you ready and willing to submit your plans, thoughts, and behavior to Him? If submitting is difficult for you in a particular area, pray specifically that God will help you.

EXPLORATION

Loyalty and Obedience—Joshua 22:2–5; Psalm 119:33–37; John 21:15–17; Philippians 4:3; 1 Peter 1:14–16.

Life Lessons

Matthew 27:1–66

SITUATION
The Jewish leaders decided that Jesus must die. Because they were not allowed to execute anyone, they turned Him over to the Romans. Jesus appeared before Pontius Pilate (governor of Samaria and Judea from A.D. 26 to 36) prior to His crucifixion.

OBSERVATION
Jewish leaders refused to believe Jesus was the Messiah and insisted that Pilate execute Him. Yet Jesus died for their sins, and ours, too.

INSPIRATION
Six hours. One Friday.

Let me ask you a question: What do you do with that day in history? What do you do with its claims?

If it really happened . . . if God did commandeer His own crucifixion . . . if He did turn His back on His own Son . . . if He did storm Satan's gate, then those six hours that Friday were packed with tragic triumph. If that was God on that cross, then the hill called Skull is a granite studded with stakes to which you can anchor.

Those six hours were no normal six hours. They were the most critical hours in history. For during those six hours on that Friday, God embedded in the earth three anchor points sturdy enough to withstand any hurricane.

Anchor point #1— *My life is not futile.* This rock secures the hull of your heart. Its sole function is to give you something which you can grip when facing

Betrayal and Arrest in Gethsemane

47 And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve,
with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief
priests and elders of the people.
48 Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "Whomever I
kiss, He is the One; seize Him." 49 Immediately he went up to Jesus and
said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed Him.
50 But Jesus said to him, "Friend, why have you come?"
Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him. 51 And
suddenly, one of those *who were* with Jesus stretched out *his* hand
and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off
his ear.
52 But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who
take the sword will perish[a] by the sword. 53 Or do you think that I can-
not now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than
twelve legions of angels? 54 How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled,
that it must happen thus?"
55 In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, "Have you come out,
as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I sat daily with
you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me. 56 But all this
was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled."
Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled.

Jesus Faces the Sanhedrin

57 And those who had laid hold of Jesus led *Him* away to Caiaphas
the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.
58 But Peter followed Him at a distance to the high priest's courtyard.
And he went in and sat with the servants to see the end.
59 Now the chief priests, the elders,[a] and all the council sought false
testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, 60 but found none. Even
though many false witnesses came forward, they found none.[a] But at
last two false witnesses[b] came forward 61 and said, "This *fellow* said, 'I
am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.' "
62 And the high priest arose and said to Him, "Do You answer noth-
ing? What *is it* these men testify against You?" 63 But Jesus kept silent.
And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath
by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!"
64 Jesus said to him, "*It is as* you said. Nevertheless, I say to you,
hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the
Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."
65 Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, "He has spoken
blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now
you have heard His blasphemy! 66 What do you think?"
They answered and said, "He is deserving of death."
67 Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck *Him*
with the palms of their hands, 68 saying, "Prophesy to us, Christ! Who
is the one who struck You?"

26:52 [a]M-Text reads *die.* **26:59** [a]NU-Text omits *the elders.* **26:60** [a]NU-Text puts a comma after *but found none,* does not capitalize *Even,* and omits *they found none.* [b]NU-Text omits *false witnesses.*

Peter Denies Jesus, and Weeps Bitterly

69 Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came
to him, saying, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee."
70 But he denied it before *them* all, saying, "I do not know what you
are saying."
71 And when he had gone out to the gateway, another *girl* saw him
and said to those *who were* there, "This *fellow* also was with Jesus of
Nazareth."
72 But again he denied with an oath, "I do not know the Man!"
73 And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter,
"Surely you also are *one* of them, for your speech betrays you."
74 Then he began to curse and swear, *saying,* "I do not know the
Man!"

Immediately a rooster crowed. 75 And Peter remembered the word
of Jesus who had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny
Me three times." So he went out and wept bitterly.

Jesus Handed Over to Pontius Pilate

27 When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the
people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. 2 And when
they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to
Pontius[a] Pilate the governor.

Judas Hangs Himself

3 Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned,
was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the
chief priests and elders, 4 saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent
blood."

And they said, "What *is that* to us? You see *to it!*"

5 Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and
departed, and went and hanged himself.
6 But the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, "It is not law-
ful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood."
7 And they consulted together and bought with them the potter's field,
to bury strangers in. 8 Therefore that field has been called the Field of
Blood to this day.
9 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, say-
ing, *"And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of Him who
was priced,* whom they of the children of Israel priced, 10 *and gave
them for the potter's field, as the* Lord *directed me."*[a]

Jesus Faces Pilate

11 Now Jesus stood before the governor. And the governor asked
Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

Jesus said to him, "*It is as* you say." 12 And while He was being
accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing.
13 Then Pilate said to Him, "Do You not hear how many things they
testify against You?" 14 But He answered him not one word, so that the
governor marveled greatly.

27:2 [a]NU-Text omits *Pontius.* **27:10** [a]Jeremiah 32:6–9

the surging tides of futility and relativism. . . . Someone is in control and I have a purpose.

Anchor point #2— *My failures are not fatal.* It's not that He loves what you did, but He loves who you are. . . . The one who has the right to condemn you has provided the way to acquit you. You make mistakes. God doesn't. And He made you.

Anchor point #3— *My death is not final.* There is one more stone to which you should tie. . . . It blocked the door of a grave. It wasn't big enough, though. . . . He only went in to prove He could come out. And on the way out He took the stone with Him and turned it into an anchor point. . . . Tie it to His rock and the typhoon of the tomb becomes a spring breeze on Easter Sunday.

There they are. Three anchor points. The anchor points of the Cross. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Some people would rather see Jesus dead than controlling their lives. What room in the castle of your life (career, family, church) needs to be placed under Christ's control? Don't hesitate a day. Pray now. Give your life fully to Him.

EXPLORATION

Jesus' Death Saves Us—
John 3:14–17; 11:25, 26;
Romans 3:23–26;
1 Corinthians 1:18;
Colossians 1:20–22; Titus
3:3–7.

Taking the Place of Barabbas

15 Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing to the
multitude one prisoner whom they wished. 16 And at that time they
had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.[a] 17 Therefore, when they
had gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to
release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" 18 For he knew
that they had handed Him over because of envy.

19 While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him,
saying, "Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered
many things today in a dream because of Him."

20 But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that
they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. 21 The governor
answered and said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to
release to you?"

They said, "Barabbas!"

22 Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called
Christ?"

They all said to him, "Let Him be crucified!"

23 Then the governor said, "Why, what evil has He done?"

But they cried out all the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified!"

24 When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather *that*
a tumult was rising, he took water and washed *his* hands before the
multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person.[a]
You see *to it.*"

25 And all the people answered and said, "His blood *be* on us and
on our children."

26 Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged
Jesus, he delivered *Him* to be crucified.

The Soldiers Mock Jesus

27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium
and gathered the whole garrison around Him. 28 And they stripped
Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. 29 When they had twisted a crown
of thorns, they put *it* on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And
they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King
of the Jews!" 30 Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck
Him on the head. 31 And when they had mocked Him, they took the
robe off Him, put His *own* clothes on Him, and led Him away to be
crucified.

The King on a Cross

32 Now as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by
name. Him they compelled to bear His cross. 33 And when they had
come to a place called Golgotha, that is to say, Place of a Skull, 34 they
gave Him sour[a] wine mingled with gall to drink. But when He had
tasted *it,* He would not drink.

35 Then they crucified Him, and divided His garments, casting
lots,[a] that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet:

27:16 [a]NU-Text reads *Jesus Barabbas.* **27:24** [a]NU-Text omits *just.* **27:34** [a]NU-Text omits *sour.* **27:35** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit the rest of this verse.

Life Lessons

Matthew 28:1–20

SITUATION

When Jesus rose from the dead, He conquered sin and death. Mary Magdalene and another Mary were the first to see the empty tomb and the risen Savior.

OBSERVATION

Jesus' resurrection proved that what He had taught was correct. He used His ultimate authority when He gave the Great Commission, but showed His unlimited power by promising to be with His followers forever.

INSPIRATION

Mary and Mary knew a task had to be done—Jesus' body had to be prepared for burial. Peter didn't offer to do it. Andrew didn't volunteer. The forgiven adulteress or healed lepers are nowhere to be seen. So the two Marys decide to do it.

I wonder if halfway to the tomb they had sat down and reconsidered. What if they'd looked at each other and shrugged, "What's the use?" What if they had given up? What if one had thrown up her arms in frustration and bemoaned, "I'm tired of being the only one who cares. Let Andrew do something for a change. Let Nathanael show some leadership"?

Whether or not they were tempted to, I'm glad they didn't quit. That would have been tragic. You see, we know something they didn't. We know the Father was watching. Mary and Mary thought they were alone. They weren't. They thought their journey was unnoticed. They were wrong. God knew. He

"They divided My garments among them,
And for My clothing they cast lots."[b]

[36]Sitting down, they kept watch over Him there. [37]And they put up over His head the accusation written against Him:

THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

[38]Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left.

[39]And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads [40]and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build *it* in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

[41]Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders,[a] said, [42]"He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel,[a] let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.[b] [43]He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.' "

[44]Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing.

Jesus Dies on the Cross

[45]Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. [46]And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*[a]

[47]Some of those who stood there, when they heard *that,* said, "This Man is calling for Elijah!" [48]Immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled *it* with sour wine and put *it* on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink.

[49]The rest said, "Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him."

[50]And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.

[51]Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, [52]and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; [53]and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

[54]So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

[55]And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, [56]among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses,[a] and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

27:35 [b]Psalm 22:18 **27:41** [a]M-Text reads *with the scribes, the Pharisees, and the elders.* **27:42** [a]NU-Text reads *He is the King of Israel!* [b]NU-Text and M-Text read *we will believe in Him.* **27:46** [a]Psalm 22:1 **27:56** [a]NU-Text reads *Joseph.*

was watching them walk up the mountain. He was measuring their steps. He was smiling at their hearts and thrilled at their devotion. And He had a surprise waiting for them. . . .

Why did the angel move the stone? For whom did he roll away the rock?

For Jesus? That's what I always thought. I just assumed that the angel moved the stone so Jesus could come out. But think about it. Did the stone have to be removed in order for Jesus to exit? Did God have to have help? Was the death conqueror so weak that He couldn't push away a rock? ("Hey, could somebody out there move this rock so I can get out?")

I don't think so. The text gives the impression that Jesus was already out when the stone was moved! Nowhere do the Gospels say that the angel moved the stone for Jesus. For whom, then was the stone moved?

Listen to what the angel says: "Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matthew 28:6).

The stone was moved—not for Jesus—but for the women; not so Jesus could come out, but so the women could see in! . . .

"Go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him" (v. 7).

Mary and Mary don't have to be told twice. They turn and start running to Jerusalem. The darkness is gone. The sun is up. The Son is out. But the Son isn't finished.

One surprise still awaits them.

"And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, 'Rejoice!' So they came and held Him

by the feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me'" (vv. 9, 10).

The God of surprises strikes again. It's as if He said, "I can't wait any longer. They came this far to see me; I'm going to drop in on them."

God does that for the faithful. Just when the womb gets too old for babies, Sarai gets pregnant. Just when the failure is too great for grace, David is pardoned. And just when the road is too dark for Mary and Mary, the angel glows and the Savior shows and the two women will never be the same.

The lesson? Three words. Don't give up.

Is the trail dark? Don't sit.

Is the road long? Don't stop . . .

Is the night black? Don't quit.

God is watching. For all you know right at this moment He may be telling the angel to move the stone.

The check may be in the mail. . . .

The apology may be in the making.

The job contract may be on the desk.

Don't quit. For if you do, you may miss the answer to your prayers.

God still sends angels. And God still moves stones. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Has the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18–20 made a practical difference in your life? Perhaps a ministry with your church's outreach program needs your help. Ask God for wisdom as you call to volunteer.

Jesus Buried in Joseph's Tomb

57 Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from
Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple
of Jesus. 58 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.
Then Pilate commanded the body to be given to him. 59 When Joseph
had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60 and laid it
in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a
large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed. 61 And Mary
Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb.

Pilate Sets a Guard

62 On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief
priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, 63 saying, "Sir, we
remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three
days I will rise.' 64 Therefore command that the tomb be made secure
until the third day, lest His disciples come by night[a] and steal Him
away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last
deception will be worse than the first."

65 Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go your way, make *it* as
secure as you know how." 66 So they went and made the tomb secure,
sealing the stone and setting the guard.

He Is Risen

28 Now after the Sabbath, as the first *day* of the week began to
dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the
tomb. 2 And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the
Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone
from the door,[a] and sat on it. 3 His countenance was like lightning, and
his clothing as white as snow. 4 And the guards shook for fear of him,
and became like dead *men.*

5 But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid,
for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here; for
He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. 7 And
go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and
indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him.
Behold, I have told you."

8 So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy,
and ran to bring His disciples word.

The Women Worship the Risen Lord

9 And as they went to tell His disciples,[a] behold, Jesus met them,
saying, "Rejoice!" So they came and held Him by the feet and wor-
shiped Him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go *and* tell
My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me."

The Soldiers Are Bribed

11 Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into
the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had hap-
pened. 12 When they had assembled with the elders and consulted

27:64 [a]NU-Text omits *by night.* **28:2** [a]NU-Text omits *from the door.* **28:9** [a]NU-Text omits the first clause of this verse.

together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, 13 saying, "Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him *away* while we slept.' 14 And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure." 15 So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

The Great Commission

16 Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. 17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.

18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore[a] and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Amen.[a]

28:19 [a]M-Text omits *therefore.* **28:20** [a]NU-Text omits *Amen.*

EXPLORATION
The Great Commission—Mark 1:17; 16:15–20; Acts 1:8; 14:21, 22; Colossians 1:28, 29.

THE BOOK OF

MARK

INTRODUCTION

The drama of Mark's Gospel peaks in Caesarea Philippi.

It's a religious mecca. Every major religion can be found here. Temples dot the landscape. Priests stride the streets.

Jesus and His followers are here? Why? If Jesus preached a sermon, it's not recorded. If He performed a miracle, we don't know it. As far as we know, all He did was ask two questions.

The first, "Who do people say that I am?"

The disciples are quick to respond. They've overheard the chatter. "Some say you are John the Baptist. Others say you are Elijah, and others say you are one of the prophets."

Good answers. True answers. But wrong answers.

Jesus then turns and asks them the question. *The* question. "But who do you say I am?"

He doesn't ask, "What do you think about what I've done?" He asks, "Who do you say I am?"

He doesn't ask, "Who *did* you think I was when the crowds were great and the miracles were many?" He asks, "Who *do* you think I am? Here against the backdrop of religion. Me, a penniless itinerant surrounded by affluent temples. Who do you say I am?"

He doesn't ask, "Who do your friends think . . . Who do your parents think . . . Who do your peers think?" He poses instead a starkly personal query, "Who do you think I am?"

The disciples aren't as quick to respond. One ducks his eyes. Another shuffles his feet. A third clears his throat. But Peter lifts his head. He lifts his head and looks at the Nazarene and speaks the words heaven has longed to hear. "You are the Christ."

You have been asked some important questions in your life:

Will you marry me?

Would you be interested in a transfer?

What would you think if I told you I was pregnant?

You've been asked some important questions. But the grandest of them is an anthill compared to the Everest found in the eighth chapter of Mark.

Who do you say I am?

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Mark, also called John Mark

Date Written: c. A.D. 60

Key Themes:

- Jesus was a savior and yet a servant.
- Jesus gave His life as a sacrifice for humanity's broken relationship with God.
- Jesus performed miracles through the power of God.
- Jesus taught about the kingdom of God.

Key Verse:

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

Contents:

I. Jesus' Introduction and Preparation 1:1—2:12

II. Public Ministry 2:13—8:26

III. Teachings 8:27—10:52

IV. Trial, Death, and Resurrection 11:1—16:20

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in the Prophets:[a]

"Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You."[b]
3 *"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:*
'Prepare the way of the Lord*;*
Make His paths straight.'"[a]

4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. 5 Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. 8 I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

John Baptizes Jesus

9 It came to pass in those days *that* Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And immediately, coming up from[a] the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. 11 Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Satan Tempts Jesus

12 Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. 13 And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him.

Jesus Begins His Galilean Ministry

14 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom[a] of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Four Fishermen Called as Disciples

16 And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 17 Then Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." 18 They immediately left their nets and followed Him.

19 When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also *were* in the boat mending their nets. 20 And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him.

1:2 [a]NU-Text reads *Isaiah the prophet.* [b]Malachi 3:1 **1:3** [a]Isaiah 40:3 **1:10** [a]NU-Text reads *out of.* **1:14** [a]NU-Text omits *of the kingdom.*

Life Lessons

Mark 1:1–45

SITUATION
Persecution and martyrdom in Rome created a dangerous environment for Christians. Mark wrote this Gospel to the Christians in Rome to encourage and strengthen their faith. He recorded Christ's baptism, temptation, and the beginning of His ministry with His disciples.

OBSERVATION
Jesus came to be a human being in the normalness of human life. He showed compassion to the people around Him. He exemplified tenderness when He healed the leper by touching Him.

INSPIRATION
You awoke today to a common day. No butler drew your bath. No maid laid out your clothes. Your eggs weren't Benedict, and your orange juice wasn't fresh squeezed. But that's OK; there's nothing special about the day. It's not your birthday or Christmas; it's like every other day. A common day.

So you went to the garage and climbed into your common car. You once read that children of the queen never need to drive. You've been told of executives and sheiks who are helicoptered to their offices. As for you, a stretch limo took you to your wedding reception, but since then it's been sedans and minivans. Common cars.

Common cars that take you to your common job. You take it seriously, but you would never call it extraordinary. You're not clearing your calendar for

Jay Leno or making time to appear before Congress. You're just making sure you get your work done before the six o'clock rush turns the Loop into a parking lot.

Get caught in the evening traffic, and be ready to wait in line. The line at the freeway on-ramp. The line at the grocery or the line at the gas station. If you were the governor or had an Oscar on your mantel, you might bypass the crowds. But you aren't. You are common.

You lead a common life. Punctuated by occasional weddings, job transfers, bowling trophies, and graduations—a few highlights—but mainly the day-to-day rhythm that you share with the majority of humanity.

And, as a result, you could use a few tips. You need to know how to succeed at being common. Commonhood has its perils, you know. A face in the crowd can feel lost in the crowd. You tend to think you are unproductive, wondering if you'll leave any lasting contribution. And you can feel insignificant. Do commoners rate in heaven? Does God love common people?

God answers these questions in a most uncommon fashion. If the word *common* describes you, take heart—you're in fine company. It also describes Christ. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you feel like you're nothing special? Common? There's nothing common about the power of gentle compassion exemplified by Jesus. Who do you have trouble "touching" because they are not attractive in any way? Compassion requires more than words;

Jesus Casts Out an Unclean Spirit

21 Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the
Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. 22 And they were
astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having author-
ity, and not as the scribes.

23 Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit.
And he cried out, 24 saying, "Let *us* alone! What have we to do with
You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You
are—the Holy One of God!"

25 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!"
26 And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with
a loud voice, he came out of him. 27 Then they were all amazed, so that
they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? What new
doctrine *is* this? For with authority[a] He commands even the unclean
spirits, and they obey Him." 28 And immediately His fame spread
throughout all the region around Galilee.

Peter's Mother-in-Law Healed

29 Now as soon as they had come out of the synagogue, they
entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30 But
Simon's wife's mother lay sick with a fever, and they told Him about
her at once. 31 So He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up,
and immediately the fever left her. And she served them.

Many Healed After Sabbath Sunset

32 At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who
were sick and those who were demon-possessed. 33 And the whole city
was gathered together at the door. 34 Then He healed many who were
sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He did not
allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him.

Preaching in Galilee

35 Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight,
He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.
36 And Simon and those *who were* with Him searched for Him. 37 When
they found Him, they said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You."

38 But He said to them, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may
preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth."

39 And He was preaching in their synagogues throughout all Gali-
lee, and casting out demons.

Jesus Cleanses a Leper

40 Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him
and saying to Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean."

41 Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out *His* hand
and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." 42 As
soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was
cleansed. 43 And He strictly warned him and sent him away at once,
44 and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go your
way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those
things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

1:27 [a] NU-Text reads *What is this? A new doctrine with authority.*

45 However, he went out and began to proclaim *it* freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction.

Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic

2 And again He entered Capernaum after *some* days, and it was heard that He was in the house. 2 Immediately[a] many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive *them,* not even near the door. And He preached the word to them. 3 Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four *men.* 4 And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying.

5 When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."

6 And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 7 "Why does this *Man* speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

8 But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, '*Your* sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'? 10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic, 11 "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." 12 Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw *anything* like this!"

Matthew the Tax Collector

13 Then He went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them. 14 As He passed by, He saw Levi the *son* of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him.

15 Now it happened, as He was dining in *Levi's* house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him. 16 And when the scribes and[a] Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, "How *is it* that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?"

17 When Jesus heard *it,* He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance."[a]

Jesus Is Questioned About Fasting

18 The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. Then they came and said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"

19 And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom

2:2 [a]NU-Text omits *Immediately.* **2:16** [a]NU-Text reads *of the.* **2:17** [a]NU-Text omits *to repentance.*

compassion requires action. Look for ways to express compassion to those who are starving for a tender touch.

EXPLORATION
Jesus' Compassion—Matthew 8:3, 15; 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 17:7; 20:34; 23:37; Mark 10:13–16; Luke 7:13; 22:51; John 11:35.

Life Lessons

Mark 2:1–28

SITUATION
Jesus' power over illness and evil spirits quickly became exciting news to the people around Him. They came to Him from everywhere, looking for help.

OBSERVATION
Jesus offers hope, healing, and new life to all who come to Him in faith.

INSPIRATION
I'll never forget Steven. I met him in St. Louis. His twenty-three years had been hard on him, his arm scarred from the needle and his wrist scarred from the knife. His pride was his fist and his weakness was his girl. . . .

He wanted to change.

But his girlfriend would have none of it. Oh, she would listen politely and would be very sweet, but her heart was gripped by darkness. Any changes Steve made would be quickly muffled as she would craftily maneuver him back into his old habits. She was the last thing between him and the Kingdom. We begged him to leave her. He was trying to put new wine into an old wineskin.

He wrestled for days trying to decide what to do. Finally, he reached a

conclusion. He couldn't leave her.

The last time I saw Steve he wept . . . uncontrollably. I held big, tough, macho Steve in my arms. The prophecy of Jesus was true. By putting his new wine into an old skin, it was lost.

. . . No friendship or romance is worth your soul. Repentance means change. And change means purging your heart of anything that can't coexist with Christ.

You can't put new life into an old life-style. The inevitable tragedy occurs. The new life is lost. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you need a big change to put your life on course? Boldly put your life in Christ's hands and let God do a miracle!

EXPLORATION

Bringing People to Jesus for Miracles—Matthew 4:24; 8:16; Mark 9:17–20; Luke 5:18, 19.

Life LESSONS

Mark 3:1–35

SITUATION

Mark affirmed the spiritual authority and power present in Jesus' ministry. Jesus properly interpreted the Mosaic law. His power was greater than evil spirits. This passage also revealed Jesus' ministry to call His spiritual brothers and sisters to do the will of God.

OBSERVATION

Jesus demonstrated remarkable patience. Though many questioned His authority, He patiently refuted them. When His immediate family thought that Jesus was a lunatic, He expanded the concept

fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. 20 But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days. 21 No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse. 22 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins."

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath

23 Now it happened that He went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; and as they went His disciples began to pluck the heads of grain. 24 And the Pharisees said to Him, "Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"

25 But He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him: 26 how he went into the house of God *in the days* of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, which is not lawful to eat except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?"

27 And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. 28 Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."

Healing on the Sabbath

3 And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. 2 So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. 3 And He said to the man who had the withered hand, "Step forward." 4 Then He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they kept silent. 5 And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched *it* out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.[a] 6 Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.

A Great Multitude Follows Jesus

7 But Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea. And a great multitude from Galilee followed Him, and from Judea 8 and Jerusalem and Idumea and beyond the Jordan; and those from Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they heard how many things He was doing, came to Him. 9 So He told His disciples that a small boat should be kept ready for Him because of the multitude, lest they should crush Him. 10 For He healed many, so that as many as had afflictions pressed about Him to touch Him. 11 And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, "You are the Son of God." 12 But He sternly warned them that they should not make Him known.

3:5 [a]NU-Text omits *as whole as the other.*

The Twelve Apostles

13 And He went up on the mountain and called to *Him* those
He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. 14 Then He appointed
twelve,[a] that they might be with Him and that He might send them
out to preach, 15 and to have power to heal sicknesses and[a] to cast out
demons: 16 Simon,[a] to whom He gave the name Peter; 17 James the *son*
of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom He gave the name
Boanerges, that is, "Sons of Thunder"; 18 Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew,
Matthew, Thomas, James the *son* of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the
Cananite; 19 and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him. And they went
into a house.

A House Divided Cannot Stand

20 Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not
so much as eat bread. 21 But when His own people heard *about this,*
they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, "He is out of His mind."

22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has
Beelzebub," and, "By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons."

23 So He called them to *Himself* and said to them in parables: "How
can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that
kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that
house cannot stand. 26 And if Satan has risen up against himself, and
is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end. 27 No one can enter a
strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the
strong man. And then he will plunder his house.

The Unpardonable Sin

28 "Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men,
and whatever blasphemies they may utter; 29 but he who blasphemes
against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal
condemnation"— 30 because they said, "He has an unclean spirit."

Jesus' Mother and Brothers Send for Him

31 Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside
they sent to Him, calling Him. 32 And a multitude was sitting around
Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers[a] are
outside seeking You."

33 But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My broth-
ers?" 34 And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him,
and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! 35 For whoever does
the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."

The Parable of the Sower

4 And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude
was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat *in it* on
the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea.
2 Then He taught them many things by parables, and said to them in
His teaching:

3:14 [a]NU-Text adds *whom He also named apostles.* **3:15** [a]NU-Text omits *to heal sicknesses and.* **3:16** [a]NU-Text reads *and He appointed the twelve: Simon. . . .* **3:32** [a]NU-Text and M-Text add *and Your sisters.*

of His family to include the kinship of people who love God.

INSPIRATION

Can you still remember? Are you still in love with Him? . . . Remember Jesus. Before you remember anything, remember Him. If you forget anything, don't forget Him.

Oh, but how quickly we forget. So much happens through the years. So many changes within. So many alterations without. And, somewhere, back there, we leave Him. We don't turn away from Him . . . we just don't take Him with us. Assignments come. Promotions come. Budgets are made. Kids are born, and the Christ . . . the Christ is forgotten.

Has it been a while since you stared at the heavens in speechless amazement? Has it been a while since you realized God's divinity and your carnality?

If it has, then you need to know something. He is still there. He hasn't left. Under all those papers and books and reports and years. In the midst of all those voices and faces and memories and pictures, He is still there. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Have you forgotten Jesus? Has your love for Him slipped through time? Let Christ renew your love and let it flow freely again, as it once did.

EXPLORATION

Spiritual Family—Isaiah 63:16; John 1:12; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 2:19; Hebrews 2:11.

Family

It's like a crammed and jammed elevator. People thrust together by chance on a short journey, saying as little as possible. The only difference is you'll eventually get off the elevator and never see these folks again—not so with the difficult relative. Family reunions, Christmas, Thanksgiving, weddings, funerals—they'll be there.

Does Jesus have anything to say about dealing with difficult relatives? Is there an example of Jesus bringing peace to a painful family? Yes, there is.

His own.

It may surprise you to know that Jesus had a difficult family. It may surprise you to know that Jesus had a family at all! You may not be aware that Jesus had brothers and sisters. He did. Quoting Jesus' hometown critics, Mark wrote, "Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" (Mark 6:3).

And it may surprise you to know that His family was less than perfect. They were. If your family doesn't appreciate you, take heart, neither did Jesus'.

It's worth noting that He didn't try to control His family's behavior, nor did He let their behavior control His. He didn't demand that they agree with him. He didn't sulk when they insulted Him. He didn't make it His mission to try to please them.

When Jesus' brothers didn't share His convictions, He didn't try to force them. He recognized that His spiritual family could provide what His physical family didn't. If Jesus Himself couldn't force His family to share His convictions, what makes you think you can force yours?

I can't assure you that your family will ever give you the blessing you seek, but I know God will. Let God give you what your family doesn't. If your earthly father doesn't affirm you, then let your heavenly Father take his place.

Study Guide

Read Mark 3:20–35.

- What circumstances or situations make family gatherings stressful?
- List several reasons why family relationships can be so challenging.
- How can jealousy divide and destroy families?
- How can having different convictions than members of your family cause strife and tension?
- List several things you expect to receive from your family.
- In what ways have Christian friends become like family members to you?
- How are our expectations different with friends than with family members?
- Describe what you believe is your responsibility to your family.
- How can you look to God to fulfill the needs that your family has not met in your life?

3 "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. 4 And it happened, as
he sowed, *that* some *seed* fell by the wayside; and the birds of the
air[a] came and devoured it. 5 Some fell on stony ground, where it did
not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had
no depth of earth. 6 But when the sun was up it was scorched, and
because it had no root it withered away. 7 And some *seed* fell among
thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop.
8 But other *seed* fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang
up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some
a hundred."

9 And He said to them,[a] "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

The Purpose of Parables

10 But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked
Him about the parable. 11 And He said to them, "To you it has been
given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who
are outside, all things come in parables, 12 so that

'Seeing they may see and not perceive,
And hearing they may hear and not understand;
Lest they should turn,
And their sins be forgiven them.'"[a]

The Parable of the Sower Explained

13 And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How
then will you understand all the parables? 14 The sower sows the word.
15 And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown.
When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word
that was sown in their hearts. 16 These likewise are the ones sown on
stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it
with gladness; 17 and they have no root in themselves, and so endure
only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for
the word's sake, immediately they stumble. 18 Now these are the ones
sown among thorns; *they are* the ones who hear the word, 19 and the
cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for
other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.
20 But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the
word, accept *it,* and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some
a hundred."

Light Under a Basket

21 Also He said to them, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket
or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? 22 For there is noth-
ing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept
secret but that it should come to light. 23 If anyone has ears to hear,
let him hear."

24 Then He said to them, "Take heed what you hear. With the same
measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear,
more will be given. 25 For whoever has, to him more will be given; but

4:4 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *of the air.* **4:9** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *to them.*
4:12 [a]Isaiah 6:9, 10

Life Lessons

Mark 4:1–41

SITUATION

Jesus used parables to teach. These stories contained great truths and insights about God and man. While quoting from Isaiah, Jesus also demonstrated how He fulfilled prophecy through his stories. Mark related not only the power of Jesus in stories but also His authority over creation in His command of the weather at sea.

OBSERVATION

Even in the middle of a dangerous sea, when Jesus patiently calmed the storm, He showed the fearful disciples that He truly cared for them. Sometimes even those close to Jesus were slow to realize how much He loved them.

INSPIRATION

"God, don't you care?"

Such an honest cry, a doggedly painful cry. I've asked that one before, haven't you? It's been screamed countless times. . . .

A mother weeps over a stillborn child. A husband is torn from his wife by a tragic accident. The tears of an eight-year-old fall on a daddy's casket. And the question wails.

"God, don't you care?" "Why me?" "Why my friend?" "Why my business?" "Don't you care?"

It's the timeless question. The question asked by literally every person that has stalked this globe. There has never been a president, a worker, or a businessman who hasn't asked it. There has never been a soul who

hasn't wrestled with this aching question. Does my God care? Or is my pain God's great goof?

As the winds howled and the sea raged, the impatient and frightened disciples screamed their fear at the sleeping Jesus. "Teacher, don't you care that we are about to die?" He could have kept on sleeping. He could have told them to shut up. He could have impatiently jumped up and angrily dismissed the storm. He could have pointed out their immaturity. . . . But He didn't.

With all the patience that only one who cares can have, He answered the question. He hushed the storm so the shivering disciples wouldn't miss His response. Jesus answered once and for all the aching dilemma of man—"Where is God when I hurt?"

Listening and healing. That's where He is. He cares. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What stories of Jesus' love and ministry can you share with others? Consider the impact of stories that have taught you. Dare yourself to discover the ways God shows He cares for you in the storms of your life.

EXPLORATION

Christ as a Teacher—Matthew 4:23; 5:2; 7:29; Mark 6:34; Luke 4:15; 5:3; John 3:2; 7:14; 8:2. Divine Power—Exodus 4:21; 15:11; Joshua 3:5; Psalm 77:14; Daniel 4:3; Joel 2:30; Acts 6:8.

whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him."

The Parable of the Growing Seed

26 And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter
seed on the ground, 27 and should sleep by night and rise by day, and
the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. 28 For
the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that
the full grain in the head. 29 But when the grain ripens, immediately
he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

30 Then He said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or
with what parable shall we picture it? 31 *It is* like a mustard seed which,
when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth;
32 but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs,
and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest
under its shade."

Jesus' Use of Parables

33 And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they
were able to hear *it*. 34 But without a parable He did not speak to them.
And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.

Wind and Wave Obey Jesus

35 On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them,
"Let us cross over to the other side." 36 Now when they had left the
multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little
boats were also with Him. 37 And a great windstorm arose, and the
waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. 38 But He was
in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him,
"Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

39 Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace,
be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. 40 But He
said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How *is it* that you have no
faith?"[a] 41 And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who
can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"

A Demon-Possessed Man Healed

5 Then they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the
Gadarenes.[a] 2 And when He had come out of the boat, immedi-
ately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit,
3 who had *his* dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind
him,[a] not even with chains, 4 because he had often been bound with
shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him,
and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him.
5 And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the
tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones.

6 When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him. 7 And

4:40 [a]NU-Text reads *Have you still no faith?* **5:1** [a]NU-Text reads *Gerasenes.*
5:3 [a]NU-Text adds *anymore.*

he cried out with a loud voice and said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me."

8 For He said to him, "Come out of the man, unclean spirit!" 9 Then He asked him, "What *is* your name?"

And he answered, saying, "My name *is* Legion; for we are many." 10 Also he begged Him earnestly that He would not send them out of the country.

11 Now a large herd of swine was feeding there near the mountains. 12 So all the demons begged Him, saying, "Send us to the swine, that we may enter them." 13 And at once Jesus[a] gave them permission. Then the unclean spirits went out and entered the swine (there were about two thousand); and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and drowned in the sea.

14 So those who fed the swine fled, and they told *it* in the city and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that had happened. 15 Then they came to Jesus, and saw the one *who had been* demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. 16 And those who saw it told them how it happened to him *who had been* demon-possessed, and about the swine. 17 Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region.

18 And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him. 19 However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you." 20 And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled.

A Girl Restored to Life and a Woman Healed

21 Now when Jesus had crossed over again by boat to the other side, a great multitude gathered to Him; and He was by the sea. 22 And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet 23 and begged Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live." 24 So *Jesus* went with him, and a great multitude followed Him and thronged Him.

25 Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years, 26 and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse. 27 When she heard about Jesus, she came behind *Him* in the crowd and touched His garment. 28 For she said, "If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well."

29 Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in *her* body that she was healed of the affliction. 30 And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My clothes?"

31 But His disciples said to Him, "You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?' "

5:13 [a]NU-Text reads *And He gave.*

Life LESSONS

Mark 5:1–43

SITUATION
Jesus ministered to the most important people and the most despised people in town. His power surpassed demons, sickness, and death.

OBSERVATION
Although Jesus brought life to those who were physically dead, He spent most of His energy reaching those who were spiritually dead. He wanted to give them a new spiritual life.

INSPIRATION
The funeral had begun. The people thought the best Jesus could do was offer some kind words about Jairus's girl. Jesus had some words all right. Not about the girl, but for the girl.

"My child, stand up!" . . .

The next thing the father knew, she was eating, Jesus was laughing, and the hired mourners were sent home early. . . .

He'll do it again, you know. He's promised He would. And He's shown that He can.

"The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout" (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

The same voice that awoke the boy near Nain, that stirred the still daughter of Jairus, that awakened the corpse of Lazarus—the same voice will speak again. The earth and the sea will give up their dead. There will be no more death.

Jesus made sure of that. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What could you do to show love and acceptance for a homeless beggar in rags?

Healing

A chronic menstrual disorder. A perpetual issue of blood. Such a condition would be difficult for any woman of any era. But for a Jewess, nothing could be worse. No part of her life was left unaffected.

Sexually . . . she could not touch her husband.

Maternally . . . she could not bear children. Domestically…anything she touched was considered unclean. No washing dishes. No sweeping floors.

Spiritually . . . she was not allowed to enter the temple.

She was physically exhausted and socially ostracized.

She had sought help "under the care of many doctors" . . .

She was a bruised reed. She awoke daily in a body that no one wanted. She is down to her last prayer. And on the day we encounter her, she's about to pray it.

By the time she gets to Jesus, He is surrounded by people. He's on His way to help the daughter of Jairus, the most important man in the community. What are the odds that He will interrupt an urgent mission with a high official to help the likes of her? Very few. But what are the odds that she will survive if she doesn't take a chance? Fewer still. So she takes a chance.

"If I can just touch His clothes," she thinks, "I will be healed."

Risky decision. To touch Him, she will have to touch the people. If one of them recognizes her. . . . But what choice does she have? She has no money, no clout, no friends, no solutions. All she has is a crazy hunch that Jesus can help and a high hope that He will. . . .

There was no guarantee, of course. She hoped He'd respond…she longed for it . . . but she didn't know if He would. All she knew was that He was good. That's faith.

Faith is not the belief that God will do what you want. Faith is the belief that God will do what is right.

"Blessed are the dirt-poor, nothing-to-give, trapped-in-a-corner, destitute, diseased," Jesus said, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:6, my translation).

God's economy is upside down (or rightside up and ours is upside down!) God says that the more hopeless your circumstance, the more likely your salvation. The greater your cares, the more genuine your prayers. The darker the room, the greater the need for light.

A healthy lady never would have appreciated the power of a touch of the hem of His robe. But this woman was sick…and when her dilemma met His dedication, a miracle occurred.

Her part in the healing was very small. All she did was extend her arm through the crowd.

"If only I can touch Him.". . .

Healing begins when we do something. Healing begins when we reach out. Healing starts when we take a step.

Study Guide

Read Mark 5:21–42.

- Think of a time when you took a step of faith. What did you do and how did God respond?
- Why do you suppose Jesus stopped to point out this woman?
- Many people touched Jesus as He passed by. Why did Jesus' power affect this woman and no others?
- What does this woman's story reveal about faith?
- In what ways can you identify with this woman?
- What makes it difficult to step out in faith?
- In what area of your life do you need to experience Christ's healing power?
- What practical steps of faith do you need to take?

32 And He looked around to see her who had done this thing. 33 But
the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to
her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth.
34 And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in
peace, and be healed of your affliction."
35 While He was still speaking, *some* came from the ruler of the
synagogue's *house* who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the
Teacher any further?"
36 As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, He said to the
ruler of the synagogue, "Do not be afraid; only believe." 37 And He per-
mitted no one to follow Him except Peter, James, and John the brother
of James. 38 Then He came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue,
and saw a tumult and those who wept and wailed loudly. 39 When He
came in, He said to them, "Why make this commotion and weep? The
child is not dead, but sleeping."
40 And they ridiculed Him. But when He had put them all outside,
He took the father and the mother of the child, and those *who were*
with Him, and entered where the child was lying. 41 Then He took the
child by the hand, and said to her, "Talitha, cumi," which is trans-
lated, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." 42 Immediately the girl arose and
walked, for she was twelve years *of age.* And they were overcome with
great amazement. 43 But He commanded them strictly that no one
should know it, and said that *something* should be given her to eat.

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth

6 Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and
His disciples followed Him. 2 And when the Sabbath had come,
He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing *Him* were
astonished, saying, "Where *did* this Man *get* these things? And what
wisdom *is* this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are per-
formed by His hands! 3 Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and
brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here
with us?" So they were offended at Him.
4 But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except
in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house."
5 Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His
hands on a few sick people and healed *them.* 6 And He marveled
because of their unbelief. Then He went about the villages in a circuit,
teaching.

Sending Out the Twelve

7 And He called the twelve to *Himself,* and began to send them
out two *by* two, and gave them power over unclean spirits. 8 He com-
manded them to take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bag,
no bread, no copper in *their* money belts— 9 but to wear sandals, and
not to put on two tunics.
10 Also He said to them, "In whatever place you enter a house, stay
there till you depart from that place. 11 And whoever[a] will not receive
you nor hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust
under your feet as a testimony against them.[b] Assuredly, I say to you,

6:11 [a]NU-Text reads *whatever place.* [b]NU-Text omits the rest of this verse.

Could you share God's love with an alcoholic, a street gang member, an AIDS victim? These people are worthy of God's love and your love, too. Join with other Christians this week in an effort to share God's Word with people you would not normally approach.

EXPLORATION
Impartiality—Ruth 1:16; Luke 5:13; Galatians 3:28.

Life LESSONS

Mark 6:1—7:23

SITUATION
This record of a particularly busy day is found in all four Gospels. Particularly significant is the feeding of the five thousand.

OBSERVATION
Jesus experienced stressful, chaotic days like ours. He knows what the pace of our life is like.

INSPIRATION
A day in the Life of Christ. . . .

[A] day in which Jesus experiences more stress than he will any other day of his life—aside from his crucifixion. Before the morning becomes evening, he has reason to weep . . . run . . . shout . . . curse . . . praise . . . doubt.

From calm to chaos. From peace to perplexity. Within moments his world is turned upside down. . . .

The morning has been a jungle trail of the unexpected. First Jesus grieves over the death of a dear friend and relative. Then his life is threatened. Next he celebrates the triumphant return of his followers. Then he is nearly suffocated by a brouhaha of humanity.

Bereavement . . . jeopardy . . . jubilation . . . bedlam. . . .

Ponder this the next time your world goes from calm to chaos. . . .

Jesus knows how you feel.

A friend of mine was recently trying to teach his six-year-old son how to shoot a basket. The boy would take the basketball and push it as hard as he could toward the goal, but it always fell short. The father would then take the ball and toss it toward the basket, saying something like, "Just do it like this, son. It's easy."

Then the boy would try, and miss, again. My friend would then take the ball and make another basket, encouraging his son to push the ball a bit harder.

After several minutes and many misses, the boy responded to his father's encouragement by saying, "Yeah, but it's easy for you up there. You don't know how hard it is from down here."

You and I can never say that about God. Of the many messages Jesus taught us that day about stress, the first one is this: "God knows how you feel." (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Follow Jesus' example in handling stress. If today starts to get hectic, take five minutes to be alone with God. If your work gets interrupted, ask God for patience to deal with the interruption and for endurance to finish the task.

EXPLORATION

Stress—Isaiah 26:3; Matthew 11:28; Luke 10:38–42; Philippians 4:6.

it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!"

12 So they went out and preached that *people* should repent. 13 And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed *them.*

John the Baptist Beheaded

14 Now King Herod heard *of Him,* for His name had become well known. And he said, "John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him."

15 Others said, "It is Elijah."

And others said, "It is the Prophet, or[a] like one of the prophets."

16 But when Herod heard, he said, "This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!" 17 For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her. 18 Because John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

19 Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not; 20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he *was* a just and holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.

21 Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief *men* of Galilee. 22 And when Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give *it* to you." 23 He also swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom."

24 So she went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask?"

And she said, "The head of John the Baptist!"

25 Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

26 And the king was exceedingly sorry; *yet,* because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her. 27 Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison, 28 brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother. 29 When his disciples heard *of it,* they came and took away his corpse and laid it in a tomb.

Feeding the Five Thousand

30 Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. 31 And He said to them, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. 32 So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves.

33 But the multitudes[a] saw them departing, and many knew Him and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them

6:15 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *or.* **6:33** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *they.*

and came together to Him. 34 And Jesus, when
He came out, saw a great multitude and was
moved with compassion for them, because
they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So
He began to teach them many things. 35 When
the day was now far spent, His disciples came
to Him and said, "This is a deserted place, and
already the hour *is* late. 36 Send them away,
that they may go into the surrounding country
and villages and buy themselves bread;[a] for
they have nothing to eat."

37 But He answered and said to them, "You
give them something to eat."

And they said to Him, "Shall we go and buy
two hundred denarii worth of bread and give
them *something* to eat?"

38 But He said to them, "How many loaves do
you have? Go and see."

And when they found out they said, "Five,
and two fish."

39 Then He commanded them to make
them all sit down in groups on the green
grass. 40 So they sat down in ranks, in hun-
dreds and in fifties. 41 And when He had taken
the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up
to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and
gave *them* to His disciples to set before them;
and the two fish He divided among *them* all.
42 So they all ate and were filled. 43 And they
took up twelve baskets full of fragments and
of the fish. 44 Now those who had eaten the
loaves were about[a] five thousand men.

Jesus Walks on the Sea

45 Immediately He made His disciples get
into the boat and go before Him to the other
side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude
away. 46 And when He had sent them away,
He departed to the mountain to pray. 47 Now
when evening came, the boat was in the
middle of the sea; and He *was* alone on the
land. 48 Then He saw them straining at rowing,
for the wind was against them. Now about the
fourth watch of the night He came to them,
walking on the sea, and would have passed
them by. 49 And when they saw Him walking
on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and
cried out; 50 for they all saw Him and were
troubled. But immediately He talked with
them and said to them, "Be of good cheer!
It is I; do not be afraid." 51 Then He went up
into the boat to them, and the wind ceased.
And they were greatly amazed in themselves
beyond measure, and marveled. 52 For they
had not understood about the loaves, because
their heart was hardened.

Many Touch Him and Are Made Well

53 When they had crossed over, they came
to the land of Gennesaret and anchored there.
54 And when they came out of the boat, imme-
diately the people recognized Him, 55 ran
through that whole surrounding region, and
began to carry about on beds those who were
sick to wherever they heard He was. 56 Wher-
ever He entered, into villages, cities, or the
country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces,
and begged Him that they might just touch
the hem of His garment. And as many as
touched Him were made well.

Defilement Comes from Within

7 Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes
came together to Him, having come from
Jerusalem. 2 Now when[a] they saw some of His
disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with
unwashed hands, they found fault. 3 For the
Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless
they wash *their* hands in a special way, hold-
ing the tradition of the elders. 4 *When they
come* from the marketplace, they do not eat
unless they wash. And there are many other
things which they have received and hold, *like*
the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels,
and couches.

5 Then the Pharisees and scribes asked
Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk accord-
ing to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread
with unwashed hands?"

6 He answered and said to them, "Well did
Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is
written:

'This people honors Me with their lips,
But their heart is far from Me.
7 *And in vain they worship Me,*
Teaching as doctrines the
commandments of men.'[a]

6:36 [a]NU-Text reads *something to eat* and omits the rest of this verse. **6:44** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *about.*
7:2 [a]NU-Text omits *when* and *they found fault.* **7:7** [a]Isaiah 29:13

Jesus Prayed

"He departed to the mountain to pray."

Jesus faced an impossible task. More than five thousand people were ready to fight a battle He had not come to fight. How could He show them that He didn't come to be a king, but to be a sacrifice? How could He take their eyes off an earthly kingdom so that they would see the spiritual one? How could they see the eternal when they only had eyes for the temporal?

What Jesus dreamed of doing and what He seemed about to do were separated by an impossible gulf. So Jesus prayed.

He prayed for the impossible to happen.

Maybe He didn't ask for anything. Maybe He just stood quietly in the presence of the Presence and basked in the majesty.

Maybe He lifted His head out of the confusion of earth long enough to hear the solution of heaven. Perhaps He was reminded that hard hearts don't faze the Father. That problem people don't perturb the Eternal One.

We don't know what He did or what He said. But we do know the result. The hill became a steppingstone; the storm became a path, and the disciples saw Jesus as they had never seen Him before.

During the storm, Jesus prayed. The sky darkened. The winds howled. Yet He prayed. The people grumbled. The disciples doubted. Yet He prayed. When forced to choose between the muscles of men and the mountain of prayer, He prayed.

There are crevasses in your life that you cannot cross alone. There are hearts in your world that you cannot change without help. There are mountains that you cannot climb until you climb His mountain.

Climb it. You will be amazed.

Study Guide

Mark 6:45–52

- Describe a time when you or someone you know needed a miracle.
- What keeps us from choosing prayer when we face the impossible?
- Why do you think prayer seems like such a passive activity at times?
- In what ways does prayer make such a difference in the impossible situations we face?
- How do you think your life would be different if you prayed more frequently and more fervently?
- How do you know if a prayer has been effective?
- Describe the most amazing answer to prayer you have ever witnessed or heard about.
- Why do you think prayer is the key to the impossible?
- What impossible situation do you need to turn over to God in prayer?

8 For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition
of men[a]—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such
things you do."
9 He said to them, "*All too* well you reject the commandment of
God, that you may keep your tradition. 10 For Moses said, *'Honor
your father and your mother';*[a] and, *'He who curses father or mother,
let him be put to death.'*[b] 11 But you say, 'If a man says to his father
or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me *is*
Corban"—' (that is, a gift *to God*), 12 then you no longer let him do
anything for his father or his mother, 13 making the word of God of
no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And
many such things you do."
14 When He had called all the multitude to *Himself,* He said to
them, "Hear Me, everyone, and understand: 15 There is nothing that
enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which
come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. 16 If anyone
has ears to hear, let him hear!"[a]
17 When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His dis-
ciples asked Him concerning the parable. 18 So He said to them,
"Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that
whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, 19 because
it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, *thus*
purifying all foods?"[a] 20 And He said, "What comes out of a man, that
defiles a man. 21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil
thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22 thefts, covetousness,
wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolish-
ness. 23 All these evil things come from within and defile a man."

A Gentile Shows Her Faith

24 From there He arose and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon.[a]
And He entered a house and wanted no one to know *it,* but He could
not be hidden. 25 For a woman whose young daughter had an unclean
spirit heard about Him, and she came and fell at His feet. 26 The
woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, and she kept asking
Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27 But Jesus said to her,
"Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's
bread and throw *it* to the little dogs."
28 And she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little
dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs."
29 Then He said to her, "For this saying go your way; the demon has
gone out of your daughter."
30 And when she had come to her house, she found the demon
gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed.

Jesus Heals a Deaf-Mute

31 Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came
through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee.

7:8 [a]NU-Text omits the rest of this verse. **7:10** [a]Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16 [b]Exodus 21:17 **7:16** [a]NU-Text omits this verse. **7:19** [a]NU-Text ends quotation with *eliminated,* setting off the final clause as Mark's comment that Jesus has declared all foods clean. **7:24** [a]NU-Text omits *and Sidon.*

Life Lessons

Mark 7:24—8:38

SITUATION
The Pharisees doubted Jesus' divine nature. They asked Him for a sign from heaven that would proclaim Him as Messiah.

OBSERVATION
To see God's presence at work, we must look at the power behind the miracle first—God.

INSPIRATION
His lunch wasn't much. In fact, it wasn't anything compared to what was needed for more than five thousand people.

He probably wrestled with the silliness of it all. What was one lunch for so many.

How far could one lunch go?

I think that's why he didn't give the lunch to the crowd. Instead he gave it to Jesus. Something told him that if he would plant the seed, God would grant the crop.

So he did.

He summoned his courage, got up off the grass, and walked into the circle of grownups. He must have been nervous. No one likes to appear silly.

Someone probably snickered at him.

If they didn't snicker, they shook their heads. "The little fellow doesn't know any better."

If they didn't shake their heads, they rolled their eyes. "Here we have a hunger crisis, and this little boy thinks that a sack lunch will solve it."

But it wasn't the men's heads or eyes that the boy saw; he saw only Jesus. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What do you believe about miracles? Look for the amazing things that have happened in your life: at work, at home, and with friends. They are all God's blessings. Help meet the needs of another, and be a part of God's miracle in that life.

EXPLORATION
Miracles—Matthew 8:23–27; Mark 3:20–30; Luke 18:35–43; John 2:1–11; 4:43–54; 11:1–44.

32 Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him.
33 And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue. 34 Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened."
35 Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly. 36 Then He commanded them that they should tell no one; but the more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed *it.* 37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

Feeding the Four Thousand

8 In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples *to Him* and said to them, 2 "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. 3 And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar."
4 Then His disciples answered Him, "How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?"
5 He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?"
And they said, "Seven."
6 So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke *them* and gave *them* to His disciples to set before *them;* and they set *them* before the multitude. 7 They also had a few small fish; and having blessed them, He said to set them also before *them.* 8 So they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments. 9 Now those who had eaten were about four thousand. And He sent them away,
10 immediately got into the boat with His disciples, and came to the region of Dalmanutha.

The Pharisees Seek a Sign

11 Then the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, testing Him. 12 But He sighed deeply in His spirit, and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation."

Beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees and Herod

13 And He left them, and getting into the boat again, departed to the other side. 14 Now the disciples[a] had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat. 15 Then He charged them, saying, "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."
16 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "*It is* because we have no bread."
17 But Jesus, being aware of *it,* said to them, "Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still[a] hardened? 18 Having eyes, do you

8:14 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *they.* **8:17** [a]NU-Text omits *still.*

not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? 19 When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?"

They said to Him, "Twelve."

20 "Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up?"

And they said, "Seven."

21 So He said to them, "How *is it* you do not understand?"

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: Our Hope and Comfort

Jesus is presented with a man who is deaf and has a speech impediment. Perhaps he stammered. Maybe he spoke with a lisp. Perhaps, because of his deafness, he never learned to articulate words properly.

Jesus, refusing to exploit the situation, took the man aside. He looked him in the face. Knowing it would be useless to talk, He explained what He was about to do through gestures. He spat and touched the man's tongue, telling him that whatever restricted his speech was about to be removed. He touched his ears. They, for the first time, were about to hear.

But before the man said a word or heard a sound, Jesus did something I never would have anticipated.

He sighed. . . .

No doubt you've done your share of sighing.

If you have teenagers, you've probably sighed. If you've tried to resist temptation, you've probably sighed. If you've had your motives questioned or your best acts of love rejected, you have been forced to take a deep breath and let escape a painful sigh. . . .

All these sighs come from the same anxiety; a recognition of pain that was never intended, or of hope deferred.

Man was not created to be separated from his creator; hence he sighs, longing for home. The creation was never intended to be inhabited by evil; hence she sighs, yearning for the Garden. . . .

And when Jesus looked into the eyes of Satan's victim, the only appropriate thing to do was sigh. "It was never intended to be this way," the sigh said. "Your ears weren't made to be deaf, your tongue wasn't made to stumble." The imbalance of it all caused the Master to languish.

So, I found a place for the word *sigh*. You might think it strange, but I placed it beside the word *comfort,* for in an indirect way, God's pain is our comfort.

And in the agony of Jesus lies our hope. Had He not sighed, had He not felt the burden for what was not intended, we would be in a pitiful condition. Had He simply chalked it all up to the inevitable or washed His hands of the whole stinking mess, what hope would we have?

But He didn't. That holy sigh assures us that God still groans for His people. He groans for the day when all sighs will cease, when what was intended to be will be. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1378.

Life Lessons

Mark 9:1–50

SITUATION
Jesus explained what God's kingdom was about. The disciples could not fathom God's eternal plan. Jesus brought Peter, James, and John up on a mountaintop. There Jesus' true glory was revealed, and Elijah and Moses appeared to the disciples as God spoke to them.

OBSERVATION
Even the majestic Son of God sympathizes with our most desperate cries.

INSPIRATION
Some of you pray like a Concorde jet—smooth, sleek, high, and mighty. Your words reverberate in the clouds and send sonic booms throughout the heavens. If you pray like a Concorde, I salute you. If you don't, I understand.

Maybe you are like me, more a crop duster than a Concorde. You aren't flashy, you fly low, you seem to cover the same ground a lot, and some mornings it's tough to get the old engine cranked up.

Most of us are like that. Most of our prayer lives could use a tune-up.

Some prayer lives lack consistency. They're either a desert or an oasis. . . . We go days or weeks without consistent prayer, but then something happens—we hear a sermon, read a book, experience a tragedy—something leads us to pray, so we dive in. We submerge ourselves in prayer and leave refreshed and renewed. But as the journey resumes, our prayers don't.

Others of us need sincerity. Our prayers are a

A Blind Man Healed at Bethsaida

22 Then He came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to
Him, and begged Him to touch him. 23 So He took the blind man by
the hand and led him out of the town. And when He had spit on his
eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything.
24 And he looked up and said, "I see men like trees, walking."
25 Then He put *His* hands on his eyes again and made him look up.
And he was restored and saw everyone clearly. 26 Then He sent him
away to his house, saying, "Neither go into the town, nor tell anyone
in the town."[a]

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ

27 Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea
Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them,
"Who do men say that I am?"
28 So they answered, "John the Baptist; but some *say,* Elijah; and
others, one of the prophets."
29 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"
Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ."
30 Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one about
Him.

Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection

31 And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer
many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and
scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 He spoke this
word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.
33 But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He
rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful
of the things of God, but the things of men."

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him

34 When He had called the people to *Himself,* with His disciples
also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him
deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 35 For whoever
desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My
sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what will it profit a man if he
gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? 37 Or what will a man
give in exchange for his soul? 38 For whoever is ashamed of Me and
My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of
Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father
with the holy angels."

9 And He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that there are some
standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of
God present with power."

Jesus Transfigured on the Mount

2 Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them
up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured
before them. 3 His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like

8:26 [a]NU-Text reads *"Do not even go into the town."*

Power

The pole of power is greasy.

The Roman emperor Charlemagne knew that. An interesting story surrounds the burial of this famous king. Legend has it that he asked to be entombed sitting upright in his throne. He asked that his crown be placed on his head and his scepter in his hand. He requested that the royal cape be draped around his shoulders and an open book be placed in his lap.

That was A.D. 814. Nearly two hundred years later, Emperor Othello determined to see if the burial request had been carried out. He allegedly sent a team of men to open the tomb and make a report. They found the body just as Charlemagne had requested. Only now, nearly two centuries later, the scene was gruesome. The crown was tilted, the mantle moth-eaten, the body disfigured. But open on the skeletal thighs was the book Charlemagne had requested—the Bible. One bony finger pointed to Matthew 16:26, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?"

You can answer that one.

Study Guide

Read Mark 8:34–38.

- What is the cost of true discipleship?
- What is the essence of true power?
- How do some people react when they learn that being a true follower of Jesus is costly?
- What does it mean to lose your life for Christ's sake?
- What does it mean to gain the whole world?
- What power would you have to give up in order to deny yourself and take up your cross?
- What is the difference between denying self and self-denial?
- What do you need to change to be a true disciple?

bit hollow, memorized, and rigid. More liturgy than life. And though they are daily, they are dull.

Still others lack, well, honesty. We honestly wonder if prayer makes a difference. Why on earth would God in heaven want to talk to me? . . .

If you struggle with prayer, I've got just the guy for you. Don't worry, he's not a monastic saint. He's not a calloused-kneed apostle. Nor is he a prophet whose middle name is meditation. He's not a too-holy-to-be-you reminder of how far you need to go in prayer. He's just the opposite. A fellow crop duster. A parent with a sick son in need of a miracle. The father's prayer isn't much, but the answer is, and the result reminds us: The power is not in the prayer; it's in the one who hears it.

He prayed out of desperation. His son, his only son, was demon-possessed. Not only was he a deaf mute and an epileptic, he was also possessed by an evil spirit. Ever since the boy was young, the demon had thrown him into fires and water.

Imagine the pain of the father. Other dads could watch their children grow and mature; he could only watch his suffer. While others were teaching their sons an occupation, he was just trying to keep his son alive. . . .

He was desperate and tired, and his prayer reflects both.

"If you can do anything for him, please have pity on us and help us."

Listen to that prayer. Does it sound courageous? Confident? Strong? Hardly.

One word would have made a lot of difference.

snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. 4And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. 5Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"— 6because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid.

7And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" 8Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves.

9Now as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, till the Son of Man had risen from the dead. 10So they kept this word to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant.

11And they asked Him, saying, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

12Then He answered and told them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and restores all things. And how is it written concerning the Son of Man, that He must suffer many things and be treated with contempt? 13But I say to you that Elijah has also come, and they did to him whatever they wished, as it is written of him."

A Boy Is Healed

14And when He came to the disciples, He saw a great multitude around them, and scribes disputing with them. 15Immediately, when they saw Him, all the people were greatly amazed, and running to *Him,* greeted Him. 16And He asked the scribes, "What are you discussing with them?"

17Then one of the crowd answered and said, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. 18And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not."

19He answered him and said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me." 20Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth.

21So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?"

And he said, "From childhood. 22And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

23Jesus said to him, "If you can believe,[a] all things *are* possible to him who believes."

24Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"

25When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!" 26Then *the*

9:23 [a]NU-Text reads *"'If You can!' All things. . . ."*

spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, "He is dead." 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

28 And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?"

29 So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."[a]

Jesus Again Predicts His Death and Resurrection

30 Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know *it*. 31 For He taught His disciples and said to them, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day." 32 But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him.

Who Is the Greatest?

33 Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?" 34 But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who *would be the* greatest. 35 And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." 36 Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me."

Jesus Forbids Sectarianism

38 Now John answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us."

39 But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. 40 For he who is not against us is on our[a] side. 41 For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.

Jesus Warns of Offenses

42 "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. 43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched— 44 where

'Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched.'[a]

9:29 [a]NU-Text omits *and fasting.* **9:40** [a]M-Text reads *against you is on your side.*
9:44 [a]NU-Text omits this verse.

Instead of *if,* what if he'd said *since?* " *Since* You can do anything for him, please have pity on us and help us."

But that's not what he said. He said *if.* The Greek is even more emphatic. The tense implies doubt. It's as if the man were saying, "This one's probably out of Your league, but if You can. . . ."

A classic crop-duster appeal. More meek than might. More timid than towering. More like a crippled lamb coming to a shepherd than a proud lion roaring in the jungle. If his prayer sounds like yours, then don't be discouraged, for that's where prayer begins.

It begins as a yearning. An honest appeal. Ordinary people staring at Mount Everest. No pretense. No boasting. No posturing. Just prayer. Feeble prayer, but prayer nonetheless. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What is your most desperate prayer? Does a rebellious child cause you grief? Is a parent dying without Christ? Are you frantic about tomorrow's bills? Tell God about your grief and anxiety.

EXPLORATION

Accepting Christ—Luke 2:9–11; 19:6–20; John 3:1–20.

Life Lessons

Mark 10:1–52

SITUATION
To serve others rather than to be served best exemplified Jesus' message to humanity. People, then as now, often hoped that others would meet their needs. They committed to ideals such as marriage and trust in God as long as these seemed convenient. Giving up personal freedoms, wealth, and status to serve others was too great a price for many people.

OBSERVATION
Jesus urges us to discard material security to follow Him. By sacrificing the treasures of this world, we gain the treasures of heaven.

INSPIRATION
Jesus gets to the point. "If you want to be perfect, then go sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven."

The statement leaves the young man distraught and the disciples bewildered.

Their question could be ours: "Who then can be saved?"

Jesus' answer shell-shocks the listeners, "With man this is impossible. . . . "

Impossible.

He doesn't say improbable. He doesn't say unlikely. He doesn't even say it will be tough. He says it is "impossible." . . .

Does that strike you as cold? All your life you've been rewarded according to your performance. You get grades according to your study. You get commendations according to your success. You get

45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to
enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into
the fire that shall never be quenched— 46 where

'Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched.'[a]

47 And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to
enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes,
to be cast into hell fire— 48 where

'Their worm does not die
And the fire is not quenched.'[a]

Tasteless Salt Is Worthless

49 "For everyone will be seasoned with fire,[a] and every sacrifice will
be seasoned with salt. 50 Salt *is* good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how
will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one
another."

Marriage and Divorce

10 Then He arose from there and came to the region of Judea by
the other side of the Jordan. And multitudes gathered to Him
again, and as He was accustomed, He taught them again.

2 The Pharisees came and asked Him, "Is it lawful for a man to
divorce *his* wife?" testing Him.

3 And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command
you?"

4 They said, "Moses permitted *a man* to write a certificate of
divorce, and to dismiss *her.*"

5 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Because of the hardness of
your heart he wrote you this precept. 6 But from the beginning of the
creation, God *'made them male and female.'*[a] 7 *'For this reason a man*
shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, 8 *and the*
two shall become one flesh';[a] so then they are no longer two, but one
flesh. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

10 In the house His disciples also asked Him again about the same
matter. 11 So He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries
another commits adultery against her. 12 And if a woman divorces her
husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

Jesus Blesses Little Children

13 Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch
them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought *them.* 14 But when
Jesus saw *it,* He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little
children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the king-
dom of God. 15 Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the

9:46 [a]NU-Text omits the last clause of verse 45 and all of verse 46. **9:48** [a]Isaiah 66:24 **9:49** [a]NU-Text omits the rest of this verse. **10:6** [a]Genesis 1:27; 5:2 **10:8** [a]Genesis 2:24

kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." [16]And He took them up in His arms, laid *His* hands on them, and blessed them.

Jesus Counsels the Rich Young Ruler

[17]Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"

[18]So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is,* God. [19]You know the commandments: *'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,'* 'Do not defraud,' *'Honor your father and your mother.'"*[a]

[20]And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth."

[21]Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."

[22]But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

With God All Things Are Possible

[23]Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" [24]And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches[a] to enter the kingdom of God! [25]It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

[26]And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?"

[27]But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men *it is* impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."

[28]Then Peter began to say to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You."

[29]So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife[a] or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, [30]who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life. [31]But many *who are* first will be last, and the last first."

Jesus a Third Time Predicts His Death and Resurrection

[32]Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed. And as they followed they were afraid. Then He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him: [33]"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and

10:19 [a]Exodus 20:12–16; Deuteronomy 5:16–20 **10:24** [a]NU-Text omits *for those who trust in riches.* **10:29** [a]NU-Text omits *or wife.*

money in response to your work.

That's why the rich young ruler thought heaven was just a payment away. It only made sense. You work hard, you pay your dues, and "zap"—your account is credited as paid in full. Jesus says, "No way." What you want costs far more than what you can pay. You don't need a system, you need a Savior. You don't need a resume, you need a Redeemer. For "what is impossible with men is possible with God."

. . . You see, it wasn't the money that hindered the rich man; it was the self-sufficiency. It wasn't the possessions; it was the pomp. It wasn't the big bucks; it was the big head. . . .

Astounding. These people are standing before the throne of God and bragging about themselves. The great trumpet has sounded, and they are still tooting their own horns. Rather than sing His praises, they sing their own. Rather than worship God, they read their resumes. When they should be speechless, they speak. In the very aura of the King they boast of self. What is worse—their arrogance or their blindness?

. . . God does not save us because of what we've done. . . .

And only a great God does for His children what they can't do for themselves.

That is the message of Paul: "What the law could not do . . . God did" (Romans 8:3).

And that is the message of the first beatitude.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . " (Matthew 5:3).

The jewel of joy is given to the impoverished spirits, not the affluent. God's delight is received upon

surrender, not awarded upon conquest. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Don't let money stand between you and God. You can't buy a ticket into heaven, you only have to ask in faith. Think about the rich value of faith throughout the day.

EXPLORATION
Selfishness—Proverbs 28:25; Matthew 19:21, 22; Mark 8:34–37; Luke 12:15–21; 16:19–31; Philippians 2:3.

[Jesus] comes as a dove. He comes bearing fruit from a distant land, from our future home. He comes with a leaf of hope.

—Max Lucado (A Love Worth Giving)

deliver Him to the Gentiles; 34 and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again."

Greatness Is Serving

35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask."

36 And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

37 They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory."

38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

39 They said to Him, "We are able."

So Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; 40 but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but *it is for those* for whom it is prepared."

41 And when the ten heard *it,* they began to be greatly displeased with James and John. 42 But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. 44 And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Jesus Heals Blind Bartimaeus

46 Now they came to Jericho. As He went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the road begging. 47 And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

48 Then many warned him to be quiet; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

49 So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called.

Then they called the blind man, saying to him, "Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you."

50 And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus.

51 So Jesus answered and said to him, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

The blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, that I may receive my sight."

52 Then Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road.

The Triumphal Entry

11 Now when they drew near Jerusalem, to Bethphage[a] and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples;

11:1 [a]M-Text reads *Bethsphage.*

2 and He said to them, "Go into the village opposite you; and as soon
as you have entered it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has
sat. Loose it and bring *it.* 3 And if anyone says to you, 'Why are you
doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it,' and immediately he will
send it here."

4 So they went their way, and found the[a] colt tied by the door out-
side on the street, and they loosed it. 5 But some of those who stood
there said to them, "What are you doing, loosing the colt?"

6 And they spoke to them just as Jesus had commanded. So they let
them go. 7 Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes
on it, and He sat on it. 8 And many spread their clothes on the road,
and others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread *them*
on the road. 9 Then those who went before and those who followed
cried out, saying:

"Hosanna!
'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'[a]
10 Blessed *is* the kingdom of our father David
That comes in the name of the Lord![a]
Hosanna in the highest!"

11 And Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple. So when He had
looked around at all things, as the hour was already late, He went out
to Bethany with the twelve.

The Fig Tree Withered

12 Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He
was hungry. 13 And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went
to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it,
He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14 In
response Jesus said to it, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again."

And His disciples heard *it.*

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

15 So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and
began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and
overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those
who sold doves. 16 And He would not allow anyone to carry wares
through the temple. 17 Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not writ-
ten, *'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'*?[a] But
you have made it a *'den of thieves.'"*[b]

18 And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they
might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were
astonished at His teaching. 19 When evening had come, He went out
of the city.

The Lesson of the Withered Fig Tree

20 Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried
up from the roots. 21 And Peter, remembering, said to Him, "Rabbi,
look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away."

11:4 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *a.* **11:9** [a]Psalm 118:26 **11:10** [a]NU-Text omits *in the name of the Lord.* **11:17** [a]Isaiah 56:7 [b]Jeremiah 7:11

Life Lessons

Mark 11:1–33

SITUATION

Jesus and His disciples made a pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem during the Passover. The people heralded Jesus, calling Him the Messiah. He threw merchants and money changers out of the temple for profiting from people's worship. During this week, He traveled between Bethany and Jerusalem frequently.

OBSERVATION

Have faith in God. He always fulfills His word. Jesus promised that through faith His disciples would accomplish great things.

INSPIRATION

The story is told about the time Napoleon's steed got away from him. An alert private jumped on his own horse and chased down the general's horse. When he presented the reins of the animal to Napoleon, the ruler took them, smiled at his willing private, and said, "Thank you, Captain."

The soldier's eyes widened at what he had heard. He then straightened. Saluted. And snapped, "Thank you, sir!"

He immediately went to the barracks. Got his bags. Moved into the officers' quarters. Took his uniform to the quartermaster and exchanged if for that of a captain. By the general's word, he had become a private-turned-commissioned officer. He didn't argue. He didn't shrug. He didn't doubt. He knew that the one who had the power to do it had done it. And he accepted that.

If only we would do the

same. If only we would have the faith of the private. . . . If only, when God smiles and says we are saved, we'd salute Him, and live like those who have just received a gift from the commander-in-chief. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Develop regular prayer times when you tell both your troubles and your joys to God.

EXPLORATION
Faith—Matthew 21:21; Hebrews 11:1–6; James 5:13–18; 1 John 5:14.

22 So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. 23 For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. 24 Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive *them,* and you will have *them.*

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: The One Who Kept His Focus

One of the incredible abilities of Jesus was to stay on target. His life never got off track. Not once do we find Him walking down the wrong side of the fairway. He had no money, no computers, no jets, no administrative assistants or staff; yet Jesus did what many of us fail to do. He kept His life on course.

As Jesus looked across the horizon of His future, He could see many targets. Many flags were flapping in the wind, each of which He could have pursued. He could have been a political revolutionary. He could have been a national leader. He could have been content to be a teacher and educate minds or to be a physician and heal bodies. But in the end He chose to be a Savior and save souls.

Anyone near Christ for any length of time heard it from Jesus Himself. "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

The heart of Christ was relentlessly focused on one task. The day He left the carpentry shop of Nazareth He had one ultimate aim—the Cross of Calvary. He was so focused that His final words were, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

How could Jesus say He was finished? There were still the hungry to feed, the sick to heal, the untaught to instruct, and the unloved to love. How could He say He was finished? Simple. He had completed His designated task. His commission was fulfilled. The painter could set aside his brush, the sculptor lay down his chisel, the writer put away his pen. The job was done. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1415.

Forgiveness and Prayer

25 "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against
anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you
your trespasses. 26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in
heaven forgive your trespasses."[a]

Jesus' Authority Questioned

27 Then they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking
in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to
Him. 28 And they said to Him, "By what authority are You doing these
things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?"

29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one
question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do
these things: 30 The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from
men? Answer Me."

31 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From
heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 32 But if we
say, 'From men'"—they feared the people, for all counted John to
have been a prophet indeed. 33 So they answered and said to Jesus,
"We do not know."

And Jesus answered and said to them, "Neither will I tell you by
what authority I do these things."

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers

12 Then He began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a
vineyard and set a hedge around *it,* dug *a place for* the wine vat
and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far
country. 2 Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers,
that he might receive some of the fruit of the vineyard from the vine-
dressers. 3 And they took *him* and beat him and sent *him* away empty-
handed. 4 Again he sent them another servant, and at him they threw
stones,[a] wounded *him* in the head, and sent *him* away shamefully
treated. 5 And again he sent another, and him they killed; and many
others, beating some and killing some. 6 Therefore still having one son,
his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, 'They will respect my
son.' 7 But those vinedressers said among themselves, 'This is the heir.
Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' 8 So they took
him and killed *him* and cast *him* out of the vineyard.

9 "Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come
and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others. 10 Have
you not even read this Scripture:

'The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone.
11 *This was the Lord's doing,*
And it is marvelous in our eyes'?"[a]

12 And they sought to lay hands on Him, but feared the multitude, for
they knew He had spoken the parable against them. So they left Him
and went away.

11:26 [a]NU-Text omits this verse. **12:4** [a]NU-Text omits *and at him they threw stones.*
12:11 [a]Psalm 118:22, 23

Life Lessons

Mark 12:1–44

SITUATION
The time for Jesus' death was approaching quickly. Nearing His final hour, Jesus wanted God's love to be made clear through His teaching and example.

OBSERVATION
As a result of God's love for us, we can love God and others. God's love also gives us hope that we have eternal life.

INSPIRATION
The phrase "take up your cross" has not fared well through the generations. Ask for a definition, and you'll hear answers like "My cross is my mother-in-law, my job, my bad marriage, my cranky boss, or the dull preacher." The cross, we assume, is any besetting affliction or personal hassle. My thesaurus agrees. It lists the following synonyms for *cross*: *frustration, trying situation, snag, hitch,* and *drawback*. To take up the cross is to put up with a personal challenge. God, we think, passes out crosses the way a warden hands out shovels to the chain gang. No one wants one. Each one gets one. Everybody has a cross to bear, and we might as well get used to it.

But really. Is Jesus reducing the Cross to hassles and headaches? Calling us to quit complaining about the fly in the ointment or the pain in the neck? The Cross means so much more. It is God's tool of redemption, instrument of salvation—proof of His love for people. To take up the Cross, then, is to take up Christ's burden for the people of the world.

(From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
When you are fed up with life and utterly exhausted, look for a way to love someone around you. Being patient and maintaining a caring attitude when you don't feel like it shows that you have experienced God's love.

EXPLORATION
God's Sacrifice—Romans 5:8; Ephesians 5:2; 1 John 4:10.

The Pharisees: Is It Lawful to Pay Taxes to Caesar?

13 Then they sent to Him some of the Pharisees and the Herodians,
to catch Him in *His* words. 14 When they had come, they said to Him,
"Teacher, we know that You are true, and care about no one; for You
do not regard the person of men, but teach the way of God in truth.
Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? 15 Shall we pay, or shall we
not pay?"

But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why do you test
Me? Bring Me a denarius that I may see *it.*" 16 So they brought *it.*

And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription *is* this?" They
said to Him, "Caesar's."

17 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Render to Caesar the
things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

And they marveled at Him.

The Sadducees: What About the Resurrection?

18 Then *some* Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came
to Him; and they asked Him, saying: 19 "Teacher, Moses wrote to us
that if a man's brother dies, and leaves *his* wife behind, and leaves no
children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his
brother. 20 Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife; and
dying, he left no offspring. 21 And the second took her, and he died;
nor did he leave any offspring. And the third likewise. 22 So the seven
had her and left no offspring. Last of all the woman died also. 23 There-
fore, in the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be? For
all seven had her as wife."

24 Jesus answered and said to them, "Are you not therefore mis-
taken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?
25 For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given
in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 26 But concerning the dead,
that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the *burn-
ing* bush *passage,* how God spoke to him, saying, *'I am the God of
Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?*[a] 27 He is not the
God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly
mistaken."

The Scribes: Which Is the First Commandment of All?

28 Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning
together, perceiving[a] that He had answered them well, asked Him,
"Which is the first commandment of all?"

29 Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments *is:
'Hear, O Israel, the* Lord *our God, the* Lord *is one.* 30 *And you shall love
the* Lord *your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your
mind, and with all your strength.'*[a] This *is* the first commandment.[b]
31 And the second, like *it, is* this: *'You shall love your neighbor as your-
self.'*[a] There is no other commandment greater than these."

32 So the scribe said to Him, "Well *said,* Teacher. You have spoken
the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. 33 And to

12:26 [a]Exodus 3:6, 15 **12:28** [a]NU-Text reads *seeing.* **12:30** [a]Deuteronomy 6:4, 5 [b]NU-Text omits this sentence. **12:31** [a]Leviticus 19:18

love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul,[a] and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

34 Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

But after that no one dared question Him.

Jesus: How Can David Call His Descendant Lord?

35 Then Jesus answered and said, while He taught in the temple, "How *is it* that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David? 36 For David himself said by the Holy Spirit:

'The Lord said to my Lord,
"Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." '[a]

37 Therefore David himself calls Him *'Lord';* how is He *then* his Son?"

And the common people heard Him gladly.

Beware of the Scribes

38 Then He said to them in His teaching, "Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, *love* greetings in the marketplaces, 39 the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, 40 who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."

The Widow's Two Mites

41 Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many *who were* rich put in much. 42 Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites,[a] which make a quadrans. 43 So He called His disciples to *Himself* and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; 44 for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."

Jesus Predicts the Destruction of the Temple

13 Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings *are here!*"

2 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not *one* stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age

3 Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately, 4 "Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?"

12:33 [a]NU-Text omits *with all the soul.* **12:36** [a]Psalm 110:1 **12:42** [a]Greek *lepta,* very small copper coins worth a fraction of a penny

Life Lessons

Mark 13:1–37

SITUATION

Jesus taught His disciples about the signs of the end times. While He taught, He stood on the Mount of Olives directly opposite the temple in Jerusalem. Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him to explain when the end would come.

OBSERVATION

Be ready for the return of Christ. Some of the signs that will precede His coming are war, hunger, earthquakes, false Christs, false prophets, rumors of wars, loss of faith, persecution of believers, the increase of evil, and the preaching of the good news to all the world.

INSPIRATION

Life is a dangerous endeavor. We pass our days in the shadows of ominous realities. The power to annihilate humanity has, it seems, been placed in the hands of people who are happy to do so. . . . If the global temperature rises a few more degrees . . . if classified information falls into sinister hands . . . if the wrong person pushes the wrong red button . . . What if things only get worse?

Christ tells us that they will. He predicts spiritual bailouts, ecological turmoil, and worldwide persecution. Yet in the midst of it all, He contends bravery is still an option. . . .

Things are going to get bad, really bad, before they get better. And when conditions worsen, "See to it that you are not alarmed" (Matthew 24:6 NIV). Jesus chose a stout term for *alarmed* that He used on

no other occasion. It means "to wail, to cry aloud," as if Jesus counseled the disciples, "Don't freak out when bad stuff happens." (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

If Jesus returned today, would you be among those who welcome Him or among those who dread His coming? Reconsider your priorities and stand ready to go at a moment's notice.

EXPLORATION

Ready for Jesus Christ's Return—Matthew 24:1—25:13; Luke 21:5–36; 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11.

If you have ever wondered how God reacts when you fail, watch carefully. He's writing. He's leaving a message. Not in the sand, but on a cross. His message has two words: not guilty.

—Max Lucado (3:16)

5 And Jesus, answering them, began to say: "Take heed that no one
deceives you. 6 For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am *He,*' and
will deceive many. 7 But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do
not be troubled; for *such things* must happen, but the end *is* not yet.
8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.
And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be
famines and troubles.[a] These *are* the beginnings of sorrows.

9 "But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought[a]
before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. 10 And
the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. 11 But when they
arrest *you* and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate[a] what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour,
speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. 12 Now
brother will betray brother to death, and a father *his* child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death.
13 And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures
to the end shall be saved.

The Great Tribulation

14 "So when you see the *'abomination of desolation,'*[a] spoken of
by Daniel the prophet,[b] standing where it ought not" (let the reader
understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.
15 Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor
enter to take anything out of his house. 16 And let him who is in the
field not go back to get his clothes. 17 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 18 And pray
that your flight may not be in winter. 19 For *in* those days there will be
tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation
which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. 20 And unless the
Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the
elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days.

21 "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here *is* the Christ!' or, 'Look,
He is there!' do not believe it. 22 For false christs and false prophets
will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the
elect. 23 But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.

The Coming of the Son of Man

24 "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light; 25 the stars of heaven will fall, and
the powers in the heavens will be shaken. 26 Then they will see the Son
of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. 27 And then
He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four
winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.

The Parable of the Fig Tree

28 "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has
already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer

13:8 [a]NU-Text omits *and troubles.* **13:9** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *will stand.* **13:11** [a]NU-Text omits *or premeditate.* **13:14** [a]Daniel 11:31; 12:11 [b]NU-Text omits *spoken of by Daniel the prophet.*

is near. 29 So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it[a] is near—at the doors! 30 Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

No One Knows the Day or Hour

32 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. 34 *It is* like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. 35 Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning— 36 lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. 37 And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"

The Plot to Kill Jesus

14 After two days it was the Passover and *the Feast* of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put *Him* to death. 2 But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people."

The Anointing at Bethany

3 And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured *it* on His head. 4 But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, "Why was this fragrant oil wasted? 5 For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they criticized her sharply.

6 But Jesus said, "Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. 7 For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. 8 She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. 9 Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her."

Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus

10 Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them. 11 And when they heard *it,* they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him.

Jesus Celebrates the Passover with His Disciples

12 Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover *lamb,* His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?"

13 And He sent out two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water;

13:29 [a]Or *He*

Life Lessons

Mark 14:1–72

SITUATION

Jesus neared the time of His death. He triumphantly entered Jerusalem and chased men from the temple who exploited worship. Excitement filled the air in Jerusalem because the people considered Jesus to be the conquering Messiah. Instead, Jesus prepared to face the Cross.

OBSERVATION

The people thought that Jesus would be a glorious hero and give the nation a majestic destiny. Instead, Jesus humbled Himself according to God's plan and won our salvation.

INSPIRATION

Would you do what Jesus did? He swapped a spotless castle for a grimy stable. He exchanged the worship of angels for the company of killers. He could hold the universe in His palm but gave it up to float in the womb of a maiden.

If you were God, would you sleep on straw, nurse from a breast, and be clothed in a diaper? I wouldn't, but Christ did.

If you knew that only a few would care that you came, would you still come? If you knew that those you loved would laugh in your face, would you still care? If you knew that the tongues you made would mock you, the mouths you made would spit at you, the hands you made would crucify you, would you still make them? Christ did. Would you regard the immobile and invalid more important than yourself? Jesus did.

He humbled Himself. He went from commanding

follow him. 14 Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' 15 Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished *and* prepared; there make ready for us."

16 So His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they prepared the Passover.

17 In the evening He came with the twelve. 18 Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me."

19 And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, "*Is* it I?" And another *said,* "*Is* it I?" [a]

20 He answered and said to them, "*It is* one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish. 21 The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born."

Jesus Institutes the Lord's Supper

22 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it,* and gave *it* to them and said, "Take, eat;[a] this is My body."

23 Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave *it* to them, and they all drank from it. 24 And He said to them, "This is My blood of the new[a] covenant, which is shed for many. 25 Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

26 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

27 Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night,[a] for it is written:

'I will strike the Shepherd,
And the sheep will be scattered.'[b]

28 "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."

29 Peter said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble, yet I *will* not *be.*"

30 Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that today, *even* this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times."

31 But he spoke more vehemently, "If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!"

And they all said likewise.

The Prayer in the Garden

32 Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here while I pray." 33 And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. 34 Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, *even* to death. Stay here and watch."

14:19 [a]NU-Text omits this sentence. **14:22** [a]NU-Text omits *eat.* **14:24** [a]NU-Text omits *new.* **14:27** [a]NU-Text omits *because of Me this night.* [b]Zechariah 13:7

angels to sleeping in the straw. From holding stars to clutching Mary's finger. The palm that held the universe took the nail of a soldier.

Why? Because that's what love does. It puts the beloved before itself. Your soul was more important than His blood. Your eternal life was more important than His earthly life. Your place in heaven was more important to Him than His place in heaven, so He gave up His so you could have yours.

He loves you that much, and because He loves you, you are of prime importance to Him.

Christ stands in contrast to the barnyard. He points to the sparrow, the most inexpensive bird of His day, and says, "Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. . . . Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Luke 12:6, 7).

God remembers the small birds of the world. We remember the eagles. We make bronze statues of the hawk. We name our athletic teams after the falcons. But God notices the sparrows. He makes time for the children and takes note of the lepers. He offers the woman in adultery a second chance and the thief on the cross a personal invitation. Christ is partial to the beat up and done in and urges us to follow suit. "When you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind" (Luke 14:13).

Want to love others as God has loved you? Come thirsty. Drink deeply of God's love for you, and ask Him to fill your heart with a love worth giving. (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

35 He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if
it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. 36 And He said, "Abba,
Father, all things *are* possible for You. Take this cup away from Me;
nevertheless, not what I will, but what You *will*."
37 Then He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "Si-
mon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour? 38 Watch and
pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed *is* willing, but
the flesh *is* weak."
39 Again He went away and prayed, and spoke the same words.
40 And when He returned, He found them asleep again, for their eyes
were heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him.
41 Then He came the third time and said to them, "Are you still
sleeping and resting? It is enough! The hour has come; behold, the
Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42 Rise, let us
be going. See, My betrayer is at hand."

Betrayal and Arrest in Gethsemane

43 And immediately, while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the
twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the
chief priests and the scribes and the elders. 44 Now His betrayer had
given them a signal, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize
Him and lead *Him* away safely."
45 As soon as he had come, immediately he went up to Him and
said to Him, "Rabbi, Rabbi!" and kissed Him.
46 Then they laid their hands on Him and took Him. 47 And one of
those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high
priest, and cut off his ear.
48 Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Have you come out,
as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? 49 I was daily
with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me. But the
Scriptures must be fulfilled."
50 Then they all forsook Him and fled.

A Young Man Flees Naked

51 Now a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth
thrown around *his* naked *body.* And the young men laid hold of him,
52 and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked.

Jesus Faces the Sanhedrin

53 And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were
assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes. 54 But Peter
followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest.
And he sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire.
55 Now the chief priests and all the council sought testimony
against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. 56 For many bore
false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree.
57 Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying,
58 "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and
within three days I will build another made without hands.' " 59 But
not even then did their testimony agree.
60 And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying,

APPLICATION
Instead of campaigning at work or church for a high and honored office, commit six months to doing what everyone else avoids. Look for ways to identify with the Servant Messiah, Jesus.

EXPLORATION
Servanthood—Matthew 20:26–28; Luke 18:14; John 13:13–17; Philippians 2:5–11.

Life LESSONS

MARK 15:1–47

SITUATION
Judas betrayed Jesus, and the religious authorities arrested God's Son. The disciples scattered, and Peter denied Him three times. Jesus, beaten and mocked throughout the night, provided salvation through His death and resurrection.

OBSERVATION
The hours before Jesus' crucifixion were extremely painful for Him, yet He faced the sacrifice with love, courage, and conviction so great that He willingly gave up His life for us!

INSPIRATION
He looked around the hill and foresaw a scene. Three figures hung on three crosses. Arms spread. Heads fallen forward. They moaned with the wind.

Men clad in soldiers' garb sat on the ground near the trio. They played games in the dirt and laughed.

Men clad in religion stood off to one side. They smiled. Arrogant, cocky. They had protected God, they thought, by killing this false one.

Women clad in sorrow huddled at the foot of the hill. Speechless. Faces tear streaked. Eyes downward. One put her arm around another and tried to lead her away. She wouldn't leave. "I will stay," she said softly. "I will stay."

All heaven stood to fight. All nature rose to rescue. All eternity poised to protect. But the Creator gave no command.

"It must be done . . . ," He said, and withdrew.

But as He stepped back in

"Do You answer nothing? What *is it* these men testify against You?" 61 But He kept silent and answered nothing.

Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"

62 Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

63 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "What further need do we have of witnesses? 64 You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?"

And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.

65 Then some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, "Prophesy!" And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands.[a]

Peter Denies Jesus, and Weeps

66 Now as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came. 67 And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with Jesus of Nazareth."

68 But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are saying." And he went out on the porch, and a rooster crowed.

69 And the servant girl saw him again, and began to say to those who stood by, "This is *one* of them." 70 But he denied it again.

And a little later those who stood by said to Peter again, "Surely you are *one* of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows *it*."[a]

71 Then he began to curse and swear, "I do not know this Man of whom you speak!"

72 A second time *the* rooster crowed. Then Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said to him, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." And when he thought about it, he wept.

Jesus Faces Pilate

15 Immediately, in the morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council; and they bound Jesus, led *Him* away, and delivered *Him* to Pilate. 2 Then Pilate asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

He answered and said to him, "*It is as* you say."

3 And the chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing. 4 Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, "Do You answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!"[a] 5 But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled.

Taking the Place of Barabbas

6 Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. 7 And there was one named Barabbas, *who was* chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion. 8 Then the multitude, crying aloud,[a] began to ask *him to do* just as he had always done for them. 9 But Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release to you the

14:65 [a]NU-Text reads *received Him with slaps.* **14:70** [a]NU-Text omits *and your speech shows it.* **15:4** [a]NU-Text reads *of which they accuse You.* **15:8** [a]NU-Text reads *going up.*

King of the Jews?" [10]For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy.

[11]But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them. [12]Pilate answered and said to them again, "What then do you want me to do *with Him* whom you call the King of the Jews?"

[13]So they cried out again, "Crucify Him!"

[14]Then Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?"

But they cried out all the more, "Crucify Him!"

[15]So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged *Him,* to be crucified.

The Soldiers Mock Jesus

[16]Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole garrison. [17]And they clothed Him with purple; and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His *head,* [18]and began to salute Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" [19]Then they struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshiped Him. [20]And when they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him.

The King on a Cross

[21]Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross. [22]And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. [23]Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take *it.* [24]And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots for them *to determine* what every man should take.

[25]Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him. [26]And the inscription of His accusation was written above:

THE KING OF THE JEWS.

[27]With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left. [28]So the Scripture was fulfilled[a] which says, *"And He was numbered with the transgressors."*[b]

[29]And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! *You* who destroy the temple and build *it* in three days, [30]save Yourself, and come down from the cross!"

[31]Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. [32]Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe."[a]

Even those who were crucified with Him reviled Him.

Jesus Dies on the Cross

[33]Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. [34]And at the ninth hour Jesus cried

15:28 [a]Isaiah 53:12 [b]NU-Text omits this verse. **15:32** [a]M-Text reads *believe Him.*

time, He heard the cry that He would someday scream: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" He wrenched at tomorrow's agony.

The angel spoke again. "It would be less painful . . . "

The Creator interrupted softly. "But it wouldn't be love." (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What have you given up for others recently? Remember how great Christ's generosity was to you as you think of these "sacrifices."

EXPLORATION

Christ's Sacrifice—John 3:16; Romans 5:6–8; Philippians 2:5–8; Hebrews 12:1–3.

Not only did Jesus find good in the bad, he found purpose in the pain. Of the ninety-eight words Jesus spoke at his arrest, thirty refer to the purpose of God.

—Max Lucado (Just Like Jesus)

Life LESSONS

Mark 16:1–20

SITUATION
Jesus was crucified and His body buried. His followers were dismayed because He did not create a kingdom on earth. Because He died so close to the Sabbath (a day on which Israelites could do no work), His body was not completely prepared for burial. Once the Sabbath was over, some women set out, intending to put sweet-smelling spices on His body.

OBSERVATION
Jesus was not simply a man who led a good life and died. He rose from the dead. Death cannot hold Him or His followers. God conquered death, and gave us hope.

INSPIRATION
The year 1899 marked the deaths of two well-known men—Dwight L. Moody, the acclaimed evangelist, and Robert Ingersoll, the famous lawyer, orator, and political leader.

The two men had many similarities. Both were raised in Christian homes. Both were skilled orators. . . . Both drew immense crowds when they spoke and attracted loyal followings. But there was one striking difference between them—their view of God.

Ingersoll was an agnostic; he had no belief in the eternal, but stressed the importance of living only in the here and now. Ingersoll made light of the Bible. . . . The Bible was "a fable, an obscenity, a humbug, a sham and a lie." . . .

Dwight L. Moody, had different convictions. He dedicated his life to presenting a resurrected

out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*[a]

35 Some of those who stood by, when they heard *that,* said, "Look, He is calling for Elijah!" 36 Then someone ran and filled a sponge full of sour wine, put *it* on a reed, and offered *it* to Him to drink, saying, "Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down."

37 And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last.

38 Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last,[a] he said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!"

40 There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome, 41 who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.

Jesus Buried in Joseph's Tomb

42 Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 44 Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. 45 So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. 46 Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. 47 And Mary Magdalene and Mary *the mother* of Joses observed where He was laid.

He Is Risen

16 Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary *the mother* of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. 2 Very early in the morning, on the first *day* of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. 3 And they said among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?" 4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away—for it was very large. 5 And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.

6 But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. 7 But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you."

8 So they went out quickly[a] and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

15:34 [a]Psalm 22:1 **15:39** [a]NU-Text reads *that He thus breathed His last.*
16:8 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *quickly.*

Mary Magdalene Sees the Risen Lord

9 Now when *He* rose early on the first
day of the week, He appeared first to Mary
Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven
demons. 10 She went and told those who had
been with Him, as they mourned and wept.
11 And when they heard that He was alive and
had been seen by her, they did not believe.

Jesus Appears to Two Disciples

12 After that, He appeared in another form
to two of them as they walked and went into
the country. 13 And they went and told *it* to the
rest, *but* they did not believe them either.

The Great Commission

14 Later He appeared to the eleven as they
sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did
not believe those who had seen Him after He
had risen. 15 And He said to them, "Go into
all the world and preach the gospel to every
creature. 16 He who believes and is baptized
will be saved; but he who does not believe
will be condemned. 17 And these signs will
follow those who believe: In My name they
will cast out demons; they will speak with new
tongues; 18 they[a] will take up serpents; and if
they drink anything deadly, it will by no means
hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and
they will recover."

Christ Ascends to God's Right Hand

19 So then, after the Lord had spoken to
them, He was received up into heaven, and
sat down at the right hand of God. 20 And they
went out and preached everywhere, the Lord
working with *them* and confirming the word
through the accompanying signs. Amen.[a]

16:18 [a]NU-Text reads *and in their hands they will.* **16:20** [a]Verses 9–20 are bracketed in NU-Text as not original. They are lacking in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, although nearly all other manuscripts of Mark contain them.

King to a dying people. He embraced the Bible as the hope for humanity and the Cross as the turning point of history. He left behind a legacy of written and spoken words, institutions of education, churches, and changed lives.

Two men. Both powerful speakers and influential leaders. One rejected God; the other embraced Him. The impact of their decisions is seen most clearly in the way they died. . . .

Ingersoll died suddenly. The news of his death stunned his family. His body was kept at home for several days because his wife was reluctant to part with it. It was eventually removed for the sake of the family's health.

Ingersoll's remains were cremated, and the public response to his passing was altogether dismal. For a man who put all his hopes on the world, death was tragic and came without the consolation of hope. . . .

Moody's legacy was different. On December 22, 1899, Moody awoke to his last winter dawn. Having grown increasingly weak during the night, he began to speak in slow measured words. "Earth recedes, heaven opens before me!" Son Will, who was nearby, hurried across the room to his father's side.

"Father, you are dreaming," he said.

"No. This is no dream, Will," Moody said. "It is beautiful. It is like a trance. If this is death, it is sweet. God is calling me, and I must go. Don't call me back."

At that point, the family gathered around, and moments later the great evangelist died. It was his coronation day—a day he had looked forward to for many years. He was with his Lord.

. . . There was no despair. Loved ones gathered to sing praise to God at a triumphant home-going service. Many remembered the words the evangelist had spoken earlier that year in New York City: "Someday you will read in the papers that Moody is dead. Don't you believe a word of it. At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now. . . . I was born of the flesh in 1837, I was born of the spirit in 1855. That which is born of the flesh may die. That which is born of the Spirit shall live forever." (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What do you fear about death? Remember that Jesus did the impossible by rising from the dead. One day your body and spirit will rise from the dead.

EXPLORATION

Victory over Death—Psalm 23:4; Hosea 13:14; Romans 8:2; 1 Corinthians 15:54–57; Ephesians 2:4, 5.

THE BOOK OF

LUKE

INTRODUCTION

Nearly two thousand years ago a doctor named Luke began a letter to a friend with these words:

"Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed" (1:1–4).

Luke and Theophilus shared two loves: a love for Christ and a love for the facts. They didn't want legends, they wanted truth. And so Dr. Luke begins to sort the truth and report the facts to Theophilus. The result is part letter and part research paper.

It is part letter because it was written for a friend. What a bond must have existed between these two that Luke would labor so! It is part research paper, because Luke had *studied everything carefully from the beginning* and he wanted Theophilus to benefit from his study.

Can't you envision Luke in the home of Mary? "Tell me again what happened in Bethlehem." Can't you see him peppering Matthew with questions? "Let me see if I got this parable right." Or on long walks with Peter, "When you denied him the third time, did Jesus know?" With the skill of a surgeon, Luke probes for truth.

Why?

So his friend could know that what he had been taught was true.

Did Luke have any idea that millions of us would benefit from his study? I doubt it. All he did was share the truth with a friend.

Can you imagine what would happen if we all did the same?

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Luke, the non-Jewish doctor

Date Written: c. A.D. 60

Key Themes:

- Jesus was fully man and fully God.
- Jesus experienced the conflicts of life, yet performed miracles.
- Jesus fulfilled God's mission and taught of God's kingdom.
- Jesus' death and resurrection made possible our relationship with God.

Key Verses:

"It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed" (Luke 1:3, 4).

Contents:

I. Jesus' Birth and Preparation 1:1—4:13

II. Jesus' Ministry 4:14—9:50

III. Jesus' Ministry in the Midst of Conflict 9:51—18:43

IV. Jesus' Last Week, Resurrection, and Ascension 19:1—24:53

Dedication to Theophilus

Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative
of those things which have been fulfilled[a] among us, 2 just as those
who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word
delivered them to us, 3 it seemed good to me also, having had perfect
understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an
orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may know the
certainty of those things in which you were instructed.

John's Birth Announced to Zacharias

5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest
named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife *was* of the daugh-
ters of Aaron, and her name *was* Elizabeth. 6 And they were both right-
eous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances
of the Lord blameless. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was
barren, and they were both well advanced in years.

8 So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the
order of his division, 9 according to the custom of the priesthood, his
lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.
10 And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the
hour of incense. 11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, stand-
ing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12 And when Zacharias saw
him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your
prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you
shall call his name John. 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and
many will rejoice at his birth. 15 For he will be great in the sight of the
Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be
filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16 And he will
turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 He will also
go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, *'to turn the hearts of
the fathers to the children,'*[a] and the disobedient to the wisdom of the
just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

18 And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am
an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years."

19 And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who
stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring
you these glad tidings. 20 But behold, you will be mute and not able
to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not
believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time."

21 And the people waited for Zacharias, and marveled that he lin-
gered so long in the temple. 22 But when he came out, he could not
speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the
temple, for he beckoned to them and remained speechless.

23 So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed,
that he departed to his own house. 24 Now after those days his wife
Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, 25 "Thus
the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on *me,* to take
away my reproach among people."

1:1 [a]Or *are most surely believed* **1:17** [a]Malachi 4:5, 6

Life LESSONS

Luke 1:1–80

SITUATION

Scholars have suggested that these events took place around 6 B.C. during the rule of Herod the Great. God set the stage for the coming of Jesus into the world.

OBSERVATION

The events leading up to Jesus' birth can be summarized by the angel's words: "God can do anything!"

INSPIRATION

Some things only a mom can do.

Only a mother can powder a baby's behind with one hand and hold the phone with the other. Only a mom can discern which teen is entering the door just by the sound of the key in the lock. Only a mom can spend a day wiping noses, laundering enough socks for the Yankees, balancing a checkbook down to $1.27, and still mean it when she thanks God for her kids. Only a mom.

Some things only a mom can fix. Like Hamburger Helper without the hamburger. Like the cabinet door her husband couldn't and his bruised ego when he found out that she could. Broken shoelace? Broken heart? Breaking out on your face? Breaking up with your sweetheart? Moms can handle that. Some things only a mom can fix.

Some things only a mom can know. The time it takes to drive from piano lesson to Little League practice? She knows. How many pizzas you need for a middle school sleepover? Mom knows. How many Weight

Watcher points are left in the day and days are left in the semester? Mom can tell you. She knows.

We men usually don't. The kids are usually clueless. Moms are a breed apart. The rest of us can only wonder, only ponder. . . .

If we've ever wondered such thoughts about mothers, how much more have we wondered them about the most famous mother of all: Mary. To bear a baby is one thing, but to carry God? What is that like?

The virgin birth is more, much more, than a Christmas story; it is a picture of how close Christ will come to you. The first stop on His itinerary was a womb. Where will God go to touch the world? Look deep within Mary for an answer.

Better still, look deep within yourself. What He did with Mary, He offers to us! He issues a Mary-level invitation to all His children. "If you'll let Me, I'll move in!"

Proliferating throughout Scripture is a preposition that leaves no doubt—the preposition *in*. Jesus lives *in* His children. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What are your greatest dreams? Remember, God can do anything, and He loves to fulfill dreams. Ask God to show you what He wants you to do, and then ask Him for the power and courage to do it.

EXPLORATION

God's Ability—Joshua 3:5; Job 42:2; Psalm 77:14; Daniel 4:3; Matthew 19:26; Romans 16:25, 26; Ephesians 3:20.

Christ's Birth Announced to Mary

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to
a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man
whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name *was*
Mary. 28 And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly
favored *one,* the Lord *is* with you; blessed *are* you among women!"[a]
29 But when she saw *him,*[a] she was troubled at his saying, and
considered what manner of greeting this was. 30 Then the angel said
to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.
31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son,
and shall call His name Jesus. 32 He will be great, and will be called the
Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His
father David. 33 And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and
of His kingdom there will be no end."
34 Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not
know a man?"
35 And the angel answered and said to her, "*The* Holy Spirit will
come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you;
therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son
of God. 36 Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a
son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was
called barren. 37 For with God nothing will be impossible."
38 Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to
me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

39 Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country
with haste, to a city of Judah, 40 and entered the house of Zacharias
and greeted Elizabeth. 41 And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the
greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth
was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 Then she spoke out with a loud voice
and said, "Blessed *are* you among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of
your womb! 43 But why *is* this *granted* to me, that the mother of my
Lord should come to me? 44 For indeed, as soon as the voice of your
greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.
45 Blessed *is* she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those
things which were told her from the Lord."

The Song of Mary

46 And Mary said:

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.
48 For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant;
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.
49 For He who is mighty has done great things for me,
And holy *is* His name.
50 And His mercy *is* on those who fear Him
From generation to generation.

1:28 [a]NU-Text omits *blessed are you among women.* **1:29** [a]NU-Text omits *when she saw him.*

51 He has shown strength with His arm;
He has scattered *the* proud in the
imagination of their hearts.
52 He has put down the mighty from *their*
thrones,
And exalted *the* lowly.
53 He has filled *the* hungry with good
things,
And *the* rich He has sent away empty.
54 He has helped His servant Israel,
In remembrance of *His* mercy,
55 As He spoke to our fathers,
To Abraham and to his seed forever."

56 And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house.

Birth of John the Baptist

57 Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. 58 When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her.

Circumcision of John the Baptist

59 So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias. 60 His mother answered and said, "No; he shall be called John."

61 But they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name." 62 So they made signs to his father—what he would have him called.

63 And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John." So they all marveled. 64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue *loosed,* and he spoke, praising God. 65 Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea. 66 And all those who heard *them* kept *them* in their hearts, saying, "What kind of child will this be?" And the hand of the Lord was with him.

Zacharias' Prophecy

67 Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:

68 "Blessed *is* the Lord God of Israel,
For He has visited and redeemed His
people,
69 And has raised up a horn of salvation
for us
In the house of His servant David,
70 As He spoke by the mouth of His holy
prophets,
Who *have been* since the world began,
71 That we should be saved from our
enemies
And from the hand of all who hate us,
72 To perform the mercy *promised* to our
fathers
And to remember His holy covenant,
73 The oath which He swore to our father
Abraham:
74 To grant us that we,
Being delivered from the hand of our
enemies,
Might serve Him without fear,
75 In holiness and righteousness before Him
all the days of our life.

76 "And you, child, will be called the prophet
of the Highest;
For you will go before the face of the Lord
to prepare His ways,
77 To give knowledge of salvation to His
people
By the remission of their sins,
78 Through the tender mercy of our God,
With which the Dayspring from on high
has visited[a] us;
79 To give light to those who sit in darkness
and the shadow of death,
To guide our feet into the way of peace."

80 So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

Christ Born of Mary

2 And it came to pass in those days *that* a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. 3 So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of

1:78 [a] NU-Text reads *shall visit.*

Life Lessons

Luke 2:1–52

SITUATION
Luke gave an account of the birth of Jesus and His early life. In His culture, boys were considered responsible adults around the age of twelve. It was not, therefore, irresponsible of Joseph and Mary to accidentally leave Jesus behind. They must have thought He was traveling with another part of the group.

OBSERVATION
God's Son became a person and lived with us for a while. During His life He was sad, happy, excited, and disappointed. God knows what life on earth is like.

INSPIRATION
There is one word that describes the night He came—*ordinary.*

The sky was ordinary. An occasional gust stirred the leaves and chilled the air. The stars were diamonds sparkling on black velvet.

The sheep were ordinary. Some fat. Some scrawny. Common animals. No history makers. No blue-ribbon winners.

And the shepherds. Peasants they were. Probably wearing all the clothes they owned. Smelling like sheep and looking just as woolly.

An ordinary night with ordinary sheep and ordinary shepherds. And were it not for a God who loves to hook an "extra" on the front of the ordinary, the night would have gone unnoticed. The sheep would have been forgotten, and the shepherds would have slept the night away.

But God dances amidst

the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife,[a] who was with child. 6 So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Glory in the Highest

8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And behold,[a] an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

14 "Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"[a]

15 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. 17 Now when they had seen *Him,* they made widely[a] known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. 18 And all those who heard *it* marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered *them* in her heart. 20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

Circumcision of Jesus

21 And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child,[a] His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

Jesus Presented in the Temple

22 Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present *Him* to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, *"Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord"),*[a] 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, *"A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."*[a]

2:5 [a]NU-Text omits *wife.* **2:9** [a]NU-Text omits *behold.* **2:14** [a]NU-Text reads *toward men of goodwill.* **2:17** [a]NU-Text omits *widely.* **2:21** [a]NU-Text reads *for His circumcision.* **2:23** [a]Exodus 13:2, 12, 15 **2:24** [a]Leviticus 12:8

Simeon Sees God's Salvation

25 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name
was Simeon, and this man *was* just and devout, waiting for the
Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had
been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death
before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 So he came by the Spirit into
the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for
Him according to the custom of the law, 28 he took Him up in his arms
and blessed God and said:

29 "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,
According to Your word;
30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation
31 Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,
32 A light to *bring* revelation to the Gentiles,
And the glory of Your people Israel."

33 And Joseph and His mother[a] marveled at those things which
were spoken of Him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary
His mother, "Behold, this *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of
many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against 35 (yes, a
sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of
many hearts may be revealed."

Anna Bears Witness to the Redeemer

36 Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel,
of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a hus-
band seven years from her virginity; 37 and this woman *was* a widow
of about eighty-four years,[a] who did not depart from the temple, but
served *God* with fastings and prayers night and day. 38 And coming
in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord,[a] and spoke of Him to all
those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

The Family Returns to Nazareth

39 So when they had performed all things according to the law of
the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their *own* city, Nazareth. 40 And
the Child grew and became strong in spirit,[a] filled with wisdom; and
the grace of God was upon Him.

The Boy Jesus Amazes the Scholars

41 His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the
Passover. 42 And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jeru-
salem according to the custom of the feast. 43 When they had finished
the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem.
And Joseph and His mother[a] did not know *it;* 44 but supposing Him to
have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him
among *their* relatives and acquaintances. 45 So when they did not find
Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. 46 Now so it was *that*

2:33 [a]NU-Text reads *And His father and mother.* **2:37** [a]NU-Text reads *a widow until she was eighty-four.* **2:38** [a]NU-Text reads *to God.* **2:40** [a]NU-Text omits *in spirit.* **2:43** [a]NU-Text reads *And His parents.*

the common. And that night he did a waltz.

The black sky exploded with brightness. Trees that had been shadows jumped into clarity. Sheep that had been silent became a chorus of curiosity. One minute the shepherd was dead asleep; the next he was rubbing his eyes and staring into the face of an alien.

The night was ordinary no more.

The announcement went first to the shepherds. Had the angel gone to the theologians, they would have first consulted their commentaries. Had he gone to the elite, they would have looked around to see if anyone was watching.

So he went to the shepherds. Men who didn't know enough to tell God that angels don't sing to sheep and that messiahs aren't found wrapped in rags and sleeping in a feed trough. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Take a moment and reflect on what "Immanuel—God with us" means to you in your daily life. Make it a point to seek God even in the mundane tasks of your life.

EXPLORATION

God with Us—Exodus 33:20–23; Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23; John 14:18–21; Acts 17:28; 2 Corinthians 6:16.

after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. 48 So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously."

49 And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" 50 But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them.

Jesus Advances in Wisdom and Favor

51 Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

3 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, 2 while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests,[a] the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. 3 And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, 4 as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying:

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord;
Make His paths straight.
5 *Every valley shall be filled*
And every mountain and hill brought low;
The crooked places shall be made straight
And the rough ways smooth;
6 *And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"*[a]

John Preaches to the People

7 Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as *our* father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. 9 And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

10 So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?"

11 He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."

12 Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"

3:2 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas.*
3:6 [a]Isaiah 40:3–5

Life Lessons

Luke 3:1–38

SITUATION
John the Baptist began his ministry and called people to repent of their sins.

OBSERVATION
John was a humble man who submitted to God. Not concerned with his own popularity, he knew that his ministry was to point people to Jesus Christ.

INSPIRATION
Next time your life feels ordinary, take your cue from Christ. Pay attention to your work and your world. Jesus' obedience began in a small town carpentry shop. His uncommon approach to His common life groomed Him for His uncommon call. "Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age" (Luke 3:23). In order to enter public life, you have to leave private life. In order for Jesus to change the world, He had to say good-bye to *His* world.

He had to give Mary a kiss. Have a final meal in the kitchen, a final walk through the streets. Did He ascend one of the hills of Nazareth and think of the day He would ascend the hill near Jerusalem?

He knew what was going to happen. "God chose him for this purpose long before the world began" (1 Peter 1:20 NLT). Every ounce of suffering had been scripted—it just fell to Him to play the part.

Not that he had to. Nazareth was a cozy town. Why not build a carpentry business? Keep His identity a secret? Return in the era of guillotines or electric chairs, and pass on the Cross. To be forced to die is

13 And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed
for you."
14 Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?"
So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely,
and be content with your wages."
15 Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their
hearts about John, whether he was the Christ *or* not, 16 John answered,
saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than
I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will bap-
tize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing fan *is* in His
hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather
the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquench-
able fire."
18 And with many other exhortations he preached to the people.
19 But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias,
his brother Philip's wife,[a] and for all the evils which Herod had done,
20 also added this, above all, that he shut John up in prison.

John Baptizes Jesus

21 When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also
was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. 22 And
the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a
voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You
I am well pleased."

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

23 Now Jesus Himself began *His ministry at* about thirty years of
age, being (as was supposed) *the* son of Joseph, *the son* of Heli, 24 *the*
son of Matthat,[a] *the son* of Levi, *the son* of Melchi, *the son* of Janna,
the son of Joseph, 25 *the son* of Mattathiah, *the son* of Amos, *the son* of
Nahum, *the son* of Esli, *the son* of Naggai, 26 *the son* of Maath, *the son*
of Mattathiah, *the son* of Semei, *the son* of Joseph, *the son* of Judah,
27 *the son* of Joannas, *the son* of Rhesa, *the son* of Zerubbabel, *the son*
of Shealtiel, *the son* of Neri, 28 *the son* of Melchi, *the son* of Addi, *the*
son of Cosam, *the son* of Elmodam, *the son* of Er, 29 *the son* of Jose, *the*
son of Eliezer, *the son* of Jorim, *the son* of Matthat, *the son* of Levi, 30 *the*
son of Simeon, *the son* of Judah, *the son* of Joseph, *the son* of Jonan,
the son of Eliakim, 31 *the son* of Melea, *the son* of Menan, *the son* of
Mattathah, *the son* of Nathan, *the son* of David, 32 *the son* of Jesse, *the*
son of Obed, *the son* of Boaz, *the son* of Salmon, *the son* of Nahshon,
33 *the son* of Amminadab, *the son* of Ram, *the son* of Hezron, *the son*
of Perez, *the son* of Judah, 34 *the son* of Jacob, *the son* of Isaac, *the son*
of Abraham, *the son* of Terah, *the son* of Nahor, 35 *the son* of Serug, *the*
son of Reu, *the son* of Peleg, *the son* of Eber, *the son* of Shelah, 36 *the*
son of Cainan, *the son* of Arphaxad, *the son* of Shem, *the son* of Noah,
the son of Lamech, 37 *the son* of Methuselah, *the son* of Enoch, *the son*
of Jared, *the son* of Mahalalel, *the son* of Cainan, 38 *the son* of Enosh,
the son of Seth, *the son* of Adam, *the son* of God.

3:19 [a]NU-Text reads *his brother's wife.* **3:24** [a]This and several other names in the genealogy are spelled somewhat differently in the NU-Text. Since the New King James Version uses the Old Testament spelling for persons mentioned in the New Testament, these variations, which come from the Greek, have not been footnoted.

one thing, but to willingly take up your own cross is something else. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Like John, believers should point people to Jesus Christ. Who are the people God is placing on your heart to pray for, to witness to, and to help?

EXPLORATION
Witnesses for Christ—Matthew 5:13–16; 28:18–20; Mark 16:15; John 15:26, 27; 2 Timothy 4:2.

Search for one example of one person who desired to see the infant Jesus and was turned away. You won't find it.

—Max Lucado (Just Like Jesus)

Life LESSONS

Luke 4:1–44

SITUATION
The Jewish people had been expecting the Messiah for a long time. They believed that He would free Israel from foreign rule and restore the nation to its prominence and greatness. As Jesus served, performed miracles, and spoke words with wisdom, the people were amazed and confused. Jesus was not the type of messiah they had been expecting.

OBSERVATION
Because the Jews assumed they knew what the Messiah would look like, they had a difficult time recognizing Jesus as God's Messiah.

INSPIRATION
It all happened in a moment, a most remarkable moment. . . . that was like none other. For through that segment of time a spectacular thing occurred. God became a man. While the creatures of earth walked unaware, Divinity arrived. Heaven opened herself and placed her most precious One in a human womb. . . .

God as a fetus. Holiness sleeping in a womb. The Creator of life being created.

God was given eyebrows, elbows, two kidneys, and a spleen. He stretched against the walls and floated in the amniotic fluids of His mother.

God had come near. . . .

The hands that first held Him were unmanicured, calloused, and dirty.

No silk. No ivory. No hype. No party. No hoopla.

Were it not for the

Satan Tempts Jesus

4 Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into[a] the wilderness, [2]being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry.

[3]And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."

[4]But Jesus answered him, saying,[a] "It is written, *'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'"*[b]

[5]Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him[a] all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. [6]And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for *this* has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. [7]Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours."

[8]And Jesus answered and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan![a] For[b] it is written, *'You shall worship the* Lord *your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"*[c]

[9]Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. [10]For it is written:

'He shall give His angels charge over you,
To keep you,'

[11]and,

'In their hands they shall bear you up,
Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"[a]

[12]And Jesus answered and said to him, "It has been said, *'You shall not tempt the* Lord *your God.'"*[a]

[13]Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.

Jesus Begins His Galilean Ministry

[14]Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. [15]And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth

[16]So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. [17]And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

[18] *"The Spirit of the* Lord *is upon Me,*
Because He has anointed Me

4:1 [a]NU-Text reads *in.* **4:4** [a]Deuteronomy 8:3 [b]NU-Text omits *but by every word of God.* **4:5** [a]NU-Text reads *And taking Him up, he showed Him.* **4:8** [a]NU-Text omits *Get behind Me, Satan.* [b]NU-Text and M-Text omit *For.* [c]Deuteronomy 6:13
4:11 [a]Psalm 91:11, 12 **4:12** [a]Deuteronomy 6:16

To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,[a]
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
19 *To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."*[a]

20 Then He closed the book, and gave *it* back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. 21 And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." 22 So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, "Is this not Joseph's son?"

23 He said to them, "You will surely say this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum,[a] do also here in Your country.'" 24 Then He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. 25 But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; 26 but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath,[a] *in the region* of Sidon, to a woman *who was* a widow. 27 And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian."

28 So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, 29 and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. 30 Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.

Jesus Casts Out an Unclean Spirit

31 Then He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths. 32 And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority. 33 Now in the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice, 34 saying, "Let *us* alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!"

35 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" And when the demon had thrown him in *their* midst, it came out of him and did not hurt him. 36 Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, "What a word this *is!* For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out." 37 And the report about Him went out into every place in the surrounding region.

Peter's Mother-in-Law Healed

38 Now He arose from the synagogue and entered Simon's house. But Simon's wife's mother was sick with a high fever, and they made

4:18 [a]NU-Text omits *to heal the brokenhearted.* **4:19** [a]Isaiah 61:1, 2 **4:23** [a]Here and elsewhere the NU-Text spelling is *Capharnaum.* **4:26** [a]Greek *Sarepta*

shepherds, there would have been no reception. And were it not for a group of star-gazers, there would have been no gifts. . . .

For thirty-three years He would feel everything you and I have ever felt. He felt weak. He grew weary. He was afraid of failure. He was susceptible to wooing women. He got colds, burped, and had body odor. His feelings got hurt. His feet got tired. And His head ached.

To think of Jesus in such a light is—well, it seems almost irreverent, doesn't it? It's not something we like to do; it's uncomfortable. It is much easier to keep the humanity out of the incarnation. He's easier to stomach that way. . . .

But don't do it. For heaven's sake, don't. Let Him be as human as He intended to be. Let Him into the mire and muck of our world. For only if we let Him in can He pull us out. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Who is Jesus? Don't try to squeeze Him into your own mold of a Savior. The Bible gives a clear picture. Study the Word of God and discover the real Jesus: God in the flesh who wants to change lives.

EXPLORATION
The Messiah—Matthew 3:17; John 1:1–18; 10:30; Colossians 1:15–20.

request of Him concerning her. [39]So He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And immediately she arose and served them.

Many Healed After Sabbath Sunset

[40]When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them. [41]And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, "You are the Christ,[a] the Son of God!"

And He, rebuking *them,* did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ.

Jesus Preaches in Galilee

[42]Now when it was day, He departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowd sought Him and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from leaving them; [43]but He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent." [44]And He was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee.[a]

Four Fishermen Called as Disciples

5 So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, [2]and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing *their* nets. [3]Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat.

[4]When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

[5]But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." [6]And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. [7]So they signaled to *their* partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. [8]When Simon Peter saw *it,* he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

[9]For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; [10]and so also *were* James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men." [11]So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.

Jesus Cleanses a Leper

[12]And it happened when He was in a certain city, that behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus; and he fell on *his* face and implored Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."

[13]Then He put out *His* hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately the leprosy left him. [14]And He charged

4:41 [a]NU-Text omits *the Christ.* **4:44** [a]NU-Text reads *Judea.*

Life Lessons

Luke 5:1–39

SITUATION
Luke continued to tell about what Jesus did on earth. Jesus began to call His disciples and perform various miracles.

OBSERVATION
Luke emphasized how people responded in faith to Jesus and were rewarded by blessings greater than they could imagine.

INSPIRATION
Whether he was born paralyzed or became paralyzed—the end result was the same: total dependence on others. . . . When people looked at him, they didn't see the man; they saw a body in need of a miracle. That's not what Jesus saw, but that's what the people saw. And that's certainly what his friends saw. So they did what any of us would do for a friend. They tried to get him some help. . . .

By the time his friends arrived at the place, the house was full. People jammed the doorways. Kids sat in the windows. Others peeked over shoulders. How would this small band of friends ever attract Jesus' attention? They had to make a choice. Do we go in or give up?

What would have happened had the friends given up? What if they had shrugged their shoulders and mumbled something about the crowd being big and dinner getting cold and turned and left? After all, they had done a good deed in coming this far. Who could fault them for turning back? You can only do so much for somebody. But

him to tell no one, "But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded."

15 However, the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities. 16 So He Himself *often* withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.

Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic

17 Now it happened on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was *present* to heal them.[a] 18 Then behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralyzed, whom they sought to bring in and lay before Him. 19 And when they could not find how they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the housetop and let him down with *his* bed through the tiling into the midst before Jesus.

20 When He saw their faith, He said to him, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."

21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, "Why are you reasoning in your hearts? 23 Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk'? 24 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the man who was paralyzed, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."

25 Immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. 26 And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen strange things today!"

Matthew the Tax Collector

27 After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." 28 So he left all, rose up, and followed Him.

29 Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them. 30 And their scribes and the Pharisees[a] complained against His disciples, saying, "Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

31 Jesus answered and said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 32 I have not come to call *the* righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

Jesus Is Questioned About Fasting

33 Then they said to Him, "Why do[a] the disciples of John fast often and make prayers, and likewise those of the Pharisees, but Yours eat and drink?"

5:17 [a]NU-Text reads *present with Him to heal.* **5:30** [a]NU-Text reads *But the Pharisees and their scribes.* **5:33** [a]NU-Text omits *Why do,* making the verse a statement.

these friends hadn't done enough.

One said that he had an idea. The four huddled over the paralytic and listened to the plan to climb to the top of the house, cut through the roof, and lower their friend down with their sashes.

It was risky—they could fall. It was dangerous—*he* could fall. It was unorthodox—de-roofing is antisocial. It was intrusive—Jesus was busy. But it was their only chance to see Jesus. So they climbed to the roof.

Faith does these things. Faith does the unexpected. And faith gets God's attention. . . .

Jesus was moved by the scene of faith. So He applauds—if not with His hands, at least with His heart. And not only does He applaud, He blesses. And we witness a divine loveburst.

The friends want Him to heal their friend. But Jesus won't settle for a simple healing of the body—He wants to heal the soul. He leapfrogs the physical and deals with the spiritual. To heal the body is temporal; to heal the soul is eternal. . . . So strong was His love for this crew of faith that He went beyond their appeal and went straight to the Cross.

Jesus already knows the cost of grace. He already knows the price of forgiveness. But He offers it anyway. Love bursts in His heart. . . .

And though we can't hear it here, the angels can hear Him there. All of heaven must pause as another burst of love declares the only words that really matter: "Your sins are forgiven." (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Do you believe God knows your problem? Do you have a disability or lack of resources that robs your faith? Remember, you don't have to go it alone. Find a group of Christians at school, work, or church who will get together weekly with you to present your requests to God.

EXPLORATION
Faith—Habakkuk 2:4; Matthew 7:7; Mark 9:24; Galatians 2:20.

34 And He said to them, "Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? 35 But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days."

36 Then He spoke a parable to them: "No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one;[a] otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was *taken* out of the new does not match the old. 37 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. 38 But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved.[a] 39 And no one, having drunk old *wine,* immediately[a] desires new; for he says, 'The old is better.' "[b]

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath

6 Now it happened on the second Sabbath after the first[a] that He went through the grainfields. And His disciples plucked the heads of grain and ate *them,* rubbing *them* in *their* hands. 2 And some of the Pharisees said to them, "Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?"

3 But Jesus answering them said, "Have you not even read this, what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: 4 how he went into the house of God, took and ate the showbread, and also gave some to those with him, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat?" 5 And He said to them, "The Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."

Healing on the Sabbath

6 Now it happened on another Sabbath, also, that He entered the synagogue and taught. And a man was there whose right hand was withered. 7 So the scribes and Pharisees watched Him closely, whether He would heal on the Sabbath, that they might find an accusation against Him. 8 But He knew their thoughts, and said to the man who had the withered hand, "Arise and stand here." And he arose and stood. 9 Then Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?"[a] 10 And when He had looked around at them all, He said to the man,[a] "Stretch out your hand." And he did so, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.[b] 11 But they were filled with rage, and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

The Twelve Apostles

12 Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. 13 And when it was day, He called His disciples to *Himself;* and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles: 14 Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; 15 Matthew and Thomas; James the *son* of Alphaeus,

5:36 [a]NU-Text reads *No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old one.* **5:38** [a]NU-Text omits *and both are preserved.* **5:39** [a]NU-Text omits *immediately.* [b]NU-Text reads *good.* **6:1** [a]NU-Text reads *on a Sabbath.* **6:9** [a]M-Text reads *to kill.* **6:10** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *to him.* [b]NU-Text omits *as whole as the other.*

and Simon called the Zealot; 16 Judas *the son* of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor.

Jesus Heals a Great Multitude

17 And He came down with them and stood on a level place with a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear Him and be healed of their diseases, 18 as well as those who were tormented with unclean spirits. And they were healed. 19 And the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for power went out from Him and healed *them* all.

The Beatitudes

20 Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said:

"Blessed *are you* poor,
For yours is the kingdom of God.
21 Blessed *are you* who hunger now,
For you shall be filled.
Blessed *are you* who weep now,
For you shall laugh.
22 Blessed are you when men hate you,
And when they exclude you,
And revile *you,* and cast out your name as evil,
For the Son of Man's sake.
23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy!
For indeed your reward *is* great in heaven,
For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.

Jesus Pronounces Woes

24 "But woe to you who are rich,
For you have received your consolation.
25 Woe to you who are full,
For you shall hunger.
Woe to you who laugh now,
For you shall mourn and weep.
26 Woe to you[a] when all[b] men speak well of you,
For so did their fathers to the false prophets.

Love Your Enemies

27 "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. 29 To him who strikes you on the *one* cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold *your* tunic either. 30 Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask *them* back. 31 And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.

32 "But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the

6:26 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *to you.* [b]M-Text omits *all.*

Life Lessons

Luke 6:1–49

SITUATION
Jesus called and appointed His apostles. He spent the next three years teaching them. He healed, He taught about loving enemies and not criticizing others, He praised those who did as He said.

OBSERVATION
Jesus said that His followers should be different from the world, following His example of right living.

INSPIRATION
From the file entitled "It Ain't Gonna Happen," I pull and pose this suggestion. Let's make Christ's command a federal law. Everyone has to make God's love his or her home. Let it herewith be stated and hereby declared:

No person may walk out into the world to begin the day until he or she has stood beneath the Cross to receive God's love.

Cabbies. Presidents. Preachers. Tooth pullers and truck drivers. All required to linger at the fountain of His favor until all thirst is gone. I mean a can't-drink-another-drop satisfaction. All hearts hydrous. Then, and only then, are they permitted to enter the interstates, biology labs, classrooms, and boardrooms of the world.

Don't you ache for the change we'd see? Less honking and locking horns, more hugging and helping kids. We'd pass fewer judgments and more compliments. Forgiveness would skyrocket. How could you refuse to give a second chance when God has made your life one big mulligan? Doctors

would replace sedative prescriptions with Scripture meditation: "Six times an hour reflect on God's promise: *'I have loved you with an everlasting love'"* (Jeremiah 31:3, emphasis mine). And can't you hear the newscast? "Since the implementation of the love law, divorce rates have dropped, cases of runaway children have plummeted, and Republicans and Democrats have disbanded their parties and decided to work together."

Wild idea? I agree. God's love can't be legislated, but it can be chosen. Choose it, won't you? For the sake of your heart. For the sake of your home. For Christ's sake, and yours, choose it. The prayer is as powerful as it is simple: "Lord, I receive Your love. Nothing can separate me from Your love." (From Come Thirsty by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

All around you people are hurting, even Christian brothers and sisters. Think of how you can meet their needs and encourage them. Follow Jesus' example in prayer and in love.

EXPLORATION

Discipleship—Matthew 10:42; 28:19; Luke 14:33; John 8:31, 32; 13:35; 15:8.

same. 34 And if you lend *to those* from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. 35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. 36 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

Do Not Judge

37 "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38 Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

39 And He spoke a parable to them: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch? 40 A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher. 41 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye? 42 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck that *is* in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the plank that *is* in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye.

A Tree Is Known by Its Fruit

43 "For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. 44 For every tree is known by its own fruit. For *men* do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. 45 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart[a] brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Build on the Rock

46 "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say? 47 Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: 48 He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock.[a] 49 But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell.[a] And the ruin of that house was great."

Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant

7 Now when He concluded all His sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum. 2 And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die. 3 So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant. 4 And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should

6:45 [a]NU-Text omits *treasure of his heart.* **6:48** [a]NU-Text reads *for it was well built.*
6:49 [a]NU-Text reads *collapsed.*

Habits

I like the story of the little boy who fell out of bed. When his Mom asked him what happened, he answered, "I don't know. I guess I stayed too close to where I got in." Easy to do the same with our faith. It's tempting just to stay where we got in and never move.

Growth is the goal of the Christian. Maturity is mandatory. If a child ceased to develop, the parent would be concerned, right? Doctors would be called. Tests would be run. When a child stops growing, something is wrong.

When a Christian stops growing, help is needed. If you are the same Christian you were a few months ago, be careful. You might be wise to get a checkup. Not on your body, but on your heart. Not a physical, but a spiritual.

May I suggest one?

First the habit of prayer: "Base your happiness on your hope in Christ. When trials come endure them patiently; steadfastly maintain the habit of prayer" (Romans 12:12 PHILLIPS).

Second, the habit of study: "The man who looks into the perfect law and makes a habit of so doing, is not the man who sees and forgets. He puts that law into practice and he wins true happiness" (James 1:25 PHILLIPS).

Third, the habit of giving: "On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come" (1 Corinthians 16:2).

And last of all, the habit of fellowship: "Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead let us encourage one another" (Hebrews 10:25 TEV).

There they are . . . habits worth having. Isn't it good to know that some habits are good for you? Make them a part of your day and grow. Don't make the mistake of the little boy. Don't stay too close to where you got in. It's risky resting on the edge.

Study Guide

Luke 6:47–49

- In your opinion, what are the two hardest habits to change?
- What are the three spiritual habits that you feel most strengthen your walk with God?
- What often hinders us from developing new habits that will help us grow spiritually?
- How do good spiritual habits function like a good foundation?
- What part does self-examination play in changing life habits?
- How do we relate to God differently when we are in the habit of obeying Him?
- What does it take to form a new habit?
- What does it take to change an old habit?
- Describe someone who, in your estimation, maintains a lifestyle of godly habits. What can you learn from that person?
- A year from now, what new habits would you like to have incorporated into your life?

do this was deserving, 5 "for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue."

6 Then Jesus went with them. And when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. 7 Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. 8 For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does *it*."

9 When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" 10 And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick.[a]

Jesus Raises the Son of the Widow of Nain

11 Now it happened, the day after, *that* He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. 12 And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. 13 When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." 14 Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried *him* stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." 15 So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother.

16 Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people." 17 And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.

John the Baptist Sends Messengers to Jesus

18 Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things. 19 And John, calling two of his disciples to *him,* sent *them* to Jesus,[a] saying, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"

20 When the men had come to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?' " 21 And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight.

22 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that *the* blind see, *the* lame walk, *the* lepers are cleansed, *the* deaf hear, *the* dead are raised, *the* poor have the gospel preached to them. 23 And blessed is *he* who is not offended because of Me."

24 When the messengers of John had departed, He began to speak to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 25 But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed those who are gorgeously appareled and live in luxury are in kings' courts. 26 But what

7:10 [a]NU-Text omits *who had been sick.* **7:19** [a]NU-Text reads *the Lord.*

Life Lessons

Luke 7:1–50

SITUATION
People heard about the signs and wonders Jesus was performing and came to meet Him. Jesus' popularity kept increasing.

OBSERVATION
Jesus pointed to people who had great faith in order to show what God desires from His people.

INSPIRATION
Two crowds. One entering the city and one leaving. They couldn't be more diverse. The group arriving buzzes with laughter and conversation. They follow Jesus. The group leaving the city is solemn—a herd of sadness hypnotized by the requiem of death. Above them rides the reason for their grief—a cold body on a wicker stretcher.

The woman at the back of the procession is the mother. She has walked this trail before. It seems like just yesterday she buried the body of her husband. Her son walked with her then. Now she walks alone, quarantined in her sadness. She is the victim of this funeral.

She is the one with no arm around her shoulder. She is the one who will sleep in the empty house tonight. She is the one who will make dinner for one and conversation with none. She is the one most violated. The thief stole her most treasured diamond—companionship.

The followers of Jesus stop and step aside as the procession shadows by. The blanket of mourning muffles the laughter of the

did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. 27 This is *he* of whom it is written:

'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You.'[a]

28 For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist;[a] but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

29 And when all the people heard *Him,* even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. 30 But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.

31 And the Lord said,[a] "To what then shall I liken the men of this generation, and what are they like? 32 They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, saying:

'We played the flute for you,
And you did not dance;
We mourned to you,
And you did not weep.'

33 For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' 34 The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' 35 But wisdom is justified by all her children."

A Sinful Woman Forgiven

36 Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. 37 And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that *Jesus* sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, 38 and stood at His feet behind *Him* weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped *them* with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed *them* with the fragrant oil. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw *this,* he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman *this is* who is touching Him, for she is a sinner."

40 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you."

So he said, "Teacher, say it."

41 "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?"

43 Simon answered and said, "I suppose the *one* whom he forgave more."

7:27 [a]Malachi 3:1 **7:28** [a]NU-Text reads *there is none greater than John.* **7:31** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *And the Lord said.*

disciples. No one spoke. What could they say? . . .

Jesus, however, knew what to say and what to do. When He saw the mother, His heart began to break . . . and His lips began to tighten. He glared at the angel of death that hovered over the body of the boy. "Not this time, Satan. This boy is Mine."

At that moment the mother walked in front of Him. Jesus spoke to her. "Don't cry." She stopped and looked into this stranger's face. If she wasn't shocked by his presumption, you can bet some of the witnesses were.

Don't cry? Don't cry? What kind of request is that?

A request only God can make.

Jesus stepped toward the bier and touched it. The pall-bearers stopped marching. The mourners ceased moaning. As Jesus stared at the boy, the crowd was silent. . . .

Jesus turned His attention to the dead boy. "Young man," His voice was calm, "come back to life again."

The living stood motionless as the dead came to life. Wooden fingers moved. Gray-pale cheeks blushed. The dead man sat up. . . .

Jesus must have smiled as the two embraced. Stunned, the crowd broke into cheers and applause. They hugged each other and slapped Jesus on the back. Someone proclaimed the undeniable, "God has come to help his people."

Jesus gave the woman much more than her son. He gave her a secret—a whisper that was overheard by us. "That," He said pointing at the cot, "that is fantasy. This," He grinned, putting an arm around the boy, "this is reality." (From

Six Hours One Friday by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What can you do to demonstrate your faith? Is there something you are afraid to do? Someone you don't want to see? A relationship that needs repair? Ask God to help you do it. Believe He will, then step out and act.

EXPLORATION
Faith—1 Samuel 17:37; 2 Chronicles 20:20; John 6:28, 29; Romans 10:9, 17; Ephesians 6:16; Hebrews 11:1, 6; James 2:17.

Yours is the hand He loves to hold.

—Max Lucado (3:16)

And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." 44Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped *them* with the hair of her head. 45You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. 46You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. 47Therefore I say to you, her sins, which *are* many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loves little."

48Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

49And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

50Then He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

Many Women Minister to Jesus

8 Now it came to pass, afterward, that He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve *were* with Him, 2and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities—Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, 3and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him[a] from their substance.

The Parable of the Sower

4And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable: 5"A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. 6Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. 7And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. 8But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold." When He had said these things He cried, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

The Purpose of Parables

9Then His disciples asked Him, saying, "What does this parable mean?"

10And He said, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest *it is given* in parables, that

'Seeing they may not see,
And hearing they may not understand.'[a]

The Parable of the Sower Explained

11"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. 12Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. 13But the ones on the rock *are those* who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a

8:3 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *them.* **8:10** [a]Isaiah 6:9

while and in time of temptation fall away. 14 Now the ones *that* fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. 15 But the ones *that* fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep *it* and bear fruit with patience.

The Parable of the Revealed Light

16 "No one, when he has lit a lamp, covers it with a vessel or puts *it* under a bed, but sets *it* on a lampstand, that those who enter may see the light. 17 For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor *anything* hidden that will not be known and come to light. 18 Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him *more* will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him."

Jesus' Mother and Brothers Come to Him

19 Then His mother and brothers came to Him, and could not approach Him because of the crowd. 20 And it was told Him *by some,* who said, "Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see You."

21 But He answered and said to them, "My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it."

Wind and Wave Obey Jesus

22 Now it happened, on a certain day, that He got into a boat with His disciples. And He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side of the lake." And they launched out. 23 But as they sailed He fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling *with water,* and were in jeopardy. 24 And they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!"

Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm. 25 But He said to them, "Where is your faith?"

And they were afraid, and marveled, saying to one another, "Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!"

A Demon-Possessed Man Healed

26 Then they sailed to the country of the Gadarenes,[a] which is opposite Galilee. 27 And when He stepped out on the land, there met Him a certain man from the city who had demons for a long time. And he wore no clothes,[a] nor did he live in a house but in the tombs. 28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before Him, and with a loud voice said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me!" 29 For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had often seized him, and he was kept under guard, bound with chains and shackles; and he broke the bonds and was driven by the demon into the wilderness.

8:26 [a]NU-Text reads *Gerasenes.* **8:27** [a]NU-Text reads *who had demons and for a long time wore no clothes.*

Life Lessons

Luke 8:1—9:17

SITUATION

Because of increasing hostility from the Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus stopped going to the synagogues. Instead, He began to preach in the countryside.

OBSERVATION

Jesus emphasized that not only must we hear God's words, but we must act on them, too. If Jesus has the power to feed over five thousand people, He surely has good reason for the words He gives us.

INSPIRATION

Five thousand men and their families surround Jesus. They are getting hungry, and the disciples are getting antsy. "When the day began to wear away, the twelve came and said to Him . . ." (Luke 9:12).

The twelve came. The three words imply an adjourned meeting. A committee had been formed, convened, and dismissed, all in the absence of Jesus. The disciples didn't consult their leader; they just described the problems and then told Him what to do.

Problem number one: location. "No one lives in this place."

Problem number two: time. "It is already very late."

Problem number three: budget. In a parallel passage, Philip, the deacon in charge of finance, produces a just-printed pie chart. "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little" (John 6:7).

Do you detect an attitude behind those phrases? "No one lives in this place." (Who picked this venue?) "It's already very late." (Whoever preached forgot to watch the clock.) "We would all have to work a month." (Why didn't these people bring their own food?) The disciples' frustration borders on downright irreverence. Rather than *ask* Jesus what to do, they *tell* Jesus what to do. "Send the multitude away, that they may go into the surrounding towns and country, and lodge and get provisions; for we are in a deserted place here" (Luke 9:12). The disciples tell Jesus to tell the people to get lost.

Not one of their finer moments. Shouldn't they have known better? This is not the first problem they've seen Jesus face or fix. Rewind the tape and make a list of miracles they've witnessed. Water turned to wine, a boy healed in Capernaum, a boatload of fish caught at Galilee. They've seen Jesus raise a little girl from the dead, banish at least one demon, heal several paralytics and one mother-in-law. They've watched Jesus still a storm, resurrect a widow's son, and stop a twelve-year hemorrhage. . . .

Veteran disciples have seen Jesus in action. The whole country has seen Jesus in action. He has earned a national reputation for doing the impossible. But do the disciples ask Jesus for His opinion? Does anyone in the committee meeting think about asking the miracle man what to do? Does John or Peter or James raise a hand and say, "Hey, I've got an idea. Let's go talk to the One who stilled the storm and raised the dead. Maybe He has a suggestion"?

30 Jesus asked him, saying, "What is your name?"

And he said, "Legion," because many demons had entered him. 31 And they begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss.

32 Now a herd of many swine was feeding there on the mountain. So they begged Him that He would permit them to enter them. And He permitted them. 33 Then the demons went out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the lake and drowned.

34 When those who fed *them* saw what had happened, they fled and told *it* in the city and in the country. 35 Then they went out to see what had happened, and came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. 36 They also who had seen *it* told them by what means he who had been demon-possessed was healed. 37 Then the whole multitude of the surrounding region of the Gadarenes[a] asked Him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. And He got into the boat and returned.

38 Now the man from whom the demons had departed begged Him that he might be with Him. But Jesus sent him away, saying, 39 "Return to your own house, and tell what great things God has done for you." And he went his way and proclaimed throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him.

A Girl Restored to Life and a Woman Healed

40 So it was, when Jesus returned, that the multitude welcomed Him, for they were all waiting for Him. 41 And behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue. And he fell down at Jesus' feet and begged Him to come to his house, 42 for he had an only daughter about twelve years of age, and she was dying.

But as He went, the multitudes thronged Him. 43 Now a woman, having a flow of blood for twelve years, who had spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any, 44 came from behind and touched the border of His garment. And immediately her flow of blood stopped.

45 And Jesus said, "Who touched Me?"

When all denied it, Peter and those with him[a] said, "Master, the multitudes throng and press You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?' "[b]

46 But Jesus said, "Somebody touched Me, for I perceived power going out from Me." 47 Now when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before Him, she declared to Him in the presence of all the people the reason she had touched Him and how she was healed immediately.

48 And He said to her, "Daughter, be of good cheer;[a] your faith has made you well. Go in peace."

49 While He was still speaking, someone came from the ruler of the synagogue's *house,* saying to him, "Your daughter is dead. Do not trouble the Teacher."[a]

8:37 [a]NU-Text reads *Gerasenes.* **8:45** [a]NU-Text omits *and those with him.* [b]NU-Text omits *and You say, 'Who touched Me?'* **8:48** [a]NU-Text omits *be of good cheer.* **8:49** [a]NU-Text adds *anymore.*

50 But when Jesus heard *it,* He answered him, saying, "Do not be
afraid; only believe, and she will be made well." 51 When He came
into the house, He permitted no one to go in[a] except Peter, James,
and John,[b] and the father and mother of the girl. 52 Now all wept and
mourned for her; but He said, "Do not weep; she is not dead, but
sleeping." 53 And they ridiculed Him, knowing that she was dead.
54 But He put them all outside,[a] took her by the hand and called,
saying, "Little girl, arise." 55 Then her spirit returned, and she arose
immediately. And He commanded that she be given *something* to eat.
56 And her parents were astonished, but He charged them to tell no
one what had happened.

Sending Out the Twelve

9 Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them
power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. 2 He
sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. 3 And He
said to them, "Take nothing for the journey, neither staffs nor bag nor
bread nor money; and do not have two tunics apiece.
4 "Whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart.
5 And whoever will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake
off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them."
6 So they departed and went through the towns, preaching the gos-
pel and healing everywhere.

Herod Seeks to See Jesus

7 Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by Him; and he
was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had risen from
the dead, 8 and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that
one of the old prophets had risen again. 9 Herod said, "John I have
beheaded, but who is this of whom I hear such things?" So he sought
to see Him.

Feeding the Five Thousand

10 And the apostles, when they had returned, told Him all that
they had done. Then He took them and went aside privately into a
deserted place belonging to the city called Bethsaida. 11 But when the
multitudes knew *it,* they followed Him; and He received them and
spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who had
need of healing. 12 When the day began to wear away, the twelve came
and said to Him, "Send the multitude away, that they may go into the
surrounding towns and country, and lodge and get provisions; for we
are in a deserted place here."
13 But He said to them, "You give them something to eat."
And they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish,
unless we go and buy food for all these people." 14 For there were
about five thousand men.
Then He said to His disciples, "Make them sit down in groups of
fifty." 15 And they did so, and made them all sit down.
16 Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to

8:51 [a]NU-Text adds *with Him.* [b]NU-Text and M-Text read *Peter, John, and James.*
8:54 [a]NU-Text omits *put them all outside.*

Please note: the mistake of the disciples is not that they calculated the problem but that they calculated without Christ. In giving Jesus no chance, they gave their day no chance. They reserved a table for twelve at the Restaurant of the Rotten Day.

How unnecessary! If your father were Bill Gates and your computer broke, where would you turn? If Stradivari were your dad and your violin string snapped, to whom would you go? If your father is God and you have a problem on your hands, what do you do? (From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
As you read God's Word, listen to the Holy Spirit. What is God telling you to *do*? Don't ignore His prodding—obey Him now.

EXPLORATION
Hearing—Exodus 22:27; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Isaiah 59:1; John 5:24; Romans 2:13; 10:17; Revelation 3:20.

Jesus' Compassion

Interestingly, the stress seen that day is not on Jesus' face, but on the faces of the disciples.

"Send the crowds away," they demand. Fair request. "After all," they are saying, "You've taught them. You've healed them. You've accommodated them. And now they're getting hungry. If we don't send them away, they'll want You to feed them, too!"

I wish I could have seen the expression on the disciples' faces when they heard the Master's response. . . .

"You give them something to eat." . . .

Rather than look to God, they looked in their wallets. "That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"

"Y-y-y-you've got to be kidding"

"He can't be serious."

"It's one of Jesus' jokes"

"Do you know how many people are out there?"

Eyes watermelon wide. Jaws dangling open. One ear hearing the din of the crowd, the other the command of God.

Don't miss the contrasting views. When Jesus saw the people, He saw an opportunity to love and affirm value. When the disciples saw the people they saw thousands of problems.

Also, don't miss the irony. In the midst of a bakery—in the presence of the Eternal Baker—they tell the "Bread of Life" that there is no bread.

How silly we must appear to God.

Here's where Jesus should have given up. This is the point in the pressure-packed day where Jesus should have exploded. The sorrow, the life threats, the exuberance, the crowds, the interruptions, the demands, and now this. His own disciples can't do what He asks them. In front of five thousand men, they let Him down.

"Beam Me up, Father," should have been Jesus' next words. But they weren't. Instead He inquires, "How many loaves do you have?"

The disciples bring Him a little boy's lunch.

A lunch pail becomes a banquet, and all are fed. No word of reprimand is given. No furrowed brow of anger is seen. No "I-told-you-so" speech is delivered. The same compassion Jesus extends to the crowd is extended to His friends.

Study Guide

Read Luke 9:10–17 and John 6:1–15.

- What do you think Jesus wanted His disciples to learn from this event?
- Who are you most like in this story? Philip? Andrew? The boy? The people? Why?
- Think of a time when God provided for your needs in an unusual or surprising way. How did that experience strengthen your faith?
- What problems in your life seem to have no solutions?
- Do you find it difficult to trust God to meet your needs? Why?
- What does this story teach us about the way God provides for His people?
- How does the faith of other believers inspire us to trust God?
- What sometimes keeps you from trusting God to meet your needs?

heaven, He blessed and broke them, and gave *them* to the disciples to set before the multitude. 17 So they all ate and were filled, and twelve baskets of the leftover fragments were taken up by them.

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ

18 And it happened, as He was alone praying, *that* His disciples joined Him, and He asked them, saying, "Who do the crowds say that I am?"

19 So they answered and said, "John the Baptist, but some *say* Elijah; and others *say* that one of the old prophets has risen again."

20 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Peter answered and said, "The Christ of God."

Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection

21 And He strictly warned and commanded them to tell this to no one, 22 saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day."

Take Up the Cross and Follow Him

23 Then He said to *them* all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily,[a] and follow Me. 24 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. 25 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? 26 For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His *own* glory, and *in His* Father's, and of the holy angels. 27 But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God."

Jesus Transfigured on the Mount

28 Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. 29 As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe *became* white *and* glistening. 30 And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, 31 who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. 32 But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him. 33 Then it happened, as they were parting from Him, *that* Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said.

34 While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. 35 And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son.[a] Hear Him!" 36 When the voice had ceased, Jesus was found alone. But they kept quiet, and told no one in those days any of the things they had seen.

9:23 [a]M-Text omits *daily.* **9:35** [a]NU-Text reads *This is My Son, the Chosen One.*

Life LESSONS

Luke 9:18—10:42

SITUATION

Luke recorded the stories of busy people. Religious leaders neglected the injured Samaritan because they were too busy. Martha was too busy to merely listen to Jesus. He encouraged His hearers never to be too busy to love God or serve others. He Himself took some time away with three of His disciples to teach them an important lesson.

OBSERVATION

Jesus is the ultimate authority. God told His disciples—and us—to listen to Him.

INSPIRATION

[In] Luke 9 . . . God isolated the authoritative voice of history and declared, "Hear Him."

It's the first scene of the final act in the earthly life of Christ. Jesus has taken three followers on a prayer retreat.

"He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening" (Luke 9:28, 29).

Oh, to have heard that prayer. What words so lifted Christ that His face was altered? Did He see His home? Hear His home?

As a college sophomore, I took a summer job far from home. Too far. My courage melted with each mile I drove. One night I was so homesick I thought my bones would melt. But my parents were traveling, and cell phones were uninvented. Though I knew no one would answer, I

called home anyway. Not once or twice, but half a dozen times. The familiar ring of the home phone brought comfort.

Maybe Jesus needed comfort. Knowing that His road home will pass through Calvary, He puts in a call. God is quick to answer. "Behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah" (v. 30).

The two were perfect comfort givers. Moses understood tough journeys. Elijah could relate to an unusual exit. So Jesus and Moses and Elijah discuss "His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (v. 31).

Peter, James, and John, meanwhile, take a good nap. "Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him. . . . Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah,' not knowing what he said" (vv. 32–33).

What would we do without Peter? The guy has no idea what he is saying, but that doesn't keep him from speaking. He has no clue what he is doing but offers to do it anyway. This is his idea: three monuments for the three heroes. Great plan? Not in God's book. . . .

Peter's error is not that he spoke, but that he spoke heresy. Three monuments would equate Moses and Elijah with Jesus. No one shares the platform with Christ. God comes with the suddenness of a blue norther and leaves Peter gulping. "This is My Son." Not "a son" as if He were clumped in with the rest of us. Not "the best son"

A Boy Is Healed

37 Now it happened on the next day, when they had come down
from the mountain, that a great multitude met Him. 38 Suddenly a
man from the multitude cried out, saying, "Teacher, I implore You,
look on my son, for he is my only child. 39 And behold, a spirit seizes
him, and he suddenly cries out; it convulses him so that he foams *at
the mouth;* and it departs from him with great difficulty, bruising him.
40 So I implored Your disciples to cast it out, but they could not."

41 Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse genera-
tion, how long shall I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son
here." 42 And as he was still coming, the demon threw him down and
convulsed *him.* Then Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the
child, and gave him back to his father.

Jesus Again Predicts His Death

43 And they were all amazed at the majesty of God.

But while everyone marveled at all the things which Jesus did, He
said to His disciples, 44 "Let these words sink down into your ears, for
the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men." 45 But
they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them so
that they did not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about
this saying.

Who Is the Greatest?

46 Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be
greatest. 47 And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a lit-
tle child and set him by Him, 48 and said to them, "Whoever receives
this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me
receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be
great."

Jesus Forbids Sectarianism

49 Now John answered and said, "Master, we saw someone casting
out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not
follow with us."

50 But Jesus said to him, "Do not forbid *him,* for he who is not
against us[a] is on our[b] side."

A Samaritan Village Rejects the Savior

51 Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be
received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, 52 and
sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a vil-
lage of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. 53 But they did not receive
Him, because His face was *set* for the journey to Jerusalem. 54 And
when His disciples James and John saw *this,* they said, "Lord, do You
want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume
them, just as Elijah did?"[a]

55 But He turned and rebuked them,[a] and said, "You do not know

9:50 [a]NU-Text reads *you.* [b]NU-Text reads *your.* **9:54** [a]NU-Text omits *just as Elijah did.* **9:55** [a]NU-Text omits the rest of this verse.

what manner of spirit you are of. 56 For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save *them.*"[a] And they went to another village.

The Cost of Discipleship

57 Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, *that* someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go."

58 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay *His* head."

59 Then He said to another, "Follow Me."

But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."

60 Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God."

61 And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go *and* bid them farewell who are at my house."

62 But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

9:56 [a]NU-Text omits the first sentence of this verse.

as if He were valedictorian of the human race. Jesus is, according to God, "My Son, My Chosen One," absolutely unique and unlike anyone else. So:

"Hear Him!" (v. 35).

(From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Who is Jesus to you? The world sees Him as one of many. But Jesus is not one of many, He is the only One. What does that mean to you?

EXPLORATION

Love the Poor—Proverbs 31:20; 1 Corinthians 13:3.

God offers authentic love. His devotion is the real deal. But He won't give you the genuine until you surrender the imitations.

—Max Lucado (A Love Worth Giving)

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: The Son of God

One of the most dramatic scenes in the New Testament occurred in a city known as Caesarea Philippi. . . . It was indeed a dramatic picture. In the midst of this carnival of marble columns and golden idols, a penniless, homeless, nameless Nazarene asks His band of followers, "Who do you say that I am?"

The immensity of the question is staggering. I would imagine that Peter's answer did not come without some hesitation. Shuffling of feet. Anxious silence. How absurd that this man should be the Son of God. No trumpets. No purple robes. No armies. Yet there was that glint of determination in His eye and that edge of certainty in His message. Peter's response sliced the silence. "I believe that you are . . . the Son of God."

Many have looked at Jesus; but few have seen Him. Many have seen His shadow, His people, His story. But only a handful have seen Jesus. Only a few have looked through the fog of religiosity and found Him. Only a few have dared to stand eye to eye and heart to heart with Jesus and say, "I believe that you are the Son of God." (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1443.

The Seventy Sent Out

10 After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also,[a] and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go. [2] Then He said to them, "The harvest truly *is* great, but the laborers *are* few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. [3] Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. [4] Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road. [5] But whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house.' [6] And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you. [7] And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house. [8] Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. [9] And heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' [10] But whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, [11] 'The very dust of your city which clings to us[a] we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you.' [12] But[a] I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city.

Woe to the Impenitent Cities

[13] "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. [14] But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. [15] And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades.[a] [16] He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me."

The Seventy Return with Joy

[17] Then the seventy[a] returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."

[18] And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. [19] Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. [20] Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather[a] rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

Jesus Rejoices in the Spirit

[21] In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. [22] All[a] things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and *the one* to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him.*"

[23] Then He turned to *His* disciples and said privately, "Blessed *are* the eyes which see the things you see; [24] for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen *it,* and to hear what you hear, and have not heard *it.*"

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

[25] And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

[26] He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading *of it*?"

[27] So he answered and said, "*'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,'*[a] and *'your neighbor as yourself.'*"[b]

[28] And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live."

[29] But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

[30] Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain *man* went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded *him,* and departed,

10:1 [a]NU-Text reads *seventy-two others.* **10:11** [a]NU-Text reads *our feet.* **10:12** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *But.* **10:15** [a]NU-Text reads *will you be exalted to heaven? You will be thrust down to Hades!* **10:17** [a]NU-Text reads *seventy-two.* **10:20** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *rather.* **10:22** [a]M-Text reads *And turning to the disciples He said, "All . . .* **10:27** [a]Deuteronomy 6:5 [b]Leviticus 19:18

leaving *him* half dead. 31 Now by chance a certain priest came down
that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.
32 Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked,
and passed by on the other side. 33 But a certain Samaritan, as he
journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had com-
passion. 34 So he went to *him* and bandaged his wounds, pouring on
oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an
inn, and took care of him. 35 On the next day, when he departed,[a] he
took out two denarii, gave *them* to the innkeeper, and said to him,
'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again,
I will repay you.' 36 So which of these three do you think was neighbor
to him who fell among the thieves?"

37 And he said, "He who showed mercy on him."

Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Mary and Martha Worship and Serve

38 Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village;
and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house.
39 And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus'[a] feet and
heard His word. 40 But Martha was distracted with much serving, and
she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister
has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me."

41 And Jesus[a] answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are
worried and troubled about many things. 42 But one thing is needed,
and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away
from her."

The Model Prayer

11 Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when
He ceased, *that* one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach
us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."

2 So He said to them, "When you pray, say:

Our Father in heaven,[a]
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.[b]
Your will be done
On earth as *it is* in heaven.
3 Give us day by day our daily bread.
4 And forgive us our sins,
For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one." [a]

A Friend Comes at Midnight

5 And He said to them, "Which of you shall have a friend, and go to
him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 for
a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing

10:35 [a]NU-Text omits *when he departed.* **10:39** [a]NU-Text reads *the Lord's.* **10:41** [a]NU-Text reads *the Lord.* **11:2** [a]NU-Text omits *Our* and *in heaven.* [b]NU-Text omits the rest of this verse. **11:4** [a]NU-Text omits *But deliver us from the evil one.*

Life Lessons

Luke 11:1–54

SITUATION
Jesus gave the disciples a good example by praying constantly. The disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray.

OBSERVATION
Jesus used a parable to show them they should be persistent in prayer. He said that everyone who asks would receive.

INSPIRATION
I like the King James translation [of Hebrews 11:6]: "He is a rewarder of them that *diligently* seek him" (italics mine).

"Diligently"—what a great word. Be diligent in your search. Be hungry in your quest, relentless in your pilgrimage. Let this book be but one of dozens you read about Jesus and this hour be but one of hundreds in which you seek Him. Step away from the puny pursuits of possessions and positions, and seek your King.

Don't be satisfied with angels. Don't be content with stars in the sky. Seek Him out as the shepherds did. Long for Him as Simeon did. Worship Him as the wise men did. Do as John and Andrew did: ask for His address. Do as Matthew: invite Jesus into your house. Imitate Zacchaeus. Risk whatever it takes to see Christ.

God rewards those who seek *Him.* Not those who seek doctrine or religion or systems or creeds. Many settle for these lesser passions, but the reward goes to those who settle for nothing less than Jesus Himself. And what is the

Rivalry

Sweet milk turns sour from being too warm too long.

Sweet dispositions turn sour for the same reason. Let aggravation stew without a period of cooling down, and the result? A bad, bitter, clabberish attitude.

It's the story of Martha. A dear soul given to hospitality and organization. More frugal than frivolous, more practical than pensive. Ask her to choose between a book and a broom, and she'll take the broom.

Mary, however, will take the book. Mary is Martha's sister. Same parents, different priorities. Martha has things to do. Mary has thoughts to think.

Apparently Martha worried too much, too. So much so that she started bossing God around. Worry will do that to you. It makes you forget who's in charge.

What makes this case interesting, however, is that Martha is worried about something good. She's having Jesus over for dinner. She's literally serving God. Her aim was to please Jesus. But, as she began to work for Him her work became more important than her Lord. What began as a way to serve Jesus, slowly and subtly became a way to serve self.

One look at the flour-covered scowl will tell you that. "That Mary. Here I am alone in the kitchen while she's out there."

Oh boy. She's miffed. Look at her glaring over her shoulder through the doorway. That's Mary she's staring at. The one seated on the floor, listening to Jesus. "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me" (Luke 10:40).

It's easy to forget who is the servant and who is to be served.

Satan knows that. This tool of distortion is one of Satan's slyest. Note: He didn't take Martha out of the kitchen; he took away her purpose in the kitchen. He won't take you away from your ministry; he'll disillusion you in your ministry.

Guard your attitude.

What matters more than the type of service is the heart behind the service. A bad attitude spoils the gift we leave on the altar for God.

God has gifted you with talents. He has done the same to your neighbor. If you concern yourself with your neighbor's talents, you will neglect yours. But if you concern yourself with yours, you could inspire both.

Study Guide

Luke 10:38–42

- What kinds of attitudes could be associated with sour milk?
- Describe someone you know who became disillusioned with ministry.
- How can we keep Satan from robbing us of our joy in our service to God?
- In what ways are our attitudes as evident as the clothes on our bodies?
- What makes it so difficult to change a wrong attitude?
- If you had been in Martha's shoes, how do you think you would have felt about doing all the work while Mary chatted with Jesus?
- How do you imagine Jesus' words changed Martha's attitude?
- If positive attitudes get us farther in life, why do we give in to negativity?
- What wrong attitudes do you need God's help to change?

to set before him'; [7] and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'? [8] I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.

Keep Asking, Seeking, Knocking

[9] "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. [10] For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. [11] If a son asks for bread[a] from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if *he asks* for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? [12] Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? [13] If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

A House Divided Cannot Stand

[14] And He was casting out a demon, and it was mute. So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke; and the multitudes marveled. [15] But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebub,[a] the ruler of the demons."

[16] Others, testing *Him,* sought from Him a sign from heaven. [17] But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house *divided* against a house falls. [18] If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out demons by Beelzebub. [19] And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? Therefore they will be your judges. [20] But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. [21] When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. [22] But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils. [23] He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters.

An Unclean Spirit Returns

[24] "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' [25] And when he comes, he finds *it* swept and put in order. [26] Then he goes and takes with *him* seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first."

Keeping the Word

[27] And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed *is* the womb that bore You, and *the* breasts which nursed You!"

11:11 [a] NU-Text omits the words from *bread* through *for* in the next sentence.
11:15 [a] NU-Text and M-Text read *Beelzebul.*

reward? What awaits those who seek Jesus? Nothing short of the heart of Jesus. "We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Can you think of a greater gift than to be like Jesus? Christ felt no guilt; God wants to banish yours. Jesus had no bad habits; God wants to remove yours. Jesus had no fear of death; God wants you to be fearless. Jesus had kindness for the diseased and mercy for the rebellious and courage for the challenges. God wants you to have the same.

He loves you just the way you are, but He refuses to leave you that way. He wants you to be just like Jesus. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Describe your spiritual life. In what ways are you diligently seeking after God? How often do you pray, and what do you pray about? Develop a plan to increase your prayer life.

EXPLORATION

Prayer—Matthew 7:7–11; John 14:13, 14; 15:7; Philippians 4:6.

28 But He said, "More than that, blessed *are*
those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

Seeking a Sign

29 And while the crowds were thickly gath-
ered together, He began to say, "This is an
evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign
will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the
prophet.[a] 30 For as Jonah became a sign to
the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be
to this generation. 31 The queen of the South
will rise up in the judgment with the men of
this generation and condemn them, for she
came from the ends of the earth to hear the
wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater
than Solomon *is* here. 32 The men of Nineveh
will rise up in the judgment with this genera-
tion and condemn it, for they repented at the
preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than
Jonah *is* here.

The Lamp of the Body

33 "No one, when he has lit a lamp, puts
it in a secret place or under a basket, but on
a lampstand, that those who come in may
see the light. 34 The lamp of the body is the
eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your
whole body also is full of light. But when *your*
eye is bad, your body also *is* full of darkness.
35 Therefore take heed that the light which is in
you is not darkness. 36 If then your whole body
is full of light, having no part dark, *the* whole
body will be full of light, as when the bright
shining of a lamp gives you light."

Woe to the Pharisees and Lawyers

37 And as He spoke, a certain Pharisee asked
Him to dine with him. So He went in and sat
down to eat. 38 When the Pharisee saw *it,* he
marveled that He had not first washed before
dinner.

39 Then the Lord said to him, "Now you
Pharisees make the outside of the cup and
dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed
and wickedness. 40 Foolish ones! Did not He
who made the outside make the inside also?
41 But rather give alms of such things as you
have; then indeed all things are clean to you.

42 "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe
mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and
pass by justice and the love of God. These you
ought to have done, without leaving the others
undone. 43 Woe to you Pharisees! For you love
the best seats in the synagogues and greetings
in the marketplaces. 44 Woe to you, scribes and
Pharisees, hypocrites![a] For you are like graves
which are not seen, and the men who walk
over *them* are not aware *of them.*"

45 Then one of the lawyers answered and
said to Him, "Teacher, by saying these things
You reproach us also."

46 And He said, "Woe to you also, lawyers!
For you load men with burdens hard to bear,
and you yourselves do not touch the burdens
with one of your fingers. 47 Woe to you! For
you build the tombs of the prophets, and your
fathers killed them. 48 In fact, you bear witness
that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for
they indeed killed them, and you build their
tombs. 49 Therefore the wisdom of God also
said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles,
and *some* of them they will kill and persecute,'
50 that the blood of all the prophets which was
shed from the foundation of the world may
be required of this generation, 51 from the
blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who
perished between the altar and the temple.
Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this
generation.

52 "Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken
away the key of knowledge. You did not enter
in yourselves, and those who were entering in
you hindered."

53 And as He said these things to them,[a] the
scribes and the Pharisees began to assail *Him*
vehemently, and to cross-examine Him about
many things, 54 lying in wait for Him, and
seeking to catch Him in something He might
say, that they might accuse Him.[a]

Beware of Hypocrisy

12 In the meantime, when an innumer-
able multitude of people had gathered
together, so that they trampled one another,
He began to say to His disciples first *of all,*
"Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which
is hypocrisy. 2 For there is nothing covered that
will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not

11:29 [a]NU-Text omits *the prophet.* **11:44** [a]NU-Text omits *scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.* **11:53** [a]NU-Text reads *And when He left there.* **11:54** [a]NU-Text omits *and seeking* and *that they might accuse Him.*

be known. 3 Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.

Jesus Teaches the Fear of God

4 "And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. 5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!

6 "Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins?[a] And not one of them is forgotten before God. 7 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Confess Christ Before Men

8 "Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. 9 But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.

10 "And anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven.

11 "Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. 12 For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

The Parable of the Rich Fool

13 Then one from the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

14 But He said to him, "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" 15 And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness,[a] for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' 18 So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, *and* be merry."' 20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'

21 "So *is* he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Do Not Worry

22 Then He said to His disciples, "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. 23 Life is more than food, and the body *is more* than cloth-

12:6 [a]Greek *assarion,* a coin of very small value **12:15** [a]NU-Text reads *all covetousness.*

Life Lessons

Luke 12:1–59

SITUATION
Thousands of people gathered around Jesus. Yet He spoke to His disciples, letting the crowd overhear.

OBSERVATION
Believers shouldn't worry about the basic necessities of life. If we keep God first in our lives, He will sustain us. He is in control.

INSPIRATION
Be honest. Are we glad He says no to what we want and yes to what we need? Not always. If we ask for a new marriage, and He says honor the one you've got, we aren't happy. If we ask for healing, and He says learn through the pain, we aren't happy. If we ask for more money, and He says treasure the unseen, we aren't always happy.

When God doesn't do what we want, it's not easy. Never has been. Never will be. But faith is the conviction that God knows more than we do about this life and He will get us through it.

Remember, disappointment is caused by unmet expectations. Disappointment is cured by revamped expectations.

I like that story about the fellow who went to the pet store in search of a singing parakeet. Seems he was a bachelor and his house was too quiet. The store owner had just the bird for him, so the man bought it. The next day the bachelor came home from work to a house full of music. He went to the cage to feed the bird and noticed for the first time that the parakeet had only one leg.

Money

If money is the gauge of the heart, then this study revealed that money is on the heart of most Americans. In exchange for ten million dollars:

25 percent would abandon their family.
25 percent would abandon their church.
23 percent would become a prostitute for a week.
16 percent would give up their American citizenship.
16 percent would leave their spouse.
13 percent would put their children up for adoption.

Even more revealing than what Americans would do for ten million dollars is that most would do something. Two-thirds of those polled would agree to at least one—some to several—of the options.

Jesus had a word for that: greed.

Jesus also had a definition for greed. He called it the practice of measuring life by possessions.

Greed equates a person's worth with a person's purse.

You got a lot = you are a lot.

You got a little = you are little.

The consequence of such a philosophy is predictable. If you are the sum of what you own, then by all means own it all. No price is too high. No payment is too much.

Greed is relative. Greed is not defined by what something costs; it is measured by what it costs you. If anything costs you your faith or your family, the price is too high.

Study Guide

Read Luke 12:15–21.

- What is your definition of greed?
- Why does money tempt us to do things we wouldn't do for any other motivation?
- Describe the balance between preparing for the future financially and hoarding your wealth.
- What pressures in our society cause us to define ourselves by our possessions?
- How does greed show itself even in the necessities of life like food and clothing?
- Besides the price we pay for our possessions, what price do we pay in life for our greed?
- Describe the biblical balance between wealth and stewardship.
- At what age do you think we start learning to define ourselves by the things we own or have?
- Which of your possessions would be the hardest to let go?
- How do you respond to the phrase, "Everybody has his price"?

ing. 24 Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have
neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more
value are you than the birds? 25 And which of you by worrying can add
one cubit to his stature? 26 If you then are not able to do *the* least, why
are you anxious for the rest? 27 Consider the lilies, how they grow: they
neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory
was not arrayed like one of these. 28 If then God so clothes the grass,
which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how
much more *will He clothe* you, O *you* of little faith?

29 "And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink,
nor have an anxious mind. 30 For all these things the nations of the
world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things.
31 But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things[a] shall be added
to you.

32 "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to
give you the kingdom. 33 Sell what you have and give alms; provide
yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heav-
ens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys.
34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The Faithful Servant and the Evil Servant

35 "Let your waist be girded and *your* lamps burning; 36 and you
yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return
from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open
to him immediately. 37 Blessed *are* those servants whom the master,
when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will
gird himself and have them sit down *to eat,* and will come and serve
them. 38 And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the
third watch, and find *them* so, blessed are those servants. 39 But know
this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief
would come, he would have watched and[a] not allowed his house to
be broken into. 40 Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is
coming at an hour you do not expect."

41 Then Peter said to Him, "Lord, do You speak this parable *only* to
us, or to all *people?*"

42 And the Lord said, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward,
whom *his* master will make ruler over his household, to give *them*
their portion of food in due season? 43 Blessed *is* that servant whom
his master will find so doing when he comes. 44 Truly, I say to you that
he will make him ruler over all that he has. 45 But if that servant says
in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat the
male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, 46 the
master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for
him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and
appoint *him* his portion with the unbelievers. 47 And that servant who
knew his master's will, and did not prepare *himself* or do according
to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes.* 48 But he who did not
know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with
few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be

12:31 [a]NU-Text reads *His kingdom, and these things.* **12:39** [a]NU-Text reads *he would not have allowed.*

He felt cheated that he'd been sold a one-legged bird, so he called and complained.

"What do you want," the store owner responded, "a bird who can sing or a bird who can dance?" . . .

We need to hear that God is still in control. We need to hear that it's not over until He says so. We need to hear that life's mishaps and tragedies are not a reason to bail out. They are simply a reason to sit tight.

Corrie ten Boom used to say, "When the train goes through a tunnel and the world gets dark, do you jump out? Of course not. You sit still and trust the engineer to get you through." . . .

Next time you're disappointed, don't panic. Don't jump out. Don't give up. Just be patient and let God remind you He's still in control. It ain't over till it's over. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What worries consume your thoughts? Turn them over to God . . . then breathe a sigh of relief and live for Him. Let God carry your burdens.

EXPLORATION

Strong Faith—Proverbs 3:6; Matthew 6:33; Mark 8:14–21.

required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

Christ Brings Division

49 "I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already
kindled! 50 But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how dis-
tressed I am till it is accomplished! 51 Do *you* suppose that I came to
give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. 52 For
from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two,
and two against three. 53 Father will be divided against son and son
against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother,
mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law
against her mother-in-law."

Discern the Time

54 Then He also said to the multitudes, "Whenever you see a cloud
rising out of the west, immediately you say, 'A shower is coming';
and so it is. 55 And when *you see* the south wind blow, you say, 'There
will be hot weather'; and there is. 56 Hypocrites! You can discern the
face of the sky and of the earth, but how *is it* you do not discern this
time?

Make Peace with Your Adversary

57 "Yes, and why, even of yourselves, do you not judge what is right?
58 When you go with your adversary to the magistrate, make every
effort along the way to settle with him, lest he drag you to the judge,
the judge deliver you to the officer, and the officer throw you into
prison. 59 I tell you, you shall not depart from there till you have paid
the very last mite."

Repent or Perish

13 There were present at that season some who told Him about
the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sac-
rifices. 2 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that
these Galileans were worse sinners than all *other* Galileans, because
they suffered such things? 3 I tell you, no; but unless you repent you
will all likewise perish. 4 Or those eighteen on whom the tower in
Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners
than all *other* men who dwelt in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, no; but unless
you repent you will all likewise perish."

The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

6 He also spoke this parable: "A certain *man* had a fig tree planted in
his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. 7 Then
he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have
come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why
does it use up the ground?' 8 But he answered and said to him, 'Sir,
let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize *it*. 9 And if it
bears fruit, *well*. But if not, after that[a] you can cut it down.' "

13:9 [a] NU-Text reads *And if it bears fruit after that, well. But if not, you can cut it down.*

Life Lessons

Luke 13:1–35

SITUATION
Many Jews believed that good fortune, health, and wealth were signs of God's approval and that hardships or tragedies were signs of God's judgment.

OBSERVATION
When others experience hardship, it is easy to judge them. Jesus taught that the best response is compassion.

INSPIRATION
May I get specific for a moment? May I talk about sin? Dare I remind you and me that our past is laced with outbursts of anger, stained with nights of godless passion, and spotted with undiluted greed?

Suppose your past was made public? Suppose you were to stand on a stage while a film of every secret and selfish second was projected on the screen behind you?

Would you not crawl beneath the rug? Would you not scream for the heavens to have mercy? And would you not feel just a fraction . . . just a fraction of what Christ felt on the Cross? The icy displeasure of a sin-hating God? . . .

Christ carried all our sins in his body . . .

See Christ on the Cross? That's a gossiper hanging there. See Jesus? Embezzler. Liar. Bigot. See the crucified carpenter? He's a wife beater. Porn addict and murderer. See Bethlehem's boy? Call Him by His other names—Adolf Hitler, Osama bin Laden, and Jeffrey Dahmer.

Hold it, Max. Don't you

A Spirit of Infirmity

10 Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.
11 And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity
eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise *herself*
up. 12 But when Jesus saw her, He called *her* to *Him* and said to her,
"Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity." 13 And He laid *His* hands
on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.

14 But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation,
because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd,
"There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and
be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day."

15 The Lord then answered him and said, "Hypocrite![a] Does not
each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the
stall, and lead *it* away to water it? 16 So ought not this woman, being
a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for
eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?" 17 And
when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame;
and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were
done by Him.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

18 Then He said, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what
shall I compare it? 19 It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and
put in his garden; and it grew and became a large[a] tree, and the birds
of the air nested in its branches."

The Parable of the Leaven

20 And again He said, "To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? 21 It
is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures[a] of meal
till it was all leavened."

The Narrow Way

22 And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and jour-
neying toward Jerusalem. 23 Then one said to Him, "Lord, are there
few who are saved?"

And He said to them, 24 "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for
many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25 When once
the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin
to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for
us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you
are from,' 26 then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your pres-
ence, and You taught in our streets.' 27 But He will say, 'I tell you I do
not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers
of iniquity.' 28 There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you
see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom
of God, and yourselves thrust out. 29 They will come from the east and
the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom
of God. 30 And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first
who will be last."

13:15 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *Hypocrites.* **13:19** [a]NU-Text omits *large.*
13:21 [a]Greek *sata,* approximately two pecks in all

lump Christ with those evildoers. Don't you place His name in the same sentence with theirs!

I didn't. *He* did. Indeed He did more. More than place His name in the same sentence, He placed Himself in their place. And yours.

With hands nailed open, He invited God, "Treat Me as you would treat them!" And God did. In an act that broke the heart of the Father, yet honored the holiness of heaven, sin-purging judgment flowed over the sinless Son of the ages.

And heaven gave earth her finest gift. The Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Don't fool yourself by thinking that sins will be ignored. Confess your sins today, and enjoy the freedom that God wants for you. Jesus paid the price.

EXPLORATION

Repentance—2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 51:17; Proverbs 28:13; Ezekiel 18:30–32; Matthew 3:2; Acts 3:19; 2 Corinthians 7:10; 1 John 1:9.

Life Lessons

Luke 14:1–35

SITUATION
While these characteristics are all too common, Jesus' stories explain that pride, laziness, and the desire for honor have no place among His disciples.

OBSERVATION
Being a disciple of Christ requires humility, commitment, and servanthood.

INSPIRATION
Make no mistake, Jesus saw Himself as God. He leaves us with two options. Accept Him as God, or reject Him as a megalomaniac. There is no third alternative.

Oh, but we try to create one. Suppose I did the same? Suppose you came across me standing on the side of the road. I can go north or south. You ask me which way I'm going. My reply? "I'm going sorth."

Thinking you didn't hear correctly, you ask me to repeat the answer.

"I'm going sorth. I can't choose between north and south, so I'm going both. I'm going sorth."

"You can't do that," you reply. "You have to choose."

"OK," I concede, "I'll head nouth."

"Nouth is not an option!" you insist. "It's either north or south. One way or the other. To the right or to the left. When it comes to this road, you gotta pick."

When it comes to Christ, you've got to do the same. Call Him crazy, or crown Him as King. Dismiss Him as a fraud, or declare Him to be God. Walk away from Him, or bow before Him, but don't play games with

31 On that very day[a] some Pharisees came, saying to Him, "Get out
and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You."
32 And He said to them, "Go, tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons
and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third *day* I shall be
perfected.' 33 Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the
day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside
of Jerusalem.

Jesus Laments over Jerusalem

34 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and
stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather
your children together, as a hen *gathers* her brood under *her* wings,
but you were not willing! 35 See! Your house is left to you desolate;
and assuredly,[a] I say to you, you shall not see Me until *the time*
comes when you say, *'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the*
Lord!'"[b]

A Man with Dropsy Healed on the Sabbath

14 Now it happened, as He went into the house of one of the
rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath, that they
watched Him closely. 2 And behold, there was a certain man before
Him who had dropsy. 3 And Jesus, answering, spoke to the lawyers and
Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"[a]
4 But they kept silent. And He took *him* and healed him, and let him
go. 5 Then He answered them, saying, "Which of you, having a don-
key[a] or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him
out on the Sabbath day?" 6 And they could not answer Him regarding
these things.

Take the Lowly Place

7 So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted
how they chose the best places, saying to them: 8 "When you are
invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best
place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; 9 and he
who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this
man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. 10 But
when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that
when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up
higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at
the table with you. 11 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and
he who humbles himself will be exalted."
12 Then He also said to him who invited Him, "When you give a din-
ner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives,
nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid.
13 But when you give a feast, invite *the* poor, *the* maimed, *the* lame, *the*
blind. 14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for
you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

13:31 [a]NU-Text reads *In that very hour.* **13:35** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *assuredly.*
[b]Psalm 118:26 **14:3** [a]NU-Text adds *or not.* **14:5** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *son.*

The Parable of the Great Supper

15 Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard
these things, he said to Him, "Blessed *is* he who shall eat bread[a] in the
kingdom of God!"

16 Then He said to him, "A certain man gave a great supper and
invited many, 17 and sent his servant at supper time to say to those
who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' 18 But they all
with one *accord* began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have
bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have
me excused.' 19 And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and
I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' 20 Still another
said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' 21 So that
servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the mas-
ter of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into
the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here *the* poor and *the*
maimed and *the* lame and *the* blind.' 22 And the servant said, 'Mas-
ter, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' 23 Then the
master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and
compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled. 24 For I say to
you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.' "

Leaving All to Follow Christ

25 Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said
to them, 26 "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and
mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own
life also, he cannot be My disciple. 27 And whoever does not bear
his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. 28 For which of
you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the
cost, whether he has *enough* to finish *it*— 29 lest, after he has laid the
foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see *it* begin to mock him,
30 saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'? 31 Or
what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down
first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him
who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 Or else, while the
other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions
of peace. 33 So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has
cannot be My disciple.

Tasteless Salt Is Worthless

34 "Salt *is* good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be
seasoned? 35 It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, *but* men
throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

15 Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to
hear Him. 2 And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying,
"This Man receives sinners and eats with them." 3 So He spoke this
parable to them, saying:

4 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of
them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after

14:15 [a] M-Text reads *dinner.*

Him. Don't call Him a great man. Don't list Him among decent folk. Don't clump Him with Moses, Elijah, Buddha, Joseph Smith, Muhammad, or Confucius. He didn't leave that option. He is either God or godless. Heaven sent or hell born. All hope or all hype. But nothing in between. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Putting Christ first in all things takes practice and persistence. Day after day we learn to follow Him.

EXPLORATION

Discipleship—Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 6:33; 16:24; Mark 10:28; John 15:8; Galatians 5:24; Colossians 3:1–3; 2 Timothy 2:15; Revelation 3:19.

Life LESSONS

Luke 15:1–32

SITUATION
The Pharisees and teachers of the law were intrigued by Jesus' teaching; they were always nearby to hear Him and watch Him—and criticize Him. The Pharisees went to great lengths to be ceremonially clean, which they believed made them righteous in God's sight. Jesus' great concern, however, was offering salvation to sinners.

OBSERVATION
Jesus told three parables to correct the Pharisees' misconception about God. These parables show that God loves *all* people and wants everyone—especially sinners—to come to Him. God doesn't play favorites, and He rejoices when anyone turns to Him.

INSPIRATION
If there is a scene in this story [of the lost son] that deserves to be framed, it's the one of the father's outstretched hands. His tears are moving. His smile is stirring. But his hands call us home. Imagine those hands. Strong fingers. Palms wrinkled with lifelines. Stretching open like a wide gate, leaving entrance as the only option.

When Jesus told this parable of the loving father, I wonder, did He use His hands? When He got to this point in the story, did He open His arms to illustrate the point?

Did He perceive the thoughts of those in the audience who were thinking, "I could never go home. Not after my life"? Did He see a housewife look at the ground and a

the one which is lost until he finds it? 5 And when he has found *it,* he lays *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together *his* friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' 7 I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

The Parable of the Lost Coin

8 "Or what woman, having ten silver coins,[a] if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds *it?* 9 And when she has found *it,* she calls *her* friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!' 10 Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

The Parable of the Lost Son

11 Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to *his* father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls *to me.*' So he divided to them *his* livelihood. 13 And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. 14 But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. 15 Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him *anything.*

17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, 19 and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants." '

20 "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring[a] out the best robe and put *it* on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on *his* feet. 23 And bring the fatted calf here and kill *it,* and let us eat and be merry; 24 for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.

25 "Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.'

28 "But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. 29 So he answered and said to *his* father,

15:8 [a]Greek *drachma,* a valuable coin often worn in a ten-piece garland by married women **15:22** [a]NU-Text reads *Quickly bring.*

Bitterness

Black and cold, bitterness denies easy escape. The sides are slippery with resentment. A floor of muddy anger stills the feet. The stench of betrayal fills the air and stings the eyes. A cloud of self-pity blocks the view of the tiny exit above.

Step in and look at the prisoners. Victims are chained to the walls. Victims of betrayal. Victims of abuse. Victims of the government, the system, the military, the world. They lift their chains as they lift their voices and wail. Loud and long they wail.

They grumble. They're angry at others who got what they didn't.

They sulk. The world is against them. . . .

You can choose, like many, to chain yourself to your hurt.

Or you can choose, like some, to put away your hurts before they become hates. You can choose to go to the party. You have a place there. Your name is beside a plate. If you are a child of God, no one can take away your sonship.

Which is precisely what the father said to the older son. "Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. . . ."

And that is precisely what the Father says to you. How does God deal with your bitter heart? He reminds you that what you have is more important than what you don't have. You still have your relationship with God. No one can take that. No one can touch it.

Study Guide

Read Luke 15:11–32.

- Think of a time when you acted out of frustration and bitterness. If you could do it over, how would you act?
- When you've been treated bitterly, how did you respond?
- What does our bitterness say about our trust in God?
- What perspective helps you out of a bitter attitude?
- The older son in the parable of the prodigal son became bitter. Describe his logic, as you imagine it.
- What advice would you give him?
- Describe the process by which someone becomes bitter.
- What bitterness do you need to lay at the altar?

businessman shake his head as if to say, "I can't start over. I've made too big a mess"? And did He open His arms even wider as if to say, "Yes. Yes, you can. You can come home"?

Whether He did that day or not, I don't know. But I know that He did later. He later stretched His hands as open as He could. He forced His arms so wide apart that it hurt. And to prove that those arms would never fold and those hands would never close, He had them nailed open.

They still are. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
God offers salvation to everyone. If you find yourself judging others, remember that God values them. Think of what you can do to show God's love to the unlovely. Think of what God has done to show love to you.

EXPLORATION
God's Impartiality—Job 34:19; Acts 10:28, 34, 35; Romans 10:11–13; Galatians 3:28; 1 Timothy 2:3, 4; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 3:20.

Life Lessons

Luke 16:1–31

SITUATION
Jesus taught the Pharisees to value the law and the prophets and the righteousness of God.

OBSERVATION
As convincing as it might be for someone to come back from the dead and warn others about hell, God provides His Word to be the most powerful testimony about Jesus Christ and the afterlife.

'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. 30 But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.'

31 "And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. 32 It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.' "

The Parable of the Unjust Steward

16 He also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. 2 So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.'

3 "Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. 4 I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.'

5 "So he called every one of his master's debtors to *him,* and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' 6 And he said, 'A hundred measures[a] of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' 7 Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures[a] of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' 8 So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.

9 "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail,[a] they may receive you into an everlasting home. 10 He who *is* faithful in *what is* least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in *what is* least is unjust also in much. 11 Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches?* 12 And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?

13 "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

The Law, the Prophets, and the Kingdom

14 Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. 15 And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

16 "The law and the prophets *were* until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it. 17 And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.

16:6 [a]Greek *batos,* eight or nine gallons each (Old Testament *bath*) **16:7** [a]Greek *koros,* ten or twelve bushels each (Old Testament *kor*) **16:9** [a]NU-Text reads *it fails.*

18 "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from *her* husband commits adultery.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

19 "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. 20 But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, 21 desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell[a] from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

24 "Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' 25 But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. 26 And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.'

27 "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' 29 Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' 30 And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' 31 But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'"

Jesus Warns of Offenses

17 Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe *to him* through whom they do come! 2 It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. 3 Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you,[a] rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. 4 And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you,[a] saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."

Faith and Duty

5 And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."

6 So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. 7 And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'? 8 But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and

16:21 [a]NU-Text reads *with what fell.* **17:3** [a]NU-Text omits *against you.*
17:4 [a]M-Text omits *to you.*

INSPIRATION

The two men indwell opposite sides of the city tracks. The rich man lives in posh luxury and wears the finest clothing. . . . He eats exotic food, enjoys a spacious house with botanical gardens. He's the New Testament version of a Monaco billionaire.

Lazarus is a homeless street sleeper. Dogs lick the sores that cavern his skin. He languishes outside the mansion, hoping for scraps. Infected. Rejected. No possessions. No family. An exception to God's "whoever" policy, right?

Wrong.

In sudden drama, the curtain of death falls on act 1, and eternal destiny is revealed in act 2. "So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom" (Luke 16:22, 23).

Just-poor Lazarus now needs nothing. The now-poor rich man needs everything. He loses the lap of luxury, and Lazarus discovers the lap of Abraham.

Lazaruses still populate our planet. You may be one. Not begging for bread, but struggling to buy some. Not sleeping on streets, but on the floor perhaps? In your car sometimes? On a couch often? Does God have a place for people in your place?

Of all the messages this account conveys, don't miss this one: God takes you *however* He finds you. No need to clean up or climb up. Just look up. God's "whoever" policy has a "however" benefit. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

drink'? 9Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not.[a] 10So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.' "

Ten Lepers Cleansed

11Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. 12Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. 13And they lifted up *their* voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

14So when He saw *them,* He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed.

15And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, 16and fell down on *his* face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan.

17So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where *are* the nine? 18Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" 19And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."

The Coming of the Kingdom

20Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; 21nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!'[a] For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."

22Then He said to the disciples, "The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see *it.* 23And they will say to you, 'Look here!' or 'Look there!'[a] Do not go after *them* or follow *them.* 24For as the lightning that flashes out of one *part* under heaven shines to the other *part* under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day. 25But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. 26And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: 27They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. 28Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; 29but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed *them* all. 30Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

31"In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods *are* in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. 32Remember Lot's wife. 33Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. 34I tell you, in that night there will be two *men* in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. 35Two *women* will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. 36Two *men* will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left."[a]

17:9 [a]NU-Text ends verse with *commanded;* M-Text omits *him.* **17:21** [a]NU-Text reverses *here* and *there.* **17:23** [a]NU-Text reverses *here* and *there.* **17:36** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit verse 36.

APPLICATION
Do you have friends like this rich man? Don't keep the Good News to yourself. Look for a way this week to share with them the news that can save their souls.

EXPLORATION
On Life After Death—Job 19:25–27; Daniel 12:2, 3; Hosea 13:14; Matthew 25:31–46; 1 Corinthians 15:50–58; 2 Corinthians 5:6–8; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; Revelation 21:3, 4; 22:5.

Life LESSONS

Luke 17:1–37

SITUATION
Jesus taught about the power of sin, forgiveness, and faith. He instilled a passion in His disciples for the kingdom of God.

OBSERVATION
In this passage, Jesus warned His disciples against the danger of causing others to sin. Jesus said that their lives should be marked by forgiveness, thankfulness, and faith.

INSPIRATION
"[Love] does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:6). In this verse lies a test for love.

Want to separate the fake from the factual, the counterfeit from the real thing? Want to know if what you feel is genuine love? Ask yourself this:

Do I encourage this person to do what is right?

. . .

For instance, one lady calls another and says, "We're friends, right?"

"Yeah, we're friends."

"If my husband asks, you tell him we were together at the movies last night."

37 And they answered and said to Him, "Where, Lord?"

So He said to them, "Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together."

The Parable of the Persistent Widow

18 Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, 2 saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. 3 Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' 4 And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, 5 yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.' "

6 Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. 7 And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? 8 I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

9 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' 13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Jesus Blesses Little Children

15 Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw *it,* they rebuked them. 16 But Jesus called them to *Him* and said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. 17 Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."

Jesus Counsels the Rich Young Ruler

18 Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

19 So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is,* God. 20 You know the commandments: *'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'* "[a]

21 And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth."

22 So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack

18:20 [a] Exodus 20:12–16; Deuteronomy 5:16–20

"But we weren't."

"I know, but I was, well, I was with another guy and—hey, you'll do this for me, won't you? We're friends, right? Tighter than sisters, right?"

Does this person pass the test? No way. The room key doesn't work. Love doesn't ask someone to do what is wrong. . . .

If you find yourself prompting evil in others, heed the alarm. This is not love. And if others prompt evil in you, be alert. Check the room key.

Here's an example. A classic one. A young couple are on a date. His affection goes beyond her comfort zone. She resists. But he tries to persuade her with the oldest line in the book: "But I love you. I just want to be near you. If you loved me . . ."

That siren you hear? It's the phony-love detector. This guy doesn't love her. He may love having sex with her. He may love her body. He may love boasting to his buddies about his conquest. But he doesn't love her. True love will never ask the "beloved" to do what he or she thinks is wrong.

Love doesn't tear down the convictions of others. Quite the contrary.

"Love edifies" (1 Corinthians 8:1).

"He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him" (1 John 2:10).

"When you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ" (1 Corinthians 8:12).

Do you want to know if your love for someone is true? If your friendship is genuine? Check the room key. Ask yourself: Do I influence this person to do what is right? (From *A*

one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

23 But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.

With God All Things Are Possible

24 And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! 25 For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

26 And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?"

27 But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

Love Worth Giving by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Are you influencing people for good or for evil? Set aside some time to figure out your motivation for being involved in people's lives. Make sure you never get yourself in a situation where you could cause someone to stumble.

EXPLORATION
Loving Others—Leviticus 19:18; Proverbs 17:17; Matthew 5:44; 22:39; 1 John 4:7, 8.

Life Lessons

Luke 18:1–43

SITUATION
Through a series of short illustrations, Jesus taught the people how to obtain eternal life and how to pray so that God would hear.

OBSERVATION
When we pray we must be persistent and humble. Most of all, we can't depend on our own resources to get us through problems. We need to trust God and His strength.

INSPIRATION
One of my favorite stories concerns a bishop who was traveling by ship to visit a church across the ocean. While en route, the ship stopped at an island for a day. He went for a walk on a beach. He came upon three fishermen mending their nets.

Curious about their trade he asked them some questions. Curious about his ecclesiastical robes, they asked him some questions. When they found out he was a Christian leader, they got excited. "We Christians!" they said,

New Life In Christ

"Shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?" —Luke 18:7

God Does What Is Best

Mark tells us that during the storm Jesus "saw [His disciples] straining at rowing" (Mark 6:48). Through the night He saw them. Through the storm He saw them. And like a loving father He waited. He waited until the right time, until the right moment. He waited until He knew it was time to come, and then He came.

What made it the right time? I don't know. Why was the ninth hour better than the fourth or fifth? I can't answer that. Why does God wait until the money is gone? Why does He wait until the sickness has lingered? Why does He choose to wait until the other side of the grave to answer the prayers for healing?

I don't know. I only know His timing is always right. I can only say He will do what is best. "Shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?" (Luke 18:7).

Though you hear nothing, He is speaking. Though you see nothing, He is acting. With God there are no accidents. Every incident is intended to bring us closer to Him. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Question: What is there in your life that is keeping you from calling out to the Lord?

For more on "New Life in Christ," see page 1456.

Righteousness

Some would rather die than admit it. Others admit it and escape death.

"God, I need help."

So the thirsty come. A ragged lot we are, bound together by broken dreams and collapsed promises. Fortunes that were never made. Families that were never built. Promises that were never kept. Wide-eyed children trapped in the basement of our own failures.

And we are very thirsty.

Not thirsty for fame, possessions, passion, or romance. We've drunk from those pools. They are salt water in the desert. They don't quench—they kill.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness…"

Righteousness. That's it. That's what we are thirsty for. We're thirsty for a clean conscience. We crave a clean slate. We yearn for a fresh start. We pray for a hand that will enter the dark cavern of our world and do for us the one thing we can't do for ourselves—make us right again.

We usually get what we hunger and thirst for. The problem is, the treasures of earth don't satisfy. The promise is, the treasures of heaven do.

Study Guide

Read Luke 18:9–14.

- What is the difference between wanting something and craving something?
- How would we live differently if we hungered for God like we crave our favorite foods?
- How does righteousness satisfy us like food and water satisfy our hunger and thirst?
- What kinds of things do people falsely assume will quench their spiritual thirst?
- What kind of righteousness does God offer to us?
- What stands in the way of our receiving the righteousness God desires?
- How does the fact that we belong to God change the way we view ourselves and our possessions?
- Describe in your own words what it means to know Christ.
- In what practical way can you seek God's righteousness this week?

proudly pointing to one another.

The bishop was impressed but cautious. Did they know the Lord's Prayer? They had never heard of it.

"What do you say, then, when you pray?"

"We pray, 'O We are three, you are three, have mercy on us.'"

The bishop was appalled at the primitive nature of the prayer. "That will not do." So he spent the day teaching them the Lord's Prayer. The fishermen were poor but willing learners. And before the bishop sailed away the next day, they could recite the prayer with no mistakes.

The bishop was proud.

On the return trip the bishop's ship drew near the island again. When the island came into view the bishop came to the deck and recalled with pleasure the men he had taught and resolved to go see them again. As he was thinking a light appeared on the horizon near the island. It seemed to be getting nearer. As the bishop gazed in wonder he realized the three fishermen were walking toward him on the water. Soon all the passengers and crew were on the deck to see the sight.

When they were within speaking distance, the fisherman cried out, "Bishop, we come hurry to meet you."

"What is it you want?" asked the stunned bishop.

"We are so sorry. We forget lovely prayer. We say, 'O Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name . . . ' and then we forget. Please tell us prayer again."

The bishop was humbled. "Go back to your homes, my friends, and when you pray say, 'O We are three, you are three, have mercy

28 Then Peter said, "See, we have left all[a] and followed You."

29 So He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, 30 who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life."

Jesus a Third Time Predicts His Death and Resurrection

31 Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. 32 For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. 33 They will scourge *Him* and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again."

34 But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken.

A Blind Man Receives His Sight

35 Then it happened, as He was coming near Jericho, that a certain blind man sat by the road begging. 36 And hearing a multitude passing by, he asked what it meant. 37 So they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. 38 And he cried out, saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

39 Then those who went before warned him that he should be quiet; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

40 So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be brought to Him. And when he had come near, He asked him, 41 saying, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

He said, "Lord, that I may receive my sight."

42 Then Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well." 43 And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw *it,* gave praise to God.

Jesus Comes to Zacchaeus' House

19 Then *Jesus* entered and passed through Jericho. 2 Now behold, *there was* a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. 3 And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that *way.* 5 And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him,[a] and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house." 6 So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. 7 But when they saw *it,* they all complained, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner."

8 Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold."

9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house,

18:28 [a]NU-Text reads *our own.* **19:5** [a]NU-Text omits *and saw him.*

because he also is a son of Abraham; 10 for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

The Parable of the Minas

11 Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. 12 Therefore He said: "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. 13 So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas,[a] and said to them, 'Do business till I come.' 14 But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We will not have this *man* to reign over us.'

15 "And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. 16 Then came the first, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned ten minas.' 17 And he said to him, 'Well *done,* good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.' 18 And the second came, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned five minas.' 19 Likewise he said to him, 'You also be over five cities.'

20 "Then another came, saying, 'Master, here is your mina, which I have kept put away in a handkerchief. 21 For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.' 22 And he said to him, 'Out of your own mouth I will judge you, *you* wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow. 23 Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?'

24 "And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give *it* to him who has ten minas.' 25 (But they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas.') 26 'For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. 27 But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay *them* before me.' "

The Triumphal Entry

28 When He had said this, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 And it came to pass, when He drew near to Bethphage[a] and Bethany, at the mountain called Olivet, *that* He sent two of His disciples, 30 saying, "Go into the village opposite *you,* where as you enter you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Loose it and bring *it here.* 31 And if anyone asks you, 'Why are you loosing *it?*' thus you shall say to him, 'Because the Lord has need of it.' "

32 So those who were sent went their way and found *it* just as He had said to them. 33 But as they were loosing the colt, the owners of it said to them, "Why are you loosing the colt?"

34 And they said, "The Lord has need of him." 35 Then they brought him to Jesus. And they threw their own clothes on the colt, and they

19:13 [a]The *mina* (Greek *mna,* Hebrew *minah*) was worth about three months' salary.
19:29 [a]M-Text reads *Bethsphage.*

on us.'" (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Do you mean what you pray? Do you get caught up in just saying words and miss their meaning? Continue to pray often—but do so out of a humble, honest heart. If the fancy prayers and big words aren't you—use your own. God wants to hear what you honestly pray.

EXPLORATION
Prayer—Psalm 5:1–3; 55:17; 116:2.

Life Lessons

Luke 19:1–48

SITUATION
The testimony of Zacchaeus as well as Jesus' tears for Jerusalem demonstrate that God desires genuine faith from His people.

OBSERVATION
God will judge those who peddle the faith and those who prevent people from worshiping.

INSPIRATION
It's tough to be let down. It's disappointing when you think someone is interested in you, only to find they are interested in your money. When salespeople do it, it's irritating—but when people of faith do it, it can be devastating.

It's a sad but true fact of the faith: religion is used for profit and prestige. When it is there are two results: people are exploited and God is infuriated.

There's no better example of this than what happened at the temple. After He had entered the city on the back of a donkey, Jesus "went into Jerusalem and into the

temple. So when He had looked around at all things, as the hour was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve" [Mark 11:11] . . .

Want to know what he saw? Then read what He did on Monday, the next morning when He returned. "Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, 'It is written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer," but you have made it a "den of thieves"'" [Matthew 21:12, 13].

What did He see? Hucksters. Faith peddlers. What lit the fire under Jesus' broiler? What was His first thought on Monday? People in the temple making a franchise out of the faith.

It was Passover week. The Passover was the highlight of the Jewish calendar. People came from all regions and many countries to be present for the celebration. Upon arriving they were obligated to meet two requirements.

First, an animal sacrifice, usually a dove. The dove had to be perfect, without blemish. The animal could be brought in from anywhere, but odds were that if you brought a sacrifice from another place, yours would be considered insufficient by the authorities in the temple. So, under the guise of keeping the sacrifice pure, the dove sellers sold doves—at their price.

Second, the people had to pay a tax, a temple tax. It was due every year. During Passover the tax had to be rendered in local currency. Knowing many foreigners

set Jesus on him. 36 And as He went, *many* spread their clothes on the road.

37 Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, 38 saying:

"'*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the* Lord*!*'[a]
Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

39 And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples."

40 But He answered and said to them, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out."

Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem

41 Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, 42 saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things *that make* for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, 44 and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

45 Then He went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in it,[a] 46 saying to them, "It is written, *'My house is*[a] *a house of prayer,'*[b] but you have made it a *'den of thieves.'*"[c]

47 And He was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him, 48 and were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear Him.

Jesus' Authority Questioned

20 Now it happened on one of those days, as He taught the people in the temple and preached the gospel, *that* the chief priests and the scribes, together with the elders, confronted *Him* 2 and spoke to Him, saying, "Tell us, by what authority are You doing these things? Or who is he who gave You this authority?"

3 But He answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one thing, and answer Me: 4 The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men?"

5 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why then[a] did you not believe him?' 6 But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us, for they are persuaded that John was a prophet." 7 So they answered that they did not know where *it was* from.

19:38 [a]Psalm 118:26 **19:45** [a]NU-Text reads *those who were selling.* **19:46** [a]NU-Text reads *shall be.* [b]Isaiah 56:7 [c]Jeremiah 7:11 **20:5** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *then.*

8 And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority
I do these things."

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers

9 Then He began to tell the people this parable: "A certain man
planted a vineyard, leased it to vinedressers, and went into a far
country for a long time. 10 Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to
the vinedressers, that they might give him some of the fruit of the
vineyard. But the vinedressers beat him and sent *him* away empty-
handed. 11 Again he sent another servant; and they beat him also,
treated *him* shamefully, and sent *him* away empty-handed. 12 And
again he sent a third; and they wounded him also and cast *him* out.
13 "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will
send my beloved son. Probably they will respect *him* when they see
him.' 14 But when the vinedressers saw him, they reasoned among
themselves, saying, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, that the
inheritance may be ours.' 15 So they cast him out of the vineyard and
killed *him*. Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do to them?
16 He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard
to others."

And when they heard *it* they said, "Certainly not!"

17 Then He looked at them and said, "What then is this that is writ-
ten:

'The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone'?[a]

18 Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls,
it will grind him to powder."

19 And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay
hands on Him, but they feared the people[a]—for they knew He had
spoken this parable against them.

The Pharisees: Is It Lawful to Pay Taxes to Caesar?

20 So they watched *Him,* and sent spies who pretended to be righ-
teous, that they might seize on His words, in order to deliver Him to
the power and the authority of the governor.

21 Then they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You say
and teach rightly, and You do not show personal favoritism, but teach
the way of God in truth: 22 Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or
not?"

23 But He perceived their craftiness, and said to them, "Why do you
test Me?[a] 24 Show Me a denarius. Whose image and inscription does
it have?"

They answered and said, "Caesar's."

25 And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that
are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

26 But they could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the
people. And they marveled at His answer and kept silent.

20:17 [a]Psalm 118:22 **20:19** [a]M-Text reads *but they were afraid.* **20:23** [a]NU-Text omits *Why do you test Me?*

would be in Jerusalem to pay the tax, money changers conveniently set up tables and offered to exchange the foreign money for local—for a modest fee, of course.

It's not difficult to see what angered Jesus. Pilgrims journeyed days to see God, to witness the holy, to worship His Majesty. But before they were taken into the presence of God, they were taken to the cleaners. What was promised and what was delivered were two different things. . . .

"I've had enough," was written all over the Messiah's face. In he stormed. Doves flapped and tables flew. People scampered and traders scattered.

This was not an impulsive show. This was not a temper tantrum. It was a deliberate act with an intentional message. Jesus had seen the money changers the day before. He went to sleep with pictures of this midway and its barkers in His memory. And when He woke up the next morning, knowing His days were drawing to a close, He chose to make a point: "You cash in on My people and you've got Me to answer to." God will never hold guiltless those who exploit the privilege of worship. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Be careful that you are motivated to attend church to worship and get to know God better. We can become like the people in this chapter if we attend church in order to meet business contacts.

EXPLORATION

God's Compassion—Exodus 33:19; Psalm 84:11; Nahum 1:7; Matthew 9:36; Romans 8:32.

Life Lessons

Luke 20:1–47

SITUATION
The Jewish leaders feared Jesus' popularity. They believed that an emotional crowd following Jesus would bring unwanted Roman oppression and undermine the limited self-rule the Jews were allowed to exercise.

OBSERVATION
Jesus hates a hypocritical and rebellious attitude from those who claim to be religious. He asked the religious leaders a question that focused on King David, whom they revered, and described how He was greater than even David (20:41–44).

INSPIRATION
Christ . . . knows you miss the target. He knows you can't pay for your mistakes. But he can. "God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins" (Romans 3:25 NLT).

Since He was sinless, He could.

Since He loves you, He did. "This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

He became one of us to redeem all of us. "Both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Hebrews 2:11).

He wasn't ashamed of David. He isn't ashamed of you. He calls you brother; He calls you sister. The question is, do you call Him Savior?

Take a moment to answer this question. Perhaps you never have. Perhaps you

The Sadducees: What About the Resurrection?

27 Then some of the Sadducees, who deny that there is a resurrection, came to *Him* and asked Him, 28 saying: "Teacher, Moses wrote to us *that* if a man's brother dies, having a wife, and he dies without children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. 29 Now there were seven brothers. And the first took a wife, and died without children. 30 And the second[a] took her as wife, and he died childless. 31 Then the third took her, and in like manner the seven also; and they left no children,[a] and died. 32 Last of all the woman died also. 33 Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife does she become? For all seven had her as wife."

34 Jesus answered and said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. 35 But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; 36 nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. 37 But even Moses showed in the *burning* bush *passage* that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord *'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'*[a] 38 For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him."

39 Then some of the scribes answered and said, "Teacher, You have spoken well." 40 But after that they dared not question Him anymore.

Jesus: How Can David Call His Descendant Lord?

41 And He said to them, "How can they say that the Christ is the Son of David? 42 Now David himself said in the Book of Psalms:

'The Lord said to my Lord,
"Sit at My right hand,
43 *Till I make Your enemies Your footstool."'*[a]

44 Therefore David calls Him *'Lord'*; how is He then his Son?"

Beware of the Scribes

45 Then, in the hearing of all the people, He said to His disciples, 46 "Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, 47 who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."

The Widow's Two Mites

21 And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, 2 and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. 3 So He said, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; 4 for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God,[a] but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had."

20:30 [a]NU-Text ends verse 30 here. **20:31** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *the seven also left no children.* **20:37** [a]Exodus 3:6, 15 **20:43** [a]Psalm 110:1 **21:4** [a]NU-Text omits *for God.*

Jesus Predicts the Destruction of the Temple

5 Then, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with
beautiful stones and donations, He said, 6 "These things which you
see—the days will come in which not *one* stone shall be left upon
another that shall not be thrown down."

The Signs of the Times and the End of the Age

7 So they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, but when will these things
be? And what sign *will there be* when these things are about to take
place?"

8 And He said: "Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will
come in My name, saying, 'I am *He,*' and, 'The time has drawn near.'
Therefore[a] do not go after them. 9 But when you hear of wars and
commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass
first, but the end *will* not *come* immediately."

10 Then He said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and
kingdom against kingdom. 11 And there will be great earthquakes in
various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fear-
ful sights and great signs from heaven. 12 But before all these things,
they will lay their hands on you and persecute *you,* delivering *you* up
to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and
rulers for My name's sake. 13 But it will turn out for you as an occa-
sion for testimony. 14 Therefore settle *it* in your hearts not to meditate
beforehand on what you will answer; 15 for I will give you a mouth and
wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or
resist. 16 You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives
and friends; and they will put *some* of you to death. 17 And you will be
hated by all for My name's sake. 18 But not a hair of your head shall be
lost. 19 By your patience possess your souls.

The Destruction of Jerusalem

20 "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know
that its desolation is near. 21 Then let those who are in Judea flee to
the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let
not those who are in the country enter her. 22 For these are the days
of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. 23 But
woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies
in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath
upon this people. 24 And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be
led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by
Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

The Coming of the Son of Man

25 "And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars;
and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the
waves roaring; 26 men's hearts failing them from fear and the expecta-
tion of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers
of the heavens will be shaken. 27 Then they will see the Son of Man
coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 Now when these
things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your
redemption draws near."

21:8 [a]NU-Text omits *Therefore.*

never knew how much Christ loves you. Now you do. Jesus didn't disown David. He won't disown you. He simply awaits your invitation. One word from you, and God will do again what He did with David and millions like him: He'll claim you, save you, and use you. Any words will do, but these seem appropriate:

Jesus, my Savior and Giant-killer, I trust You with my heart and give You my life. I ask for mercy, strength, and eternal life. Amen.

Pray such words with an honest heart, and be assured of this: your greatest Goliath has fallen. Your failures are flushed and death defanged. The power that made pygmies out of David's giants has done the same with yours. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Jesus alone can take away all of your sin. He loves you. No matter how much you have sinned, Jesus' death is able to cleanse and forgive you.

EXPLORATION

Hypocrisy—Psalm 5:9; Isaiah 29:13; Ezekiel 33:31, 32; Matthew 16:5–12; Romans 2:17–24; Titus 1:16; 1 Peter 2:1.

Life LESSONS

Luke 21:1—22:71

SITUATION

The temple was rebuilt about 516 B.C. In addition, Herod had undertaken a massive renovation and enlargement of the temple. Jesus prophesied that persecution would come and the temple would be destroyed.

OBSERVATION
As Jesus' disciples, we should be prepared for persecution and be discerning about world events. Because Jesus is God, we can have great comfort that Jesus will one day return and make all things right.

INSPIRATION
The definitive voice in the universe is Jesus. He is not one among many voices; He is the One Voice over all voices.

You cross a line with that claim. Many people recoil at such a distinction. Call Jesus godly, godlike, God inspired. Call Him "a voice" but not "the voice"; a good man but not God-man.

But *good man* is precisely the terminology we cannot use. A good man would not say what He said or claim what He claimed. A liar would. Or a God would. Call Him anything in between, and you have a dilemma. No one believed that Jesus was equal with God more than Jesus did.

His followers worshiped Him, and He didn't tell them to stop.

Peter and Thomas and Martha called Him the Son of God, and He didn't tell them they were wrong.

At His own death trial, His accusers asked, "'Are You then the Son of God?' So He said to them, 'You rightly say that I am'" (Luke 22:70).

His purpose, in His words, was to "give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

According to Jesus, no one could kill Him. Speaking of His life, He said, "I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:18).

Could He speak with more aplomb than He did in John 14:9? "He who

The Parable of the Fig Tree

29 Then He spoke to them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the
trees. 30 When they are already budding, you see and know for your-
selves that summer is now near. 31 So you also, when you see these
things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. 32 Assuredly,
I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things
take place. 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by
no means pass away.

The Importance of Watching

34 "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down
with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day
come on you unexpectedly. 35 For it will come as a snare on all those
who dwell on the face of the whole earth. 36 Watch therefore, and pray
always that you may be counted worthy[a] to escape all these things
that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."
37 And in the daytime He was teaching in the temple, but at night
He went out and stayed on the mountain called Olivet. 38 Then early
in the morning all the people came to Him in the temple to hear Him.

The Plot to Kill Jesus

22 Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called
Passover. 2 And the chief priests and the scribes sought how
they might kill Him, for they feared the people.
3 Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered
among the twelve. 4 So he went his way and conferred with the chief
priests and captains, how he might betray Him to them. 5 And they
were glad, and agreed to give him money. 6 So he promised and sought
opportunity to betray Him to them in the absence of the multitude.

Jesus and His Disciples Prepare the Passover

7 Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover
must be killed. 8 And He sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare
the Passover for us, that we may eat."
9 So they said to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare?"
10 And He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city,
a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the
house which he enters. 11 Then you shall say to the master of the
house, 'The Teacher says to you, "Where is the guest room where I
may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' 12 Then he will show you a
large, furnished upper room; there make ready."
13 So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they
prepared the Passover.

Jesus Institutes the Lord's Supper

14 When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve[a] apostles
with Him. 15 Then He said to them, "With *fervent* desire I have desired
to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 for I say to you, I will no
longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."
17 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and

21:36 [a]NU-Text reads *may have strength.* **22:14** [a]NU-Text omits *twelve.*

divide *it* among yourselves; 18 for I say to you,[a] I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

19 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke *it,* and gave *it* to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

22:18 [a] NU-Text adds *from now on.*

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: Master of God's Domain

God hasn't kept the ending a secret. He wants us to see the big picture. He wants us to know that He wins. And He also wants us to know that the evil we witness on the stage of life is not as mighty as we might think.

Many passages teach these truths, but my favorite is a couple of verses recorded by Luke. Jesus speaks the words on the night before His death. He is in the upper room with His followers. They are shocked to hear His prophecy that one of them will betray the Master. Their defensiveness leads to an argument, and the argument leads Jesus to exhort them to servanthood.

Then in an abrupt shift, Jesus turns to Simon Peter and makes this intriguing statement: "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:31, 32).

This passage gives us a glimpse into an unseen world. It raises many questions, but it also affords many assurances, the chief of which is the chain of command. God is clearly in control, and the devil is on a short leash. Did you notice the verb that followed Satan's name? Ask. "Satan has asked. . . ."

The devil didn't demand, resolve, or decide. He asked. Just as he requested permission to tempt Job, he requested permission to tempt Simon Peter. Sort of recasts our image of the old snake, doesn't it? Instead of the mighty Darth Vader of Gloom, a better caricature is a skinny, back-alley punk who acts tough, but ducks fast when God flexes. "Uh, uh . . . I'd . . . uh . . . like to do a number on Peter—that is, if you don't mind." The chain of command is clear. Satan does nothing outside of God's domain, and God uses Satan to advance the cause of His kingdom. (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1458.

has seen Me has seen the Father."

And could words be more blasphemous than John 8:58? "Before Abraham was, I AM." The claim infuriated the Jews. "They took up stones to throw at Him" (v. 59). Why? Because only God is the great I AM. And in calling Himself I AM, Christ was equating Himself with God. "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

We have all eagerly waited for one event or another in our lives. Do you look forward to Christ's return? Do you get more excited anticipating a birthday or anniversary? Why or why not? What can you do to prepare for Christ's return?

EXPLORATION

Signs of Christ's Return—Mark 13:6; 2 Timothy 4:3, 4; 2 Peter 3:3, 4; Revelation 13:1–8.

20 Likewise He also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup *is* the new covenant in
My blood, which is shed for you. 21 But behold,
the hand of My betrayer *is* with Me on the
table. 22 And truly the Son of Man goes as it
has been determined, but woe to that man by
whom He is betrayed!"

23 Then they began to question among themselves, which of them it was who would do this thing.

The Disciples Argue About Greatness

24 Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. 25 And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' 26 But not so *among* you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. 27 For who *is* greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? *Is* it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.

28 "But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. 29 And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed *one* upon Me, 30 that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

31 And the Lord said,[a] "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me,* strengthen your brethren."

33 But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death."

34 Then He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me."

Supplies for the Road

35 And He said to them, "When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?"

So they said, "Nothing."

36 Then He said to them, "But now, he who has a money bag, let him take *it,* and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one. 37 For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: *'And He was numbered with the transgressors.'*[a] For the things concerning Me have an end."

38 So they said, "Lord, look, here *are* two swords."

And He said to them, "It is enough."

The Prayer in the Garden

39 Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him. 40 When He came to the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation."

41 And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, 42 saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." 43 Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. 44 And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.[a]

45 When He rose up from prayer, and had come to His disciples, He found them sleeping from sorrow. 46 Then He said to them, "Why do you sleep? Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation."

Betrayal and Arrest in Gethsemane

47 And while He was still speaking, behold, a multitude; and he who was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them and drew near to Jesus to kiss Him. 48 But Jesus said to him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

49 When those around Him saw what was going to happen, they said to Him, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" 50 And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear.

51 But Jesus answered and said, "Permit even this." And He touched his ear and healed him.

22:31 [a]NU-Text omits *And the Lord said.* **22:37** [a]Isaiah 53:12 **22:44** [a]NU-Text brackets verses 43 and 44 as not in the original text.

52 Then Jesus said to the chief priests, captains of the temple, and
the elders who had come to Him, "Have you come out, as against a
robber, with swords and clubs? 53 When I was with you daily in the
temple, you did not try to seize Me. But this is your hour, and the
power of darkness."

Peter Denies Jesus, and Weeps Bitterly

54 Having arrested Him, they led *Him* and brought Him into the
high priest's house. But Peter followed at a distance. 55 Now when they
had kindled a fire in the midst of the courtyard and sat down together,
Peter sat among them. 56 And a certain servant girl, seeing him as he
sat by the fire, looked intently at him and said, "This man was also
with Him."

57 But he denied Him, [a] saying, "Woman, I do not know Him."

58 And after a little while another saw him and said, "You also are
of them."

But Peter said, "Man, I am not!"

59 Then after about an hour had passed, another confidently
affirmed, saying, "Surely this *fellow* also was with Him, for he is a
Galilean."

60 But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are saying!"

Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster [a] crowed. 61 And
the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word
of the Lord, how He had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, [a] you
will deny Me three times." 62 So Peter went out and wept bitterly.

Jesus Mocked and Beaten

63 Now the men who held Jesus mocked Him and beat Him. 64 And
having blindfolded Him, they struck Him on the face and asked Him, [a]
saying, "Prophesy! Who is the one who struck You?" 65 And many other
things they blasphemously spoke against Him.

Jesus Faces the Sanhedrin

66 As soon as it was day, the elders of the people, both chief priests
and scribes, came together and led Him into their council, saying,
67 "If You are the Christ, tell us."

But He said to them, "If I tell you, you will by no means believe.
68 And if I also ask *you,* you will by no means answer Me or let *Me* go. [a]
69 Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of
God."

70 Then they all said, "Are You then the Son of God?"

So He said to them, "You *rightly* say that I am."

71 And they said, "What further testimony do we need? For we have
heard it ourselves from His own mouth."

Jesus Handed Over to Pontius Pilate

23 Then the whole multitude of them arose and led Him to Pilate.
2 And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this *fellow*

22:57 [a]NU-Text reads *denied it.* **22:60** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *a rooster.* **22:61** [a]NU-Text adds *today.* **22:64** [a]NU-Text reads *And having blindfolded Him, they asked Him.* **22:68** [a]NU-Text omits *also* and *Me or let Me go.*

Life LESSONS

Luke 23:1–56

SITUATION

Incited by the temple priests, an angry mob demanded that Pilate crucify Jesus. Pilate knew that he did not have justification for using the death penalty.

OBSERVATION

Through His sacrifice on the Cross, Jesus fulfilled His earthly mission and atoned for sin.

INSPIRATION

The King swallowed. . . .

He looked at the Prince of Light. "The darkness will be great." He passed His hand over the spotless face of His Son. "The pain will be awful." Then He paused and looked at His darkened dominion. When He looked up, His eyes were moist. "But there is no other way."

The Son looked into the stars as He heard the answer. "Then, let it be done."

Slowly the words that would kill the Son began to come from the lips of the Father.

"Hour of death, moment of sacrifice, it is your moment. Rehearsed a million times on false altars with false lambs; the moment of truth has come. . . .

"Oh, My Son, My Child. Look up into the heavens and see My face before I turn it. Hear My voice before I silence it. Would that I could save You and them. But they don't see and they don't hear.

"The living must die so that the dying can live. The time has come to kill the Lamb." . . .

God must have wept as He performed His task.

Every lie, every lure, every act done in shadows was in that cup. Slowly, hideously they were absorbed into the body of the Son. The final act of incarnation. . . .

The throne room is dark and cavernous. The eyes of the King are closed. He is resting.

In His dream He is again in the Garden. The cool of the evening floats across the river as the three walk. They speak of the Garden—of how it is, of how it will be.

"Father . . ." the Son begins. The King replays the word again. Father. Father. The word was a flower, petal-delicate, yet so easily crushed. Oh, how He longed for His children to call Him Father again.

A noise snaps Him from His dream. He opens His eyes and sees a transcendent figure gleaming in the doorway. "It is finished, Father. I have come home." (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

By faith in Christ, we gain access to all of God's treasures—joy, peace, and eternal life. Don't wait another minute. Receive Christ as your Savior and Lord. Commit the rest of your life to following His teachings.

EXPLORATION

Sacrifice—1 Samuel 15:22; Psalm 50:5–13; 51:17.

perverting the[a] nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King."

3 Then Pilate asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

He answered him and said, "*It is as* you say."

4 So Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no fault in this Man."

5 But they were the more fierce, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place."

Jesus Faces Herod

6 When Pilate heard of Galilee,[a] he asked if the Man were a Galilean. 7 And as soon as he knew that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. 8 Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long *time* to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him. 9 Then he questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing. 10 And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. 11 Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked *Him,* arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. 12 That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other.

Taking the Place of Barabbas

13 Then Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, 14 said to them, "You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined *Him* in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him; 15 no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him;[a] and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him. 16 I will therefore chastise Him and release *Him*" 17 (for it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast).[a]

18 And they all cried out at once, saying, "Away with this *Man,* and release to us Barabbas"— 19 who had been thrown into prison for a certain rebellion made in the city, and for murder.

20 Pilate, therefore, wishing to release Jesus, again called out to them. 21 But they shouted, saying, "Crucify *Him,* crucify Him!"

22 Then he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has He done? I have found no reason for death in Him. I will therefore chastise Him and let *Him* go."

23 But they were insistent, demanding with loud voices that He be crucified. And the voices of these men and of the chief priests prevailed.[a] 24 So Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested. 25 And he released to them[a] the one they requested, who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison; but he delivered Jesus to their will.

23:2 [a]NU-Text reads *our.* **23:6** [a]NU-Text omits *of Galilee.* **23:15** [a]NU-Text reads *for he sent Him back to us.* **23:17** [a]NU-Text omits verse 17. **23:23** [a]NU-Text omits *and of the chief priests.* **23:25** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *to them.*

The King on a Cross

26 Now as they led Him away, they laid hold
of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was
coming from the country, and on him they
laid the cross that he might bear *it* after Jesus.
27 And a great multitude of the people fol-
lowed Him, and women who also mourned
and lamented Him. 28 But Jesus, turning to
them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not
weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for
your children. 29 For indeed the days are com-
ing in which they will say, 'Blessed *are* the bar-
ren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which
never nursed!' 30 Then they will begin *'to say to
the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills,
"Cover us!"'*[a] 31 For if they do these things in
the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"
32 There were also two others, criminals, led
with Him to be put to death. 33 And when they
had come to the place called Calvary, there
they crucified Him, and the criminals, one
on the right hand and the other on the left.
34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for
they do not know what they do."[a]

And they divided His garments and cast
lots. 35 And the people stood looking on. But
even the rulers with them sneered, saying, "He
saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the
Christ, the chosen of God."
36 The soldiers also mocked Him, coming
and offering Him sour wine, 37 and saying, "If
You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself."
38 And an inscription also was written over
Him in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew:[a]

THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

39 Then one of the criminals who were
hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are
the Christ,[a] save Yourself and us."
40 But the other, answering, rebuked him,
saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you
are under the same condemnation? 41 And we
indeed justly, for we receive the due reward
of our deeds; but this Man has done noth-
ing wrong." 42 Then he said to Jesus, "Lord,[a]
remember me when You come into Your king-
dom."
43 And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to
you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

Jesus Dies on the Cross

44 Now it was[a] about the sixth hour, and
there was darkness over all the earth until the
ninth hour. 45 Then the sun was darkened,[a]
and the veil of the temple was torn in two.
46 And when Jesus had cried out with a loud
voice, He said, "Father, *'into Your hands I
commit My spirit.'"*[a] Having said this, He
breathed His last.
47 So when the centurion saw what had
happened, he glorified God, saying, "Certainly
this was a righteous Man!"
48 And the whole crowd who came together
to that sight, seeing what had been done,
beat their breasts and returned. 49 But all His
acquaintances, and the women who followed
Him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watch-
ing these things.

Jesus Buried in Joseph's Tomb

50 Now behold, *there was* a man named
Joseph, a council member, a good and just
man. 51 He had not consented to their deci-
sion and deed. *He was* from Arimathea, a city
of the Jews, who himself was also waiting[a] for
the kingdom of God. 52 This man went to Pilate
and asked for the body of Jesus. 53 Then he
took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in
a tomb *that was* hewn out of the rock, where
no one had ever lain before. 54 That day was
the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near.
55 And the women who had come with Him
from Galilee followed after, and they observed
the tomb and how His body was laid. 56 Then
they returned and prepared spices and fra-
grant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath
according to the commandment.

He Is Risen

24 Now on the first *day* of the week, very
early in the morning, they, and certain
other women with them,[a] came to the tomb
bringing the spices which they had prepared.
2 But they found the stone rolled away from
the tomb. 3 Then they went in and did not find

23:30 [a]Hosea 10:8 **23:34** [a]NU-Text brackets the first sentence as a later addition. **23:38** [a]NU-Text omits *written* and *in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew.* **23:39** [a]NU-Text reads *Are You not the Christ?* **23:42** [a]NU-Text reads *And he said, "Jesus, remember me.* **23:44** [a]NU-Text adds *already.* **23:45** [a]NU-Text reads *obscured.* **23:46** [a]Psalm 31:5 **23:51** [a]NU-Text reads *who was waiting.* **24:1** [a]NU-Text omits *and certain other women with them.*

Life LESSONS

Luke 24:1–53

SITUATION
The disciples failed to understand what Jesus was saying when He told them that He would rise again.

OBSERVATION
God uses other believers to reveal his will to us.

INSPIRATION
To pray, "Thy will be done" is to seek the heart of God. The word "will" means "strong desire." The study is where we learn what God desires. What is His heart? His passion? He wants you to know it.

Shall God hide from us what He is going to do? Apparently not, for He has gone to great lengths to reveal His will to us. Could He have done more than send His Son to lead us? Could He have done more than give His Word to teach us? Could He have done more than orchestrate events to awaken us? Could He have done more than send His Holy Spirit to counsel us?

God is not the God of confusion, and wherever He sees sincere seekers with confused hearts, you can bet your sweet December that He will do whatever it takes to help them see His will. That's what He was doing on the road to Emmaus.

Everybody else was on-line, and they were on foot. They saw the death of Jesus as the death of the movement, and they packed their bags and headed home. And that is where they were going when Jesus appeared to them. How sweet is the appearance of Jesus on the road. Let a

the body of the Lord Jesus. 4And it happened, as they were greatly[a] perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. 5Then, as they were afraid and bowed *their* faces to the earth, they said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? 6He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, 7saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.'"

8And they remembered His words. 9Then they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. 10It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary *the mother* of James, and the other *women* with them, who told these things to the apostles. 11And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them. 12But Peter arose and ran to the tomb; and stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying[a] by themselves; and he departed, marveling to himself at what had happened.

The Road to Emmaus

13Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles[a] from Jerusalem. 14And they talked together of all these things which had happened. 15So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. 16But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him.

17And He said to them, "What kind of conversation *is* this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?"[a]

18Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, "Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?"

19And He said to them, "What things?"

So they said to Him, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. 21But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. 22Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. 23When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. 24And certain of those *who were* with us went to the tomb and found *it* just as the women had said; but Him they did not see."

25Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" 27And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

The Disciples' Eyes Opened

28Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. 29But they constrained

24:4 [a]NU-Text omits *greatly.* **24:12** [a]NU-Text omits *lying.* **24:13** [a]Literally *sixty stadia* **24:17** [a]NU-Text reads *as you walk? And they stood still, looking sad.*

Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them.

30 Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke *it,* and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.

32 And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" 33 So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those *who were* with them gathered together, 34 saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" 35 And they told about the things *that had happened* on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread.

Jesus Appears to His Disciples

36 Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, "Peace to you." 37 But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. 38 And He said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have."

40 When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet.[a] 41 But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, "Have you any food here?" 42 So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb.[a] 43 And He took *it* and ate in their presence.

The Scriptures Opened

44 Then He said to them, "These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me." 45 And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

46 Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise[a] from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 And you are witnesses of these things. 49 Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem[a] until you are endued with power from on high."

The Ascension

50 And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. 51 Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. 52 And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple praising and[a] blessing God. Amen.[b]

24:40 [a]Some printed New Testaments omit this verse. It is found in nearly all Greek manuscripts. **24:42** [a]NU-Text omits *and some honeycomb.* **24:46** [a]NU-Text reads *written, that the Christ should suffer and rise.* **24:49** [a]NU-Text omits *of Jerusalem.* **24:53** [a]NU-Text omits *praising and.* [b]NU-Text omits *Amen.*

lamb take the wrong turn and miss the pasture and our Shepherd, unwilling to let him wander too far, comes to guide him home. How does He do this? How does he reveal His will to us? You might be surprised at the simplicity of the process.

The first mistake of the duo was to disregard the words of their fellow disciples. God reveals His will through a community of believers. On the first Easter, He spoke through women who spoke to the others. "Certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive" (Luke 24:22, 23).

His plan hasn't changed. Jesus still speaks to believers through believers. "Speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:15, 16). (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Who in your life has helped make God's will known to you? Take time in the next couple of weeks to send them a thank-you note for their involvement in your life. Ask God how He can use you to help build the body of Christ.

EXPLORATION

Body of Believers—Acts 14:21; Romans 12:4–8; 1 Corinthians 12; 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11; Hebrews 12:1.

THE BOOK OF

JOHN

INTRODUCTION

He's an old man, this one who sits on the stool and leans against the wall. Eyes closed and face soft, were it not for his hand stroking his beard, you'd think he was asleep.

Some in the room assume he is. He does this often during worship. As the people sing, his eyes will close and his chin will fall until it rests on his chest, and there he will remain motionless. Silent.

Those who know him well know better. They know he is not resting. He is traveling. Atop the music he journeys back, back, back until he is young again. Strong again. There again. There on the seashore with James and the apostles. There on the trail with the disciples and the women. There in the temple with Caiaphas and the accusers.

It's been sixty years, but John sees Him still. The decades took John's strength, but they didn't take his memory. The years dulled his sight, but they didn't dull his vision. The seasons may have wrinkled his face, but they didn't soften his love.

He had been with God. God had been with him. How could he forget?

The wine that moments before had been water—John could still taste it.

The mud placed on the eyes of the blind man in Jerusalem—John could still remember it.

The aroma of Mary's perfume as it filled the room—John could still smell it.

And the voice. Oh, the voice. His voice. John could still hear it.

I am the light of the world, it rang . . . I am the door . . . I am the way, the truth, the life.

I will come back, it promised, and take you to be with me.

Those who believe in me, it assured, will have life even if they die.

John could hear Him. John could see Him. Scenes branded on his heart. Words seared into his soul. John would never forget. How could he? He had been there.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: John, the disciple

Date Written: A.D. 65–95

Key Themes:

- Jesus was and is eternally present in spirit
- While He was on earth, Jesus communicated with many kinds of people about His mission.
- Jesus performed many miracles to show the nature of His love and power.
- Jesus prepared His followers for the future by promising them the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Key Verse:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

Contents:

I. John the Baptist, the Disciples, and Jesus 1:1—4:54

II. Opposition to Jesus 5:1—12:50

III. Preparation of the Disciples for Jesus' Death and Resurrection 13:1—17:26

IV. Jesus' Death, Resurrection, and Appearances 18:1—21:25

INTRODUCTION
THE BOOK OF JOHN

He opens his eyes and blinks. The singing has stopped. The teaching has begun. John looks at the listeners and listens to the teacher.

If only you could have been there, he thinks.

But he wasn't. Most weren't. Most weren't even born. And most who were there are dead. Peter is. So is James. Nathanael, Martha, Philip. They are all gone. Even Paul, the apostle who came late, is dead.

Only John remains.

He looks again at the church. Small but earnest. They lean forward to hear the teacher. John listens to him. What a task. Speaking of one he never saw. Explaining words he never heard. John is there if the teacher needs him.

But what will happen when John is gone? What will the teacher do then? When John's voice is silent and his tongue stilled? Who will tell them how Jesus silenced the waves? Will they hear how He fed the thousands? Will they remember how He prayed for unity?

How will they know? If only they could have been there.

Suddenly, in His heart he knows what to do.

Later, under the light of a sunlit shaft, the old fisherman unfolds the scroll and begins to write the story of His life . . .

"In the beginning was the Word . . ."

The Eternal Word

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the
Word was God. [2] He was in the beginning with God. [3] All things were
made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was
made. [4] In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. [5] And the
light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend[a] it.

John's Witness: The True Light

[6] There was a man sent from God, whose name *was* John. [7] This
man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through
him might believe. [8] He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear wit-
ness of that Light. [9] That was the true Light which gives light to every
man coming into the world.[a]

[10] He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and
the world did not know Him. [11] He came to His own,[a] and His own[b] did
not receive Him. [12] But as many as received Him, to them He gave the
right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:
[13] who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the
will of man, but of God.

1:5 [a]Or *overcome* **1:9** [a]Or *That was the true Light which, coming into the world, gives light to every man.* **1:11** [a]That is, His own things or domain [b]That is, His own people

Life LESSONS

JOHN 1:1–51

SITUATION
The Greeks and the Jews were familiar with the concept of the word. For the Jews it was an expression of God's wisdom, and for the Greeks it meant reason and intellect.

OBSERVATION
Leaving His heavenly home, Jesus put on human flesh to bring us God's Good News.

INSPIRATION
For John and Andrew, it wasn't enough to listen to John the Baptist. Most would have been content to serve in the shadow of the world's most famous

evangelist. Could there be a better teacher? Only one. And when John and Andrew saw Him, they left John the Baptist and followed Jesus. Note the request they made.

"Rabbi," they asked, "where are You staying?" (John 1:38). Pretty bold request. They didn't ask Jesus to give them a minute or an opinion or a message or a miracle. They asked for his address. They wanted to hang out with Him. They wanted to know Him. They wanted to know what caused His head to turn and His heart to burn and His soul to yearn. They wanted to study His eyes and follow His steps. They wanted to see Him. They wanted to know what made Him laugh and if He ever got tired.

And most of all, they wanted to know, *Could Jesus be who John said He was—and if He is, what on earth is God doing on the earth?* You can't answer such a question by talking to His cousin; you've got to talk to the man Himself.

Jesus' answer to the disciples? "Come and see" (v. 39). He didn't say, "Come and glance" or "Come and peek." He said, "Come and see." Bring your bifocals and binoculars. There is no time for side-glances or occasional peeks. "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2 NIV).

The disciple fixes his eyes on the Savior. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

If people want to know what God is like, they can look at Jesus. If they want to know what Jesus is like, they should be able to look at His followers. Can people see Christ in you?

The Word Becomes Flesh

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld
His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace
and truth.
15 John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of
whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He
was before me.' "
16 And[a] of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.
17 For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came
through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has seen God at any time. The only
begotten Son,[a] who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared
Him.

A Voice in the Wilderness

19 Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and
Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?"
20 He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the
Christ."
21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?"
He said, "I am not."
"Are you the Prophet?"
And he answered, "No."
22 Then they said to him, "Who are you, that we may give an answer
to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?"
23 He said: "I *am*

'The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
"Make straight the way of the Lord*,"* '[a]

as the prophet Isaiah said."
24 Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees. 25 And they
asked him, saying, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ,
nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"
26 John answered them, saying, "I baptize with water, but there
stands One among you whom you do not know. 27 It is He who, com-
ing after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not
worthy to loose."
28 These things were done in Bethabara[a] beyond the Jordan, where
John was baptizing.

The Lamb of God

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said,
"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This
is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before
me, for He was before me.' 31 I did not know Him; but that He should
be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water."
32 And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from
heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. 33 I did not know
Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon

1:16 [a]NU-Text reads *For.* **1:18** [a]NU-Text reads *only begotten God.* **1:23** [a]Isaiah 40:3
1:28 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *Bethany.*

whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' 34 And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."

The First Disciples

35 Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. 36 And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!"

37 The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. 38 Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, "What do you seek?"

They said to Him, "Rabbi" (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), "where are You staying?"

39 He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour).

40 One of the two who heard John *speak,* and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41 He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ). 42 And he brought him to Jesus.

Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah.[a] You shall be called Cephas" (which is translated, A Stone).

Philip and Nathanael

43 The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

46 And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

Philip said to him, "Come and see."

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!"

48 Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?"

Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

49 Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

50 Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." 51 And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter[a] you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Water Turned to Wine

2 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. 3 And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine."

1:42 [a]NU-Text reads *John.* **1:51** [a]NU-Text omits *hereafter.*

EXPLORATION
The Word Is Born—John 14:6, 7; 1 Corinthians 8:5, 6; Galatians 4:4; Philippians 2:7, 8; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 1:1, 2; 4:2.

Life Lessons

John 2:1–25

SITUATION
Weddings were an important part of Jewish culture. An entire village or town often participated in the festivities. Jesus performed His first miracle at this wedding in Cana.

OBSERVATION
Jesus is concerned about us because we are His children and His friends.

INSPIRATION
Picture six men walking on a narrow road. . . .

The men's faces are eager, but common. Their leader is confident, but unknown. They call Him Rabbi. . . .

Where are they going? . . . They haven't been told, but they each have their own idea. . . .

Then a chorus of confusion breaks out and ends only when Jesus lifts His hand and says softly, "We're on our way to a wedding." . . .

"Why would we go to a wedding?" . . .

The answer? It's found in the second verse of John 2. "Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding." . . .

Big deal? I think so. I think it's significant that common folk in a little town enjoyed being with Jesus. . . . Jesus was a likable fellow. And His disciples should be the same. I'm not talking debauchery, drunkenness, and adultery. I'm not

Where is God?

It's called Bethesda. It could be called Central Park, Metropolitan Hospital, or even Joe's Bar and Grill. It could be the homeless huddled beneath a downtown overpass. It could be Calvary Baptist. It could be any collection of hurting people.

An underwater spring caused the pool to bubble occasionally. The people believed the bubbles were caused by the dipping of angels' wings. They also believed that the first person to touch the water after the angel did would be healed. Did healing occur? I don't know. But I do know crowds of invalids came to give it a try.

Picture a battleground strewn with wounded bodies, and you see Bethesda. Imagine a nursing home overcrowded and understaffed, and you see the pool. Call to mind the orphans in Bangladesh or the abandoned in New Delhi, and you will see what people saw when they passed Bethesda. As they passed, what did they hear? An endless wave of groans. What did they witness? A field of faceless need. What did they do? Most walked past, ignoring the people.

But not Jesus. He is in Jerusalem for a feast. . . .

He is alone. He is not there to teach the disciples or to draw a crowd. The people need Him—so He's there.

Can you picture it? Jesus walking among the suffering.

What is He thinking? When an infected hand touches His ankle, what does He do? When a blind child stumbles in Jesus' path, does He reach down to catch the child? When a wrinkled hand extends for alms, how does Jesus respond?

Whether the watering hole is Bethesda or Bill's Bar . . . how does God feel when people hurt?

It's worth the telling of the story if all we do is watch Him walk. Its worth it just to know He even came. He didn't have to, you know. Surely there are more sanitary crowds in Jerusalem. Surely there are more enjoyable activities. After all, this is the Passover feast. It's an exciting time in the holy city. People have come from miles around to meet God in the temple.

Little do they know that God is with the sick.

Little do they know that God is walking slowly, stepping carefully between the beggars and the blind.

Little do they know that the strong young carpenter who surveys the ragged landscape of pain is God.

Study Guide

Read John 2:1–15.

- Think of a time when a friend showed special concern for you during a difficult time in your life. How did that person's support help you?
- What do you think motivated Jesus to go to Bethesda during a celebration?
- What do Jesus' actions in this story teach us about His character?
- What are some of the challenges of ministering to people with a serious illness? What are the rewards?
- How can we demonstrate God's love to people who are suffering?
- Why is it important for believers to minister to hurting people?
- Think of someone you know who is hurting. How can you reach out to that person?
- How can the church become more sensitive to the suffering around it?

4 Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do
with Me? My hour has not yet come."
5 His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do *it.*"
6 Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the
manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons
apiece. 7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they
filled them up to the brim. 8 And He said to them, "Draw *some* out
now, and take *it* to the master of the feast." And they took *it.* 9 When
the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and
did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn
the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. 10 And
he said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine,
and when the *guests* have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept
the good wine until now!"
11 This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and mani-
fested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.
12 After this He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His
brothers, and His disciples; and they did not stay there many days.

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

13 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to
Jerusalem. 14 And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and
sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. 15 When
He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple,
with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money
and overturned the tables. 16 And He said to those who sold doves,
"Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of
merchandise!" 17 Then His disciples remembered that it was written,
"Zeal for Your house has eaten[a] *Me up."*[b]
18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show
to us, since You do these things?"
19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in
three days I will raise it up."
20 Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this
temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"
21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body. 22 Therefore,
when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He
had said this to them;[a] and they believed the Scripture and the word
which Jesus had said.

The Discerner of Hearts

23 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast,
many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did.
24 But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all
men, 25 and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He
knew what was in man.

The New Birth

3 There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler
of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him,

2:17 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *will eat.* [b]Psalm 69:9 **2:22** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *to them.*

endorsing compromise, coarseness, or obscenity. I am simply crusading for the freedom to enjoy a good joke, enliven a dull party, and appreciate a fun evening. . . . (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
How long has it been since you had a good laugh? A hilarious time of fun with Christian friends? Jesus wants us to rejoice and enjoy life. Celebrate!

EXPLORATION
God's Care and Concern—2 Kings 13:23; Matthew 7:9–11; John 11:33–38; Acts 15:14.

Life Lessons

John 3:1–36

SITUATION
Nicodemus belonged to the highest governing body of the Jewish people, the Sanhedrin. Many of these Jewish leaders were bound by tradition and legalism.

OBSERVATION
Jesus came to free men and women from slavery to sin and from the chains of legalism.

INSPIRATION
The meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus was more than an encounter between two religious figures. It was a collision between two philosophies. Two opposing views on salvation.

Nicodemus thought the person did the work; Jesus says God does the work. . . .

These two views encompass all views. All the world religions can be placed in one of two

New Life In Christ

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."—John 3:3

The Second Birth: Life Eternal

Changing the clothes doesn't change the man. Outward discipline doesn't alter what is within. New habits don't make a new soul. That's not to say that outward change is not good. That is to say that outward change is not enough. If one would see the kingdom, he must be born again.

That phrase, "born again," belongs to Jesus. He first used it when He was talking to Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a good man. A very good man. He was a Pharisee, a religious ruler, a member of the Sanhedrin, one of the decision makers in Jerusalem. No doubt he had been taught and had taught that if you change the outside, you change the inside. He, like Paul, revered the law. He, like Paul, wanted to do right.

But Jesus told him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Nicodemus's response is sincere. He didn't ask *Why?* He asked *How?*... How is a person born again?

To get an idea, think back to your own birth. Put the VCR of your days in reverse, and pause at your first moments. Look at yourself. Brand-new. New hands. New eyes. New mouth. No pre-owned parts. All original material.

Now tell me, who gave you these parts? Who gave you eyes so you could see? Who gave you hands so you could work? Who gave you feet that you could walk? Did you make your own eyes? Your own hands? Your own feet?

No, you made nothing; God made everything. He was the one who made everything new the first time, and he is the one who makes everything new the second. The Creator creates again! "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new!" (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Here is (dare I say it?) the greatest miracle of God. It is astounding when God heals the body. It is extraordinary when God hears the prayer.... But none of these compares to when God creates new life.

At our new birth God remakes our souls and gives us what we need, again. New eyes so we can see by faith. A new mind so we can have the mind of Christ. New strength so we won't grow tired. A new vision so we won't lose heart. A new voice for praise and new hands for service. And most of all, a new heart. A heart that has been cleansed by Christ.

And, oh, how we need it. We have soiled what He gave us the first time. We have used our eyes to see impurity, our hands to give pain, our feet to walk the wrong path, our minds to think evil thoughts. All of us need to be made new again.

The first birth was for earthly life; the second one is for eternal life. The first time we received a physical heart; the second time we receive a spiritual heart. The first birth enabled us to have life on earth. The second birth enables us to have life eternal. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

Question: How do you know for certain that you are born again and will have everlasting life?

For more on "New Life in Christ," see page 1596.

"Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

9 Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?"

10 Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? 11 Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is,* the Son of Man who is in heaven.[a] 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but[a] have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

18 "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

John the Baptist Exalts Christ

22 After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized. 23 Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized. 24 For John had not yet been thrown into prison.

25 Then there arose a dispute between *some* of John's disciples and the Jews about purification. 26 And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!"

27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. 28 You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.'

3:13 [a]NU-Text omits *who is in heaven.* **3:15** [a]NU-Text omits *not perish but.*

camps: legalism or grace. . . .

A legalist believes the supreme force behind salvation is you. If you look right, speak right, and belong to the right segment of the right group, you will be saved. The brunt of responsibility doesn't lie with God; it lies within you. . . .

Spirituality, Jesus says, comes not from church attendance or good deeds or correct doctrine, but from heaven itself. Such words must have set Nicodemus back on his heels. But Jesus was just getting started. . . .

Salvation is God's business. Grace is His idea, His work, and His expense. He offers it to whom He desires, when He desires. Our job in the process is to inform the people, not screen the people.

The question must have been written all over Nicodemus's face. Why would God do this? What would motivate Him to offer such a gift? What Jesus told Nicodemus, Nicodemus could never have imagined. The motive behind the gift of new birth? Love. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Nicodemus has never heard such words. Never. He has had many discussions of salvation. But this is the first in which no rules were given. No system was offered. No code or ritual. "Everyone who believes can have eternal life in him," Jesus told him. Could God be so generous? (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are there religious "rules" you observe but do not understand? Did God

command them, or did mere people create them? Do they help you feel close to God? If so, keep them. Are some confusing to you? Ask your pastor to explain them to you.

EXPLORATION
Legalism—Matthew 5:17, 21, 22; 12:9–12; 1 Corinthians 10:25–27.

And as the hands of Jesus opened for the nail, the doors of heaven opened for you.

—Max Lucado (He Chose the Nails)

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: Whoever Believes

Whoever unfurls John 3:16 as a banner for the ages. *Whoever* unrolls the welcome mat of heaven to humanity. *Whoever* invites the world to God.

Jesus could have so easily narrowed the scope, changing *whoever* into *whatever.* "Whatever Jew believes" or "Whatever woman follows Me." But He used no qualifier. The pronoun is wonderfully indefinite. After all, who isn't a *whoever*?

The word sledgehammers racial fences and dynamites social classes. It bypasses gender borders and surpasses ancient traditions. *Whoever* makes it clear: God exports His grace worldwide. For those who attempt to restrict it, Jesus has a word: *Whoever.*

"Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32).

"*Whoever* finds his life will lose it, and *whoever* loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39 NIV).

"Whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother" (Mark 3:35).

"*Whoever* believes and is baptized will be saved, but *whoever* does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16 NIV).

"*Whoever* believes in the Son has eternal life, but *whoever* rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:36 NIV)

"Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst" (John 4:14).

"*Whoever* comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37 NIV).

"*Whoever* lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:26).

"Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17).

Titus 2:11 assures us that "the grace of God . . . has appeared to all men." Paul contends that Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself "to win freedom for all mankind" (1 Timothy 2:6 NEB). Peter affirms that God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). God's gospel has a "whoever" policy. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1477.

29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. 30 He must increase, but I *must* decrease. 31 He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. 32 And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. 33 He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. 34 For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. 35 The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. 36 He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

A Samaritan Woman Meets Her Messiah

4 Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John 2 (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), 3 He left Judea and departed again to Galilee. 4 But He needed to go through Samaria.

5 So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. 6 Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from *His* journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

7 A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." 8 For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

9 Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

10 Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

11 The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? 12 Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?"

13 Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

15 The woman said to Him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."

16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."

17 The woman answered and said, "I have no husband."

Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly."

19 The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you *Jews* say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship."

21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we know what we wor-

Life Lessons

John 4:1–54

SITUATION
Although the Jews did not like the Samaritans, Jesus purposely went through their territory. His disciples were amazed to find Jesus talking with a Samaritan—especially a woman!

OBSERVATION
Jesus knows everything about us before we tell Him.

INSPIRATION
Remarkable. . . . It wasn't within the colonnades of a Roman court that He announced His identity.

No, it was in the shade of a well in a rejected land to an ostracized woman. His eyes must have danced as He whispered the secret.

"I am the Messiah." . . .

Don't miss the drama of the moment. Look at her eyes, wide with amazement. Listen to her as she struggles for words. "Y-y-y-you a-a-a-are the M-m-m-messiah!" . . .

Suddenly the insignificance of her life was swallowed by the significance of the moment. "God is here! God has come! God cares . . . for me!" . . .

That is why she grabbed the first person she saw and announced her discovery, "I just talked to a man who knows everything I ever did . . . and He loves me anyway!"

The disciples offered Jesus some food. He refused it—He was too excited! He had just done what He does best. He had taken a life that was drifting and given it direction.

He was exuberant! (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What doubts and misgivings about Jesus do you have that hinder your faith? First, realize that even the disciples doubted, right up to the end (Matthew 28:17). Second, commit your doubts to the Lord, and ask for faith to live for Christ. Third, have confidence in Jesus the living Word. He will refresh your faith.

EXPLORATION
Doubts—Genesis 3:1–6; 21:7; Numbers 11:21, 22; Mark 8:17–21; Luke 1:18; 4:3; John 3:18; 20:25–28; James 1:5–8.

ship, for salvation is of the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. 24 God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

25 The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will tell us all things."

26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am *He*."

The Whitened Harvest

27 And at this *point* His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why are You talking with her?"

28 The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, 29 "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" 30 Then they went out of the city and came to Him.

31 In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat."

32 But He said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know."

33 Therefore the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought Him *anything* to eat?"

34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. 35 Do you not say, 'There are still four months and *then* comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! 36 And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. 37 For in this the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.' 38 I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors."

The Savior of the World

39 And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all that I *ever* did." 40 So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. 41 And many more believed because of His own word.

42 Then they said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard *Him* and we know that this is indeed the Christ,[a] the Savior of the world."

Welcome at Galilee

43 Now after the two days He departed from there and went to Galilee. 44 For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. 45 So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they also had gone to the feast.

A Nobleman's Son Healed

46 So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at

4:42 [a] NU-Text omits *the Christ*.

Capernaum. 47 When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. 48 Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you *people* see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe."

49 The nobleman said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies!"

50 Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives." So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way. 51 And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told *him,* saying, "Your son lives!"

52 Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." 53 So the father knew that *it was* at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives." And he himself believed, and his whole household.

54 This again *is* the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.

A Man Healed at the Pool of Bethesda

5 After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep *Gate* a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda,[a] having five porches. 3 In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water.[a] 4 For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. 5 Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been *in that condition* a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?"

7 The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me."

8 Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." 9 And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked.

And that day was the Sabbath. 10 The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed."

11 He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.' "

12 Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" 13 But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in *that* place. 14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you."

15 The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

5:2 [a]NU-Text reads *Bethzatha.* **5:3** [a]NU-Text omits *waiting for the moving of the water* at the end of verse 3, and all of verse 4.

Life Lessons

John 5:1–47

SITUATION
While He was traveling to Jerusalem to attend the feast of the Passover, Jesus made a detour to Bethesda to meet the needs of the people.

OBSERVATION
Jesus had special concern for the suffering and the neglected.

INSPIRATION
Jesse spotted Meagan through the window of a café, squeezing lemon into her glass of water. For a couple of minutes he watched. The restaurant had a retro look, a throwback to diner days with soda counters and silver-rimmed tables. Two men in an adjacent booth said something to her; she ignored them. A server offered her a menu; she declined it. A car screeched to a stop and honked at a jaywalking pedestrian; she looked up. That's when Meagan saw him.

Jesse smiled. She didn't. But neither did she turn away. She watched him cross the narrow street, enter the café, and walk toward her booth. He asked if he could join her, and she nodded. As he signaled the server, Meagan noticed Jesse looked tired.

He said little as he waited on his coffee. She spoke even less, at first. But once she began, her whole story tumbled out. Dropped by a boyfriend in Missouri. Fed up with her family. Someone told her she could make fast money in commercials. Escaped to the West Coast. Audition after audition. Rejection after

rejection. Finally cosmetics school. "I never even finished," she confessed. "I heard about the opening at Bentley Bishop's. Went for an interview and . . ."—she looked away—"after doing what he wanted, he hired me. And now"—a tear bubbled—"I'm here. I pay the rent and don't go hungry. Twenty-one years old and surviving L.A. Sounds like the chorus of a country-western song. But I'm okay. At least that's what I tell myself."

Jesse's sandwich arrived. He offered her half, but she declined. After a couple of bites, he wiped his mouth with a napkin.

"Meagan, I know you. I've watched you stain pillows with tears and walk streets because you couldn't sleep. I know you. And I know you hate who you are becoming."

"So"—Meagan touched the corner of her eye with the back of a knuckle—"if you're such a psychic, tell me: where's God in all this? I've been looking for Him a long, long time." With a sudden increase in volume, she began listing misdeeds on her fingers. "I ran out on my folks. I sleep with my boss. I've spent more time on a barstool than a church pew. I'm tired, tired of it all." She bit her lip and looked away.

Jesse inclined the same direction and caught her attention. She looked up to see him beaming, energetic, as though he were an algebra professor and she was struggling with two plus two.

"Where is God in all this?" He repeated her question. "Nearer than you've ever dreamed." He took her glass and held it. "Meagan, everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again. But I offer a

Honor the Father and the Son

16 For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill
Him,[a] because He had done these things on the Sabbath. 17 But Jesus
answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have
been working."
18 Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not
only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, mak-
ing Himself equal with God. 19 Then Jesus answered and said to them,
"Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but
what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in
like manner. 20 For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things
that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these,
that you may marvel. 21 For as the Father raises the dead and gives life
to *them,* even so the Son gives life to whom He will. 22 For the Father
judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, 23 that all
should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not
honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

Life and Judgment Are Through the Son

24 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes
in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judg-
ment, but has passed from death into life. 25 Most assuredly, I say to
you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice
of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. 26 For as the Father has
life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, 27 and
has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the
Son of Man. 28 Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which
all who are in the graves will hear His voice 29 and come forth—those
who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have
done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. 30 I can of Myself do
nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I
do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.

The Fourfold Witness

31 "If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. 32 There is
another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which
He witnesses of Me is true. 33 You have sent to John, and he has borne
witness to the truth. 34 Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but
I say these things that you may be saved. 35 He was the burning and
shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light.
36 But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the
Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness
of Me, that the Father has sent Me. 37 And the Father Himself, who
sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any
time, nor seen His form. 38 But you do not have His word abiding in
you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. 39 You search the
Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are
they which testify of Me. 40 But you are not willing to come to Me that
you may have life.
41 "I do not receive honor from men. 42 But I know you, that you do

5:16 [a] NU-Text omits *and sought to kill Him.*

not have the love of God in you. 43 I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. 44 How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that *comes* from the only God? 45 Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is *one* who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. 46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. 47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

Feeding the Five Thousand

6 After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is *the Sea* of Tiberias. 2 Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased. 3 And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples.

4 Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near. 5 Then Jesus lifted up *His* eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" 6 But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do.

7 Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little."

8 One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, 9 "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are they among so many?"

10 Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. 11 And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed *them* to the disciples, and the disciples[a] to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. 12 So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost." 13 Therefore they gathered *them* up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. 14 Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."

Jesus Walks on the Sea

15 Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.

16 Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, 17 got into the boat, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was already dark, and Jesus had not come to them. 18 Then the sea arose because a great wind was blowing. 19 So when they had rowed about three or four miles,[a] they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near the boat; and they were afraid. 20 But He said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." 21 Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.

6:11 [a]NU-Text omits *to the disciples, and the disciples.* **6:19** [a]Literally *twenty-five or thirty stadia*

different drink. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst. Not ever."

Again, silence.

With a finger Meagan bounced the ice cubes in the glass. Finally she asked, "Never?"

"Not ever."

She looked away, then looked back, and, with every ounce of honesty she owned, asked, "Tell me, Jesse. Who in the world are you?"

Her new friend leaned forward in response and replied, "I thought you'd never ask." (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Do you spend much time among suffering people? Jesus set an example for us. Think of how you can meet the needs of those who suffer, and with God's help, do it.

EXPLORATION
Meeting Needs—Exodus 20:1; Numbers 10:29–32; 35:2, 3; 2 Kings 6:1–7; Matthew 25:34–40.

Life Lessons

John 6:1–71

SITUATION
Jesus demonstrated His power to meet spiritual and physical needs.

OBSERVATION
To gain eternal life, we must be nourished with God's Word, drawn to Christ, and united with Him.

INSPIRATION
When you abide somewhere, you live there. You grow familiar with the surroundings. You don't pull in the driveway and ask, "Where is the garage?" You don't consult the blueprint

God's Presence

Their question—What hope do we have of surviving a stormy night?
My question—Where is God when His world is stormy?

Doubtstorms: turbulent days when the enemy is too big, the task too great, the future too bleak, and the answers too few.

Every so often a storm will come and I'll look up into the blackening sky and say, "God, a little light, please?"

The light came for the disciples. A figure came to them walking on the water. It wasn't what they expected. Perhaps they were looking for angels to descend or heaven to open. Maybe they were listening for a divine proclamation to still the storm. We don't know what they were looking for. But one thing is for sure, they weren't looking for Jesus to come walking on the water . . . and since Jesus came in a way they didn't expect, they almost missed seeing the answer to their prayers.

And unless we look, and listen closely, we risk making the same mistake. God's lights in our dark nights are as numerous as the stars, if only we'll look for them.

"When Jesus comes," the disciples in the boat may have thought, "He'll split the sky. The sea will be calm. The clouds will disperse."

"When God comes," we doubters think, "all pain will flee. Life will be tranquil. No questions will remain."

And because we look for the bonfire, we miss the candle. Because we listen for the shout, we miss the whisper.

But it is in burnished candles that God comes, and through whispered promises He speaks: "When you doubt, look around; I am closer than you think."

Study Guide

Read John 6:16–21.

- What are the tough questions we face when we're dealing with doubt?
- Describe a time when God has come to you or someone you know in a time of darkness.
- On what do we base our expectations of how God will help us?
- When Jesus walked on the water, why do you think Peter wanted to go to Jesus on the water rather than asking Jesus to come to him?
- How do you think faith enables miracles such as Peter standing on water?
- After having witnessed Jesus' power and miracles, why do you think the disciples were still amazed when He worked a miracle?
- What kinds of things make you doubt God?
- What are your expectations of how God will meet you in life?

The Bread from Heaven

22 On the following day, when the people who were standing on the
other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, except
that one which His disciples had entered,[a] and that Jesus had not
entered the boat with His disciples, but His disciples had gone away
alone— 23 however, other boats came from Tiberias, near the place
where they ate bread after the Lord had given thanks— 24 when the
people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they
also got into boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. 25 And
when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him,
"Rabbi, when did You come here?"

26 Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you
seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the
loaves and were filled. 27 Do not labor for the food which perishes, but
for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man
will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."

28 Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the
works of God?"

29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that
you believe in Him whom He sent."

30 Therefore they said to Him, "What sign will You perform then,
that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? 31 Our
fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, *'He gave them
bread from heaven to eat.'"*[a]

32 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did
not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true
bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is He who comes down
from heaven and gives life to the world."

34 Then they said to Him, "Lord, give us this bread always."

35 And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to
Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.
36 But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. 37 All
that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to
Me I will by no means cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven,
not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. 39 This is the
will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should
lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. 40 And this is the will
of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in
Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

Rejected by His Own

41 The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, "I am
the bread which came down from heaven." 42 And they said, "Is not
this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How
is it then that He says, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

43 Jesus therefore answered and said to them, "Do not murmur
among yourselves. 44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who
sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is writ-
ten in the prophets, *'And they shall all be taught by God.'*[a] Therefore

6:22 [a]NU-Text omits *that* and *which His disciples had entered.* **6:31** [a]Exodus 16:4; Nehemiah 9:15; Psalm 78:24 **6:45** [a]Isaiah 54:13

to find the kitchen. To abide is to be at home.

To abide in Christ's love is to make His love your home. Not a roadside park or hotel room you occasionally visit, but your preferred dwelling. You rest in Him. Eat in Him. When thunder claps, you step beneath His roof. His walls secure you from the winds. His fireplace warms you from the winters of life. As John explained, "He who abides in love abides in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16). You abandon the old house of false love and move into His home of real love.

Adapting to this new home takes time. First few nights in a new home you can wake up and walk into a wall. I did. Not in a new home, but in a motel. Climbed out of bed to get a glass of water, turned left, and flattened my nose. The dimensions to the room were different.

The dimensions of God's love are different too. You've lived a life in a house of imperfect love. You think God is going to cut you as the coach did, or abandon you as your father did, or judge you as false religion did, or curse you as your friend did. He won't, but it takes time to be convinced.

For that reason, abide in Him. Hang on to Christ the same way a branch clutches the vine. According to Jesus, the branch models His definition of *abiding*. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me" (John 15:4).

Does a branch ever release the vine? Only at the risk of death. Does the branch ever stop eating? Nope. It receives nutrients twenty-four hours a day. Would you say the branch is vine-dependent? I would.

If branches had seminars, the topic would be "Get a Grip: Secrets of Vine Grabbing." But branches don't have seminars because attendance requires releasing the vine, something they refuse to do.

How well do you pass the vine test? Do you ever release yourself from Christ's love? Go unnourished? Do you ever stop drinking from His reservoir? Do so at the certain risk of a parched heart. (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What is the source of your spiritual nourishment? Movies, television, or music? Do you need to change your diet so that Christ becomes the strong force in your life? Do this by Bible reading, prayer, and worship.

EXPLORATION

Choices—Genesis 2:15–17; Matthew 9:9; Romans 1:24–32.

everyone who has heard and learned[b] from the Father comes to Me. 46 Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father. 47 Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me[a] has everlasting life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. 50 This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

52 The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us *His* flesh to eat?"

53 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For My flesh is food indeed,[a] and My blood is drink indeed. 56 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. 58 This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."

59 These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.

Many Disciples Turn Away

60 Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this,* said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?"

61 When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you? 62 *What* then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? 63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life. 64 But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. 65 And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."

66 From that *time* many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. 67 Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?"

68 But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."[a]

70 Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" 71 He spoke of Judas Iscariot, *the son* of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve.

Jesus' Brothers Disbelieve

7 After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews[a] sought to kill Him. 2 Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. 3 His brothers therefore said

6:45 [b]M-Text reads *hears and has learned.* **6:47** [a]NU-Text omits *in Me.* **6:55** [a]NU-Text reads *true food* and *true drink.* **6:69** [a]NU-Text reads *You are the Holy One of God.* **7:1** [a]That is, the ruling authorities

to Him, "Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. 4For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." 5For even His brothers did not believe in Him.

6Then Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. 7The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. 8You go up to this feast. I am not yet[a] going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come." 9When He had said these things to them, He remained in Galilee.

The Heavenly Scholar

10But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. 11Then the Jews sought Him at the feast, and said, "Where is He?" 12And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him. Some said, "He is good"; others said, "No, on the contrary, He deceives the people." 13However, no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews.

14Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. 15And the Jews marveled, saying, "How does this Man know letters, having never studied?"

16Jesus[a] answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. 17If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or *whether* I speak on My own *authority*. 18He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him. 19Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?"

20The people answered and said, "You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You?"

21Jesus answered and said to them, "I did one work, and you all marvel. 22Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. 23If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? 24Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

Could This Be the Christ?

25Now some of them from Jerusalem said, "Is this not He whom they seek to kill? 26But look! He speaks boldly, and they say nothing to Him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is truly[a] the Christ? 27However, we know where this Man is from; but when the Christ comes, no one knows where He is from."

28Then Jesus cried out, as He taught in the temple, saying, "You both know Me, and you know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. 29But[a] I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me."

30Therefore they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on

7:8 [a]NU-Text omits *yet*. **7:16** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *So Jesus*. **7:26** [a]NU-Text omits *truly*. **7:29** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *But*.

Life LESSONS

John 7:1–53

SITUATION

Jesus prepared His followers for His death, and the leading priests and Pharisees became more determined than ever to arrest Him.

OBSERVATION

Jesus knows how it feels to be persecuted and threatened. His own family did not believe in Him. But Jesus never wavered from His mission to bring the water of life to thirsty souls.

INSPIRATION

Where do you find water for the soul? Jesus gave an answer one October day in Jerusalem. People had packed the streets for the annual reenactment of the rock-giving-water miracle of Moses. In honor of their nomadic ancestors, they slept in tents. In tribute to the desert stream, they poured out water. Each morning a priest filled a golden pitcher with water from the Gihon spring and carried it down a people-lined path to the temple. Announced by trumpets, the priest encircled the altar with a libation of liquid. He did this every day, once a day, for seven days. Then on the last day, the great day, the priest gave the altar a Jericho loop—seven circles—dousing it with seven vessels of water. It may have been at this very moment that the rustic rabbi from the northlands commanded the people's attention. "On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out

of his heart will flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:37, 38).

Finely frocked priests turned. Surprised people looked. Wide-eyed children and toothless grandparents paused. They knew this man. Some had heard Him preach in the Hebrew hills; others, in the city streets. Two and a half years had passed since He'd emerged from the Jordan waters. The crowd had seen this carpenter before.

But had they seen Him this intense? He "stood and shouted" (NLT). The traditional rabbinic teaching posture was sitting and speaking. But Jesus stood up and shouted out. The blind man shouted, appealing for sight (Mark 10:46, 47); the sinking Peter shouted, begging for help (Matthew 14:29, 30); and the demon-possessed man shouted, pleading for mercy (Mark 5:2–7). John uses the same Greek verb to portray the volume of Jesus' voice. Forget a kind clearing of the throat. God was pounding His gavel on heaven's bench. Christ demanded attention.

He shouted because His time was short. The sand in the neck of His hourglass was down to measurable grains. In six months He'd be dragging a cross through these streets. And the people? The people thirsted. They needed water, not for their throats, but for their hearts. So Jesus invited: *Are your insides starting to shrivel? Drink Me.* (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Does Jesus have a slot in your schedule? Do you plan your day around your time with Him, or does He get whatever time is left? Your spiritual life will dry up if you don't continue to drink the water of life. Give Jesus

Him, because His hour had not yet come. 31 And many of the people believed in Him, and said, "When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this *Man* has done?"

Jesus and the Religious Leaders

32 The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning Him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take Him. 33 Then Jesus said to them,[a] "I shall be with you a little while longer, and *then* I go to Him who sent Me. 34 You will seek Me and not find *Me,* and where I am you cannot come."

35 Then the Jews said among themselves, "Where does He intend to go that we shall not find Him? Does He intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? 36 What is this thing that He said, 'You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come'?"

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

37 On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." 39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing[a] in Him would receive; for the Holy[b] Spirit was not yet *given,* because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Who Is He?

40 Therefore many[a] from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, "Truly this is the Prophet." 41 Others said, "This is the Christ."

But some said, "Will the Christ come out of Galilee? 42 Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" 43 So there was a division among the people because of Him. 44 Now some of them wanted to take Him, but no one laid hands on Him.

Rejected by the Authorities

45 Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why have you not brought Him?"

46 The officers answered, "No man ever spoke like this Man!"

47 Then the Pharisees answered them, "Are you also deceived? 48 Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? 49 But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed."

50 Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night,[a] being one of them) said to them, 51 "Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?"

52 They answered and said to him, "Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen[a] out of Galilee."

7:33 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *to them.* **7:39** [a]NU-Text reads *who believed.* [b]NU-Text omits Holy. **7:40** [a]NU-Text reads *some.* **7:50** [a]NU-Text reads *before.* **7:52** [a]NU-Text reads *is to rise.* **7:53** [a]The words *And everyone* through *sin no more* (8:11) are bracketed by NU-Text as not original. They are present in over 900 manuscripts.

An Adulteress Faces the Light of the World

53 And everyone went to his *own* house.[a]

8 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

2 Now early[a] in the morning He came again into the temple,
and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them.
3 Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in
adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, 4 they said to Him,
"Teacher, this woman was caught[a] in adultery, in the very act. 5 Now
Moses, in the law, commanded[a] us that such should be stoned.[b] But
what do You say?"[c] 6 This they said, testing Him, that they might have
something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote
on the ground with *His* finger, as though He did not hear.[a]

7 So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up[a] and
said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone
at her first." 8 And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground.
9 Then those who heard *it,* being convicted by *their* conscience,[a] went
out one by one, beginning with the oldest *even* to the last. And Jesus
was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. 10 When Jesus
had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her,[a]
"Woman, where are those accusers of yours? [b] Has no one condemned
you?"

11 She said, "No one, Lord."

And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and[a] sin no
more."

12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the
world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the
light of life."

Jesus Defends His Self-Witness

13 The Pharisees therefore said to Him, "You bear witness of
Yourself; Your witness is not true."

14 Jesus answered and said to them, "Even if I bear witness of
Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where
I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am
going. 15 You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. 16 And yet if
I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I *am* with the
Father who sent Me. 17 It is also written in your law that the testimony
of two men is true. 18 I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the
Father who sent Me bears witness of Me."

19 Then they said to Him, "Where is Your Father?"

Jesus answered, "You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had
known Me, you would have known My Father also."

20 These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the
temple; and no one laid hands on Him, for His hour had not yet come.

8:2 [a]M-Text reads *very early.* **8:4** [a]M-Text reads *we found this woman.* **8:5** [a]M-Text reads *in our law Moses commanded.* [b]NU-Text and M-Text read *to stone such.* [c]M-Text adds *about her.* **8:6** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *as though He did not hear.* **8:7** [a]M-Text reads *He looked up.* **8:9** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *being convicted by their conscience.* **8:10** [a]NU-Text omits *and saw no one but the woman;* M-Text reads *He saw her and said.* [b]NU-Text and M-Text omit *of yours.* **8:11** [a]NU-Text and M-Text add *from now on.*

priority by praying often and by making decisions you believe He would make.

EXPLORATION
Gift of Faith—1 Corinthians 12:7–13; Ephesians 2:8, 9.

Life Lessons

John 8:1–59

SITUATION
Jesus convinced the Pharisees that God could forgive the most hideous sins. He also tried to convince them of His divine lineage, but they assumed He was demon-possessed or mad. The Pharisees grew angry when Jesus told them that they had fallen out of favor with God.

OBSERVATION
We must seek God's wisdom to overcome difficult situations in life.

INSPIRATION
Sightless and heartless redeemers. . . . That's not the Redeemer of the New Testament.

Compare the blind Christ I saw in Rio to the compassionate one seen by a frightened woman early one morning in Jerusalem.

Jesus sits surrounded by a horseshoe of listeners. Some nod their heads in agreement and open their hearts in obedience. . . .

We don't know his topic that morning. Prayer, perhaps. Or maybe kindness or anxiety. But whatever it was, it was soon interrupted when people burst into the courtyard. . . .

The listeners scramble to get out of the way. The mob is made up of

religious leaders, the elders and deacons of their day. . . . And struggling to keep her balance on the crest of this angry wave is a scantily-clad woman.

Only moments before she had been in bed with a man who was not her husband. Was this how she made her living? Maybe. Maybe not. We don't know.

But we do know that a door was jerked open and she was yanked from a bed. . . .

And now, with holy strides, the mob storms toward the teacher. They throw the woman in his direction. . . .

"We found this woman in bed with a man!" cries the leader. "The law says to stone her. What do you say?" . . .

The accusers are persistent. "Tell us, teacher! What do you want us to do with her?"

He just raised His head and offered an invitation, "I guess if you've never made a mistake, then you have a right to stone this woman." He looked back down and began to draw on the earth again.

Someone cleared his throat as if to speak, but no one spoke. Feet shuffled. Eyes dropped. Then thud. . . . thud . . . thud . . .rocks fell to the ground. . . . And they walked away. They came as one, but they left one by one.

Jesus told the woman to look up. "Is there no one to condemn you?"

Maybe she expected Him to scold her. . . . I'm not sure, but I do know this: What she got, she never expected. She got a promise and a commission.

The promise: "Then neither do I condemn you."

The commission: "Go and sin no more."

The woman turns and

Jesus Predicts His Departure

21 Then Jesus said to them again, "I am going away, and you will
seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come."
22 So the Jews said, "Will He kill Himself, because He says, 'Where I
go you cannot come'?"
23 And He said to them, "You are from beneath; I am from above.
You are of this world; I am not of this world. 24 Therefore I said to you
that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am *He,*
you will die in your sins."
25 Then they said to Him, "Who are You?"
And Jesus said to them, "Just what I have been saying to you from
the beginning. 26 I have many things to say and to judge concerning
you, but He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things
which I heard from Him."
27 They did not understand that He spoke to them of the Father.
28 Then Jesus said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then
you will know that I am *He,* and *that* I do nothing of Myself; but as My
Father taught Me, I speak these things. 29 And He who sent Me is with
Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that
please Him." 30 As He spoke these words, many believed in Him.

The Truth Shall Make You Free

31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide
in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the
truth, and the truth shall make you free."
33 They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have
never been in bondage to anyone. How *can* You say, 'You will be made
free'?"
34 Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever
commits sin is a slave of sin. 35 And a slave does not abide in the house
forever, *but* a son abides forever. 36 Therefore if the Son makes you
free, you shall be free indeed.

Abraham's Seed and Satan's

37 "I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill
Me, because My word has no place in you. 38 I speak what I have seen
with My Father, and you do what you have seen with [a]your father."
39 They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father."
Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do
the works of Abraham. 40 But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has
told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this.
41 You do the deeds of your father."
Then they said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have
one Father—God."
42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me,
for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself,
but He sent Me. 43 Why do you not understand My speech? Because
you are not able to listen to My word. 44 You are of *your* father the
devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a mur-
derer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because

8:38 [a]NU-Text reads *heard from.*

there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources,* for he is a liar and the father of it. 45 But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. 46 Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? 47 He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God."

Before Abraham Was, I AM

48 Then the Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?"

49 Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. 50 And I do not seek My *own* glory; there is One who seeks and judges. 51 Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death."

52 Then the Jews said to Him, "Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.' 53 Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?"

54 Jesus answered, "If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your[a] God. 55 Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, 'I do not know Him,' I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word. 56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad."

57 Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?"

58 Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."

59 Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple,[a] going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

A Man Born Blind Receives Sight

9 Now as *Jesus* passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. 2 And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

3 Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. 4 I[a] must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; *the* night is coming when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

6 When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. 7 And He said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing.

8 Therefore the neighbors and those who previously had seen that he was blind[a] said, "Is not this he who sat and begged?"

9 Some said, "This is he." Others *said,* "He is like him."[a]

8:54 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *our.* **8:59** [a]NU-Text omits the rest of this verse. **9:4** [a]NU-Text reads *We.* **9:8** [a]NU-Text reads *a beggar.* **9:9** [a]NU-Text reads *"No, but he is like him."*

walks into anonymity. . . . But we can be confident of one thing: On that morning in Jerusalem, she saw Jesus and Jesus saw her. And could we somehow transport her to Rio de Janeiro and let her stand at the base of the *Crist redentor,* I know what her response would be.

"That's not the Jesus I saw," she would say. For the Jesus she saw didn't have a hard heart. And the Jesus that saw her didn't have blind eyes.

However, if we could somehow transport her to Calvary and let her stand at the base of the Cross . . . you know what she would say. "That's Him."

She would recognize His voice. It's raspier and weaker, but the words are the same, "Father, forgive them. . . ." And she would recognize His eyes. Eyes that saw her not as she was, but as she was intended to be. (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Discerning right from wrong is sometimes easy, sometimes hard. How about those who have made the wrong choice? How do you judge people? Seek God's wisdom so that you are slow to condemn and quick to show compassion.

EXPLORATION

Judgment—Isaiah 11:3–5; Matthew 13:40–43; Acts 11:2–18; Romans 2:12–15.

Life LESSONS

John 9:1–41

SITUATION

Jesus restored sight to a man born blind. The Pharisees questioned the man, but refused to believe

Usefulness

"Why do you think he's blind?" one asked.

"He must have sinned." "No, it's his folks' fault."

"Jesus, what do you think? Why is he blind?"

"He's blind to show what God can do."

The apostles knew what was coming; they had seen this look in Jesus' eyes before. They knew what He was going to do, but they didn't know how He was going to do it. Lightning? Thunder? A shout? A clap of the hands? They all watched.

Jesus began to work His mouth a little. The onlookers stared. "What is He doing?" He moved His jaw as if He were chewing on something.

Some of the people began to get restless. Jesus just chewed. His jaw rotated around until He had what He wanted. Spit. Ordinary saliva.

If no one said it, somebody had to be thinking it: "Yuk!"

Jesus spat on the ground, stuck His finger into the puddle, and stirred. Soon it was a mud pie, and He smeared some of the mud across the blind man's eyes.

The same One who'd turned a stick into a scepter and a pebble into a missile now turned saliva and mud into a balm for the blind.

Once again, the mundane became majestic. Once again the dull became divine, the humdrum holy. Once again God's power was seen, not through the ability of the instrument, but through its availability.

"Blessed are the meek," Jesus explained. Blessed are the available. Blessed are the conduits, the tunnels, the tools. Deliriously joyful are the ones who believe that if God has used sticks, rocks, and spit to do His will, then He can use us.

Study Guide

John 9:1–12.

- Why do you think Jesus chose to heal that way?
- If you had witnessed this event, how do you think you would have responded?
- Describe a time when you have witnessed God using something unlikely to accomplish His will.
- Think about your personal strengths and weaknesses. How has God worked through your weaknesses for His glory?
- When have you seen a person's weakness or even a specific disability used for God's glory?
- What does it feel like to be used by God?
- Put into your own words why the "availability" of an instrument is just as or even more important than the "ability."
- In what ways can you be more available to God?

He said, "I am *he.*"

10 Therefore they said to him, "How were your eyes opened?"

11 He answered and said, "A Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to the pool of[a] Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and I received sight."

12 Then they said to him, "Where is He?"

He said, "I do not know."

The Pharisees Excommunicate the Healed Man

13 They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees. 14 Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. 15 Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see."

16 Therefore some of the Pharisees said, "This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath."

Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them.

17 They said to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?"

He said, "He is a prophet."

18 But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight. 19 And they asked them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"

20 His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21 but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself." 22 His parents said these *things* because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed *that* He *was* Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. 23 Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

24 So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, "Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner."

25 He answered and said, "Whether He is a sinner *or not* I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see."

26 Then they said to him again, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?"

27 He answered them, "I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear *it* again? Do you also want to become His disciples?"

28 Then they reviled him and said, "You are His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. 29 We know that God spoke to Moses; *as for* this *fellow,* we do not know where He is from."

30 The man answered and said to them, "Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! 31 Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. 32 Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of

9:11 [a]NU-Text omits *the pool of.*

that Jesus had healed him. Despite the obvious evidence, the scoffing Pharisees threw the healed man out of the temple.

OBSERVATION

Some people doubt Christ's work, not for lack of evidence but because they don't want to believe it. Jesus' mission is often missed by the "wise" people of this world.

INSPIRATION

Born blind only to be healed. Healed only to be kicked out. Kicked out only to be left alone. The peak of Everest and the heat of Sahara, all in one Sabbath. Now he can't even beg anymore. How would that feel?

You may know all too well. I know of a man who has buried four children. A single mother in our church is raising two autistic sons. We buried a neighbor whose cancer led to heart trouble, which created pneumonia. Her health record was as thick as a phone book. Do some people seem to be dealt more than their share of bad hands?

If so, Jesus knows. He knows how they feel, and he knows where they are. "Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and . . . found him" (John 9:35). In case the stable birth wasn't enough. If three decades of earth walking and miracle working are insufficient. If there be any doubt regarding God's full-bore devotion, He does things like this. He tracks down a troubled pauper.

The beggar lifts his eyes to look into the face of the One who started all this. Is he going to criticize Christ? Complain to Christ? You couldn't blame him for doing both. After all, he didn't volunteer for the

disease or the deliverance. But he does neither. No, "he worshiped Him" (v. 38). Don't you know he knelt? Don't you think he wept? And how could he keep from wrapping his arms around the waist of the One who gave him sight? He worshiped Him.

And when you see Him, you will too. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Do Jesus' miracles seem hard to believe? God can defy the laws of time and space because He created them. Miracles are easily within God's power to perform. Remember, you serve a powerful God. Go ahead, then, and tell Him how you need His help today.

EXPLORATION
Belief—2 Kings 5:10–15; Matthew 8:5–10; Mark 4:35–41; 9:17–27; 10:15.

Life LESSONS

John 10:1–42

SITUATION
The parable of the Good Shepherd described Jesus' role perfectly. Unlike a hired worker, Jesus, through love and affection, offered to lay down His life for His flock. Believers trust and know Him.

OBSERVATION
Christ is our faithful shepherd. Put your trust in Him. He wants to give you life to the fullest!

INSPIRATION
Heaven never exports monotony. Christ once announced: "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). Nor does God author

one who was born blind. 33 If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing."

34 They answered and said to him, "You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?" And they cast him out.

True Vision and True Blindness

35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of God?"[a]

36 He answered and said, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?"

37 And Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you."

38 Then he said, "Lord, I believe!" And he worshiped Him.

39 And Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind."

40 Then *some* of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, "Are we blind also?"

41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains.

Jesus the True Shepherd

10 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." 6 Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.

Jesus the Good Shepherd

7 Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who *ever* came before Me[a] are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. 12 But a hireling, *he who is* not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. 13 The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd; and I know My *sheep,* and am known by My own. 15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold;

9:35 [a]NU-Text reads *Son of Man.* **10:8** [a]M-Text omits *before Me.*

them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock *and* one shepherd.

17 "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. 18 No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."

19 Therefore there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings. 20 And many of them said, "He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?"

21 Others said, "These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

The Shepherd Knows His Sheep

22 Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. 23 And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch. 24 Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly."

25 Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. 26 But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you.[a] 27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand. 30 I and *My* Father are one."

Renewed Efforts to Stone Jesus

31 Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. 32 Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?"

33 The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God."

34 Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, *'I said, "You are gods" '?*[a] 35 If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), 36 do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? 37 If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; 38 but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe[a] that the Father *is* in Me, and I in Him." 39 Therefore they sought again to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand.

The Believers Beyond Jordan

40 And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was baptizing at first, and there He stayed. 41 Then many came to Him and said, "John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true." 42 And many believed in Him there.

10:26 [a]NU-Text omits *as I said to you.* **10:34** [a]Psalm 82:6 **10:38** [a]NU-Text reads *understand.*

loneliness. Among our Maker's first recorded words were these: "It is not good that man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18).

He gets no argument from us. We may relish moments of solitude—but a lifetime of it? No way. Many of us, however, are too fluent in the language of loneliness.

No one knows me, we think. *People know my name, but not my heart. They know my face, but not my feelings. I have a Social Security number, but not a soul mate. No one really knows me. And . . .*

No one's near me. We hunger for physical contact. . . . Ever since Eve emerged from the bone of Adam, we've been reaching out to touch one another. We need to make a connection. And we need to make a difference.

The anthem of the lonely heart has a third verse: *No one needs me.* The kids used to need me . . . The business once needed me . . . My spouse never needs me . . . Lonely people fight feelings of insignificance.

What do you do with such thoughts? *No one knows me. No one's near me. No one needs me.* How do you cope with such cries for significance?

Some stay busy; others stay drunk. Some buy pets; others buy lovers. Some seek therapy. And a few seek God.

He invites us all to. God's treatment for insignificance won't lead you to a bar or dating service, a spouse or social club. God's ultimate cure for the common life takes you to a manger. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you living life to the fullest? If not, why not? Jesus came to give you

a life of joy, peace, and fulfillment.

EXPLORATION
Shepherd—Genesis 48:15; Psalm 23.

Life LESSONS

John 11:1–57

SITUATION
Jesus traveled from villages beyond the Jordan River to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead. Bethany was about two miles east of Jerusalem, and this miracle attracted the attention of many people, including the chief priests and Pharisees. As a result, the people welcomed Him into Jerusalem like a king, but the Pharisees sought to kill Him.

OBSERVATION
Jesus knew Lazarus would die, but He showed His power by raising him from the dead. Before seeing Him perform this great miracle, however, we see that Jesus was sensitive to grief and pain.

INSPIRATION
Have you been there? Have you been called to stand at the thin line that separates the living from the dead? Have you lain awake at night listening to machines pumping air in and out of your lungs? Have you watched sickness corrode and atrophy the body of a friend? Have you lingered behind at the cemetery long after the others have left, gazing in disbelief at the metal casket that contains the body that contained the soul of the one you can't believe is gone?

If so, then this canyon is not unfamiliar to you. . . . Standing on the edge of

The Death of Lazarus

11 Now a certain *man* was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of
Mary and her sister Martha. 2 It was *that* Mary who anointed
the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose
brother Lazarus was sick. 3 Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying,
"Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick."

4 When Jesus heard *that,* He said, "This sickness is not unto death,
but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through
it."

5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So, when He
heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where
He was. 7 Then after this He said to *the* disciples, "Let us go to Judea
again."

8 *The* disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone
You, and are You going there again?"

9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone
walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this
world. 10 But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light
is not in him." 11 These things He said, and after that He said to them,
"Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up."

12 Then His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well."
13 However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was
speaking about taking rest in sleep.

14 Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. 15 And I am glad
for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless
let us go to him."

16 Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples,
"Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

I Am the Resurrection and the Life

17 So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the
tomb four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles[a]
away. 19 And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha
and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

20 Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went
and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. 21 Now Martha said
to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.
22 But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give
You."

23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

24 Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resur-
rection at the last day."

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who
believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 And whoever lives
and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

27 She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the
Son of God, who is to come into the world."

11:18 [a] Literally *fifteen stadia*

Jesus and Death, the Last Enemy

28 And when she had said these things, she went her way and
secretly called Mary her sister, saying, "The Teacher has come and is
calling for you." 29 As soon as she heard *that,* she arose quickly and
came to Him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was[a]
in the place where Martha met Him. 31 Then the Jews who were with
her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose

11:30 [a]NU-Text adds *still.*

the canyon draws all of life into perspective. What matters and what doesn't are easily distinguished. . . .

It is possible that I'm addressing someone who is walking the canyon wall. . . . If this is the case, please read the rest of this piece very carefully.

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: The Resurrection and the Life

As youngsters, we neighborhood kids would play street football. The minute we got home from school, we'd drop the books and hit the pavement. The kid across the street had a dad with a great arm and a strong addiction to football. As soon as he'd pull in the driveway from work we'd start yelling for him to come and play ball. He couldn't resist. Out of fairness he'd always ask, "Which team is losing?" Then he would join that team, which often seemed to be mine.

His appearance in the huddle changed the whole ball game. He was confident, strong, and most of all, he had a plan. We'd circle around him, and he'd look at us and say, "OK boys, here is what we are going to do." The other side was groaning before we left the huddle. You see, we not only had a new plan, we had a new leader.

He brought new life to our team. God does precisely the same. We didn't need a new play; we needed a new plan. We didn't need to trade positions; we needed a new player. That player is Jesus Christ, God's firstborn Son.

"He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Ephesians 2:4, 5). God's solution is not to preserve the dead—but to raise the dead. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

What Jesus did with Lazarus, He is willing to do with us. Which is good to know, for what Martha said about Lazarus can be said about us, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days" (John 11:39). Martha was speaking for us all. The human race is dead, and there is a bad smell. We have been dead and buried a long time. We don't need someone to fix us up; we need someone to raise us up. In the muck and mire of what we call life, there is death, and we have been in it so long we've grown accustomed to the stink. But Christ hasn't.

And Christ can't stand the thought of His kids rotting in the cemetery. So He comes in and calls us out. We are the corpse, and He is the corpse-caller. We are the dead, and He is the dead-raiser. Our task is not to get up but to admit we are dead. The only ones who remain in the grave are the ones who don't think they are there. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1490.

Look carefully at the scene described in John 11.

In this scene there are two people: Martha and Jesus. And for all practical purposes they are the only two people in the universe.

Her words were full of despair. "If you had been here. . . ." She stares into the Master's face with confused eyes. . . . Lazarus was dead. And the one man who could have made a difference didn't. He hadn't even made it for the burial. . . .

You see, if God is God anywhere, He has to be God in the face of death. Pop psychology can deal with depression. Pep talks can deal with pessimism. Prosperity can handle hunger. But only God can deal with our ultimate dilemma—death. And only the God of the Bible has dared to stand on the canyon's edge and offer an answer. . . .

Jesus then made one of those claims that place Him either on the throne or in the asylum: "Your brother will rise and live again" (v. 23).

Martha misunderstood. (Who wouldn't have?) "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (v. 24).

That wasn't what Jesus meant. . . . Imagine the setting: Jesus has intruded on the enemy's turf; He's standing in Satan's territory, Death Canyon. His stomach turns as He smells the sulfuric stench of the ex-angel, and He winces as He hears the oppressed wails of those trapped in the prison. Satan has been here. He has violated one of God's creations.

With His foot planted on the serpent's head, Jesus speaks loudly enough that His words echo off the canyon walls.

up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, "She is going to the tomb to weep there."[a]

32 Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she
fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my
brother would not have died."

33 Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came
with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. 34 And
He said, "Where have you laid him?"

They said to Him, "Lord, come and see."

35 Jesus wept. 36 Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!"

37 And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the
eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?"

Lazarus Raised from the Dead

38 Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was
a cave, and a stone lay against it. 39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone."

Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been *dead* four days."

40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe
you would see the glory of God?" 41 Then they took away the stone
from the place where the dead man was lying.[a] And Jesus lifted up
His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. 42 And
I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are
standing by I said *this,* that they may believe that You sent Me." 43 Now
when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus,
come forth!" 44 And he who had died came out bound hand and foot
with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said
to them, "Loose him, and let him go."

The Plot to Kill Jesus

45 Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen
the things Jesus did, believed in Him. 46 But some of them went away
to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did. 47 Then the chief
priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we
do? For this Man works many signs. 48 If we let Him alone like this,
everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take
away both our place and nation."

49 And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to
them, "You know nothing at all, 50 nor do you consider that it is expe-
dient for us[a] that one man should die for the people, and not that the
whole nation should perish." 51 Now this he did not say on his own
authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus
would die for the nation, 52 and not for that nation only, but also that
He would gather together in one the children of God who were scat-
tered abroad.

53 Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death.
54 Therefore Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews, but
went from there into the country near the wilderness, to a city called
Ephraim, and there remained with His disciples.

11:31 [a]NU-Text reads *supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.* **11:41** [a]NU-Text omits *from the place where the dead man was lying.* **11:50** [a]NU-Text reads *you.*

55 And the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went from the
country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves.
56 Then they sought Jesus, and spoke among themselves as they
stood in the temple, "What do you think—that He will not come to
the feast?" 57 Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given
a command, that if anyone knew where He was, he should report *it,*
that they might seize Him.

The Anointing at Bethany

12 Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany,
where Lazarus was who had been dead,[a] whom He had raised
from the dead. 2 There they made Him a supper; and Martha served,
but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. 3 Then
Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of
Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with
the fragrance of the oil.

4 But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son,* who would
betray Him, said, 5 "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hun-
dred denarii[a] and given to the poor?" 6 This he said, not that he cared
for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and
he used to take what was put in it.

7 But Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept[a] this for the day of My
burial. 8 For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not
have always."

The Plot to Kill Lazarus

9 Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they
came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus,
whom He had raised from the dead. 10 But the chief priests plotted to
put Lazarus to death also, 11 because on account of him many of the
Jews went away and believed in Jesus.

The Triumphal Entry

12 The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when
they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, 13 took branches of
palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out:

"Hosanna!
'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*!'*[a]
The King of Israel!"

14 Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it
is written:

15 *"Fear not, daughter of Zion;*
Behold, your King is coming,
Sitting on a donkey's colt."[a]

12:1 [a]NU-Text omits *who had been dead.* **12:5** [a]About one year's wages for a worker **12:7** [a]NU-Text reads *that she may keep.* **12:13** [a]Psalm 118:26 **12:15** [a]Zechariah 9:9

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (vv. 25, 26).

. . . Life confronts death—and wins! The wind stops. A cloud blocks the sun and a bird chirps in the distance while a humiliated snake slithers between the rocks and disappears into the ground. . . .

But Jesus isn't through with Martha. With eyes locked on hers He asks the greatest question found in Scripture, a question meant as much for you and me as for Martha.

"Do you believe this?" . . .

This is a canyon question. . . . For then we must face ourselves as we really are: rudderless humans tail-spinning toward disaster. And we are forced to see Him for what He claims to be: our only hope. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are there ways to imitate Jesus' care and compassion for others in times of deep hurt? Responding to grief with your own emotion offers greater comfort than words.

EXPLORATION

Responding to Emotion—Job 6:26; 8:2; Romans 12:15. Jesus' Compassion—Matthew 9:36; 15:32; 20:34; 2 Corinthians 1:3.

Life LESSONS

John 12:1–50

SITUATION

Several groups turned out to see Jesus in the days just prior to His death. Some

Jews still believed He was about to set up an earthly political kingdom. Others, especially the Pharisees, opposed Jesus.

OBSERVATION

Jesus proclaimed His kingship with an entry suitable for a king. In Jerusalem, He engaged the leaders and common folks alike in final words of teaching. He explained why He had to die and summarized his overall message. Judas, however, turned against Jesus.

INSPIRATION

God gave Martha a bass drum of service. God gave Mary a flute for praise. And God gave Lazarus a trumpet. And he stood on center stage and played it.

God still gives trumpets. God still calls people from the pits. God still gives pinch-me-I'm-dreaming, too-good-to-be-true testimonies. But not everyone has a dramatic testimony. Who wants a band full of trumpets?

Some convert the lost. Some encourage the saved. And some keep the movement in step. All are needed.

If God has called you to be a Martha, then serve! Remind the rest of us that there is evangelism in feeding the poor and there is worship in nursing the sick.

If God has called you to be a Mary, then worship! Remind the rest of us that we don't have to be busy to be holy. Urge us with your example to put down our clipboards and megaphones and be quiet in worship.

If God has called you to be a Lazarus, then testify. Remind the rest of us that we, too, have a story to tell. We, too, have neighbors who are lost. We, too, have died and been resurrected.

16 His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when
Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were
written about Him and *that* they had done these things to Him.
17 Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called
Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness.
18 For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that
He had done this sign. 19 The Pharisees therefore said among them-
selves, "You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world
has gone after Him!"

The Fruitful Grain of Wheat

20 Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to
worship at the feast. 21 Then they came to Philip, who was from
Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."
22 Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told
Jesus.
23 But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the
Son of Man should be glorified. 24 Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a
grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it
dies, it produces much grain. 25 He who loves his life will lose it, and he
who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If anyone
serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be
also. If anyone serves Me, him *My* Father will honor.

Jesus Predicts His Death on the Cross

27 "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me
from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. 28 Father,
glorify Your name."
Then a voice came from heaven, *saying,* "I have both glorified *it*
and will glorify *it* again."
29 Therefore the people who stood by and heard *it* said that it had
thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him."
30 Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come because of
Me, but for your sake. 31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the
ruler of this world will be cast out. 32 And I, if I am lifted up from the
earth, will draw all *peoples* to Myself." 33 This He said, signifying by
what death He would die.
34 The people answered Him, "We have heard from the law that the
Christ remains forever; and how *can* You say, 'The Son of Man must
be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?"
35 Then Jesus said to them, "A little while longer the light is with
you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he
who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. 36 While you
have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light."
These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them.

Who Has Believed Our Report?

37 But although He had done so many signs before them, they did
not believe in Him, 38 that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be
fulfilled, which he spoke:

"Lord, who has believed our report?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"[a]

39 Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again:

40 *"He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts,*
Lest they should see with their eyes,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them."[a]

41 These things Isaiah said when[a] he saw His glory and spoke of Him.

Walk in the Light

42 Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *Him,* lest they should be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

44 Then Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me. 45 And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me. 46 I have come *as* a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. 47 And if anyone hears My words and does not believe,[a] I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. 48 He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. 49 For I have not spoken on My own *authority;* but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. 50 And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak."

Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

13 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

2 And supper being ended,[a] the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son,* to betray Him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, 4 rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. 5 After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel with which He was girded. 6 Then He came to Simon Peter. And *Peter* said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?"

7 Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this."

8 Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!"

Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."

12:38 [a]Isaiah 53:1 **12:40** [a]Isaiah 6:10 **12:41** [a]NU-Text reads *because.*
12:47 [a]NU-Text reads *keep them.* **13:2** [a]NU-Text reads *And during supper.*

Each of us has our place at the table.

Except one. There was one at Martha's house who didn't find his place. Though he had been near Jesus longer than any of the others, he was furthest in his faith. His name was Judas. He was a thief. When Mary poured the perfume he feigned spirituality. "The perfume could have been sold and given to the poor," he said. But Jesus knew Judas's heart, and Jesus defended Mary's worship. Years later, John, too, knew Judas's heart, and John explained that Judas was a thief (John 12:6). And all these years he had been dipping his hand in the treasury. The reason he wanted the perfume to be sold and the money put in the treasury was so that he could get his hands on it.

What a sad ending to a beautiful story. But what an appropriate ending. For in every church there are those like Martha who take time to serve. There are those like Mary who take time to worship. There are those like Lazarus who take time to testify.

And there are those like Judas who take, take, take, and never give in return. Are you a Judas? I ask the question carefully, yet honestly. Are you near Christ but far from His heart? Are you at the dinner with a sour soul? Are you always criticizing the gifts of others yet seldom, if ever, giving your own? Are you benefiting from the church while never giving to it? Do others give sacrificially while you give miserly? Are you a Judas?

Do you take, take, take, and never give? If so, you are the Judas in this story.

If you are a Martha, be strengthened. God sees your service.

If you are a Mary, be encouraged. God receives your worship.

If you are a Lazarus, be strong. God honors your conviction.

But if you are a Judas, be warned. God sees your selfishness. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How would you describe yourself and your service for God's kingdom? Are you more like Martha, Mary, Lazarus—or Judas?

EXPLORATION

Unbelief—Numbers 14:11, 12; 2 Kings 17:14, 18–20; Luke 12:8, 9; John 3:18, 36; Romans 9:30–33; Hebrews 4:2, 3, 6, 11.

Life LESSONS

John 13:1–38

SITUATION

Jesus began to teach in the upper room the night before His death. He looked forward to spending this last Passover with His disciples.

OBSERVATION

Jesus washed His disciples' feet, giving us a significant lesson in servanthood.

INSPIRATION

Of all the times we see the bowing knees of Jesus, none is so precious as when He kneels before His disciples and washes their feet.

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He now showed them the full extent of His love [John 13:1–5].

It has been a long day. Jerusalem is packed with Passover guests, most of

9 Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also *my* hands and *my* head!"

10 Jesus said to him, "He who is bathed needs only to wash *his* feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." 11 For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You are not all clean."

12 So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13 You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for *so* I am. 14 If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. 16 Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. 17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

Jesus Identifies His Betrayer

18 "I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, *'He who eats bread with Me*[a] *has lifted up his heel against Me.'*[b] 19 Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am *He*. 20 Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."

21 When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." 22 Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke.

23 Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. 24 Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke.

25 Then, leaning back[a] on Jesus' breast, he said to Him, "Lord, who is it?"

26 Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped *it*." And having dipped the bread, He gave *it* to Judas Iscariot, *the son* of Simon. 27 Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly." 28 But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him. 29 For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, "Buy *those things* we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor.

30 Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night.

The New Commandment

31 So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. 32 If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately. 33 Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you. 34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another;

13:18 [a]NU-Text reads *My bread.* [b]Psalm 41:9 **13:25** [a]NU-Text and M-Text add *thus.*

as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

36 Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?"

Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward."

37 Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake."

38 Jesus answered him, "Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.

The Way, the Truth, and the Life

14 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many mansions;[a] if *it were* not *so,* I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.[b] 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also. 4 And where I go you know, and the way you know."

5 Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?"

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

The Father Revealed

7 "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him."

8 Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us."

9 Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own *authority;* but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. 11 Believe Me that I *am* in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.

The Answered Prayer

12 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do, because I go to My Father. 13 And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask[a] anything in My name, I will do *it.*

Jesus Promises Another Helper

15 "If you love Me, keep[a] My commandments. 16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with

14:2 [a]Literally *dwellings* [b]NU-Text adds a word which would cause the text to read either *if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?* or *if it were not so I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.* **14:14** [a]NU-Text adds *Me.* **14:15** [a]NU-Text reads *you will keep.*

whom clamor for a glimpse of the Teacher. The spring sun is warm. The streets are dry. And the disciples are a long way from home. A splash of cool water would be refreshing.

The disciples enter, one by one, and take their places around the table. On the wall hangs a towel, and on the floor sits a pitcher and a basin. Any one of the disciples could volunteer for the job, but not one does.

After a few moments, Jesus stands and removes His outer garment. He wraps a servant's girdle around His waist, takes up the basin, and kneels before one of the disciples. He unlaces a sandal and gently lifts the foot and places it in the basin, covers it with water, and begins to bathe it. One by one, one grimy foot after another, Jesus works His way down the row.

In Jesus' day the washing of feet was a task reserved not just for servants but for the lowest of servants. Every circle has its pecking order, and the circle of household workers was no exception. The servant at the bottom of the totem pole was expected to be the one on his knees with the towel and basin.

In this case the one with the towel and basin is the king of the universe. Hands that shaped the stars now wash away filth. Fingers that formed mountains now massage toes. And the one before whom all nations will one day kneel now kneels before His disciples. Hours before His own death, Jesus' concern is singular. He wants His disciples to know how much He loves them. More than removing dirt, Jesus is removing doubt.

Jesus knows what will happen to His hands at the crucifixion. Within twenty-four hours they will

be pierced and lifeless. Of all the times we'd expect Him to ask for the disciples' attention, this would be one. But He doesn't.

You can be sure Jesus knows the future of these feet He is washing. These twenty-four feet will not spend the next day following their master, defending His cause. These feet will dash for cover at the flash of a Roman sword. Only one pair of feet won't abandon Him in the garden. One disciple won't desert him at Gethsemane—Judas won't even make it that far! He will abandon Jesus that very night at the table.

I looked for a Bible translation that reads, "Jesus washed all the disciples' feet except the feet of Judas," but I couldn't find one. What a passionate moment when Jesus silently lifts the feet of His betrayer and washes them in the basin! Within hours the feet of Judas, cleansed by the kindness of the one he will betray, will stand in Caiaphas's court.

Behold the gift Jesus gives His followers! He knows what these men are about to do. He knows they are about to perform the vilest act of their lives. By morning they will bury their heads in shame and look down at their feet in disgust. And when they do, He wants them to remember how His knees knelt before them and He washed their feet. He wants them to realize those feet are still clean. "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this" (John 13:7).

Remarkable. He forgave their sin before they even committed it. He offered mercy before they even sought it. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

Indwelling of the Father and the Son

19 "A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. 20 At that day you will know that I *am* in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. 21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."

22 Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?"

23 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. 24 He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.

The Gift of His Peace

25 "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. 28 You have heard Me say to you, 'I am going away and coming *back* to you.' If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said,[a] 'I am going to the Father,' for My Father is greater than I.

29 "And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe. 30 I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me. 31 But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do. Arise, let us go from here.

The True Vine

15 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away;[a] and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

5 "I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will[a] ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

14:28 [a]NU-Text omits *I said.* **15:2** [a]Or *lifts up* **15:7** [a]NU-Text omits *you will.*

Love and Joy Perfected

9 "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.
10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I
have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.
11 "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in
you, and *that* your joy may be full. 12 This is My commandment, that
you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one
than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. 14 You are My
friends if you do whatever I command you. 15 No longer do I call you
servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I
have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I
have made known to you. 16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you
and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your
fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name
He may give you. 17 These things I command you, that you love one
another.

The World's Hatred

18 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated*
you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet
because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world,
therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to
you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me,
they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours
also. 21 But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake,
because they do not know Him who sent Me. 22 If I had not come and
spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse
for their sin. 23 He who hates Me hates My Father also. 24 If I had not
done among them the works which no one else did, they would have
no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father.
25 But *this happened* that the word might be fulfilled which is written
in their law, *'They hated Me without a cause.'*[a]

The Coming Rejection

26 "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the
Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify
of Me. 27 And you also will bear witness, because you have been with
Me from the beginning.

16 "These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be
made to stumble. 2 They will put you out of the synagogues;
yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers
God service. 3 And these things they will do to you[a] because they have
not known the Father nor Me. 4 But these things I have told you, that
when the[a] time comes, you may remember that I told you of them.

"And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I
was with you.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

5 "But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me,
'Where are You going?' 6 But because I have said these things to you,

15:25 [a]Psalm 69:4 **16:3** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *to you.* **16:4** [a]NU-Text reads *their.*

APPLICATION
Take personal inventory of your life. Are there people you don't want to be around because you feel you're superior to them? Are there people you wouldn't "lower" yourself to help? Study the idea of servanthood. Ask God to put a particular person in your path over the course of the next few weeks.

EXPLORATION
Servanthood—Matthew 20:25–28; John 12:24–26; Romans 14:16–19; 1 Corinthians 3:4–9; 2 Corinthians 3:4–6.

Life LESSONS

John 14:1–31

SITUATION
Jesus knew that the disciples were troubled at the thought of His departure. He reassured them by teaching about the Holy Spirit, who would help them.

OBSERVATION
Death did not need to be a terror to the disciples because Jesus was preparing a place for them.

INSPIRATION
What do we do with these worries? Take your anxieties to the cross—literally. Next time you're worried about your health or house or finances or flights, take a mental trip up the hill. Spend a few moments looking again at the pieces of passion.

Run your thumb over the tip of the spear. Balance a spike in the palm of your hand. Read the wooden sign written in your own language. And as you do, touch the velvet dirt, moist with the blood of God.

Blood He bled for you.

The spear He took for you.

The nails He felt for you.

The sign He left for you.

He did all of this for you. Knowing this, knowing all He did for you there, don't you think He'll look out for you here?

Or as Paul wrote, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things" (Romans 8:32).

Do yourself a favor; take your anxious moments to the Cross. Leave them there with your bad moments, your mad moments, and your anxious moments. And may I suggest one more? Your final moment.

Barring the return of Christ first, you and I will have one. A final moment. A final breath. A final widening of the eyes and beating of the heart. In a split second you'll leave what you know and enter what you don't.

That's what bothers us. Death is the great unknown. We're always a bit skittish about the unknown.

Sara certainly was. Denalyn and I thought it was a great idea. We would kidnap the girls from school and take them on a weekend trip. We made reservations at a hotel and cleared the trip with their teachers but kept it a secret from our girls. When we showed up at Sara's fourth grade classroom on Friday afternoon, we thought she'd be thrilled. She wasn't. She was afraid. She didn't want to leave!

As we left, I assured her nothing was wrong. We had come to take her to a fun place. Didn't work. By the time we got to the car, she was crying. She was confused. She didn't like the interruption.

Nor do we. God promises

sorrow has filled your heart. 7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. 8 And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: 9 of sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; 11 of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

12 "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. 13 However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority,* but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. 14 He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you. 15 All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare *it* to you.[a]

Sorrow Will Turn to Joy

16 "A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father."

17 Then *some* of His disciples said among themselves, "What is this that He says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?" 18 They said therefore, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is saying."

19 Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, "Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'? 20 Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. 21 A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. 22 Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.

23 "And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. 24 Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

Jesus Christ Has Overcome the World

25 "These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. 26 In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; 27 for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. 28 I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father."

29 His disciples said to Him, "See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! 30 Now we are sure that You know all things,

16:15 [a] NU-Text and M-Text read *He takes of Mine and will declare it to you.*

and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God."

31 Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? 32 Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. 33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will[a] have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Jesus Prays for Himself

17 Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, 2 as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should[a] give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. 4 I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. 5 And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

6 "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. 7 Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. 8 For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received *them,* and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.

9 "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. 10 And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. 11 Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me,[a] that they may be one as We *are.* 12 While I was with them in the world,[a] I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept;[b] and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. 13 But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. 14 I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 15 I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. 18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.

16:33 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *will.* **17:2** [a]M-Text reads *shall.* **17:11** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *keep them through Your name which You have given Me.* **17:12** [a]NU-Text omits *in the world.* [b]NU-Text reads *in Your name which You gave Me. And I guarded them;* (or *it;*).

to come at an unexpected hour and take us from the gray world we know to a golden world we don't. But since we don't, we aren't sure we want to go. We even get upset at the thought of His coming.

For that reason God wants us to do what Sara finally did—trust her father. "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me," He urged. "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1, 3).

By the way, in a short time Sara relaxed and enjoyed the trip. In fact, she didn't want to come back. You won't want to either.

Troubled about your final moments? Leave them at the foot of the Cross.

Leave them there with your bad moments, mad moments, and anxious moments.

About this time someone is thinking, "You know, Max, if I leave all those moments at the Cross, I won't have any moments left but good ones."

Well, what do you know? I guess you won't. (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Make a list of everything you're worrying about—health, finances, family, job, and so on. Ask God to help you see all of them in light of eternity. Thank Him that He's looking out for you.

EXPLORATION

Eternity—John 10:25–30; 17:1–3; 2 Corinthians 4:16—5:5; 1 John 5:11–13.

Life Lessons

John 15:1–16:4a

SITUATION

The Old Testament referred to Israel as the vine. The Jews in Jesus' day believed that because they belonged to Israel, they were connected to God. But Israel often failed to produce the fruit God looked for. Jesus made a radical statement by claiming to be the vine.

OBSERVATION

Jesus emphasized that Christians must produce fruit. He expected that of His followers then and He expects that of His followers now.

INSPIRATION

God loves to find anything that impedes our growth. Jesus portrays Him as the Good Gardener who cuts and trims the vine. "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you" (John 15:1–3).

Jesus likely spoke these words while walking from the upper room to the Garden of Gethsemane. Perhaps He saw a vine hanging over a fence or draped along the wall. He lifted up a section of the plant and explained the chain of command in the universe. God is the Gardener. Jesus is the vine. We are the grapes.

Vines grew abundantly in Palestine. Carefully pruned, they produced sweet grapes. But left unkept, they crept everywhere and into everything. The gardener

Jesus Prays for All Believers

20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will[a] believe
in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father,
are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world
may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I
have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them,
and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the
world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You
have loved Me.

24 "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with
Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have
given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. 25 O
righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known
You; and these have known that You sent Me. 26 And I have declared
to them Your name, and will declare *it,* that the love with which You
loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

Betrayal and Arrest in Gethsemane

18 When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which
He and His disciples entered. 2 And Judas, who betrayed Him, also
knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples. 3 Then
Judas, having received a detachment *of troops,* and officers from the
chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and
weapons. 4 Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon
Him, went forward and said to them, "Whom are you seeking?"

5 They answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth."

Jesus said to them, "I am *He.*" And Judas, who betrayed Him, also
stood with them. 6 Now when He said to them, "I am *He,*" they drew
back and fell to the ground.

7 Then He asked them again, "Whom are you seeking?"

And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."

8 Jesus answered, "I have told you that I am *He.* Therefore, if you
seek Me, let these go their way," 9 that the saying might be fulfilled
which He spoke, "Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none."

10 Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high
priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was
Malchus.

11 So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not
drink the cup which My Father has given Me?"

Before the High Priest

12 Then the detachment *of troops* and the captain and the officers
of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him. 13 And they led Him away
to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high
priest that year. 14 Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it
was expedient that one man should die for the people.

Peter Denies Jesus

15 And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so *did* another[a] disciple.
Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus

17:20 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *will.* **18:15** [a]M-Text reads *the other.*

into the courtyard of the high priest. 16 But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in. 17 Then the servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also *one* of this Man's disciples, are you?"

He said, "I am not."

18 Now the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for it was cold, and they warmed themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself.

Jesus Questioned by the High Priest

19 The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine.

20 Jesus answered him, "I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet,[a] and in secret I have said nothing. 21 Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said."

22 And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, "Do You answer the high priest like that?"

23 Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?"

24 Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Peter Denies Twice More

25 Now Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. Therefore they said to him, "You are not also *one* of His disciples, are you?"

He denied *it* and said, "I am not!"

26 One of the servants of the high priest, a relative *of him* whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" 27 Peter then denied again; and immediately a rooster crowed.

In Pilate's Court

28 Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover. 29 Pilate then went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?"

30 They answered and said to him, "If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you."

31 Then Pilate said to them, "You take Him and judge Him according to your law."

Therefore the Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death," 32 that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die.

33 Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

34 Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?"

35 Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief

18:20 [a] NU-Text reads *where all the Jews meet.*

trimmed the vines. Why? So they could bear more fruit. God trims us. Why? For the same reason.

"[I] appointed you that you should go and bear fruit," He explained, "and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16).

A good gardener will do what it takes to help a vine bear fruit. What fruit does God want? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (see Galatians 5:22, 23). These are the fruits of the Spirit. And this is what God longs to see in us. And like a careful gardener, He will clip and cut away anything that interferes.

A good track coach looks into the face of the runner and says, "We can break the record, but this is what it will take." And then the coach lists a regimen of practice and discipline.

A good editor reads the manuscript and says, "This work has potential, but here is what we need to cut." And the writer groans as the red ink flows.

A good piano instructor says, "I think you can master this piece for the competition, but to do so here is our rehearsal schedule." And the pianist sighs as she sees the hours required. . . .

God lifts up a branch of His vine and says, "You can be fruitful, but I'm going to have to clip some diseased leaves." And though the process is painful, we can see on the soil below us the spotted greenery He has clipped. Arrogance. Vain ambitions. Bad relationships. Dangerous opportunities. Revenge.

Does God take this process lightly? I don't think so. Listen to this serious statement. "Every branch that bears fruit He prunes,

priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?"

36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

37 Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?"

Jesus answered, "You say *rightly* that I am

Christ Through The Bible

The Clothing of Christ

Scripture says little about the clothes Jesus wore. We know what His cousin John the Baptist wore. We know what the religious leaders wore. But the clothing of Christ is nondescript: neither so humble as to touch hearts nor so glamorous as to turn heads.

One reference to Jesus' garments is noteworthy. "Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be'" (John 19:23, 24).

It must have been Jesus' finest possession. Jewish tradition called for a mother to make such a robe and present it to her son as a departure gift when he left home. Had Mary done this for Jesus? We don't know. But we do know the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom. Why is this significant?

Scripture often describes our behavior as the clothes we wear. . . . Garments can symbolize character, and like His garment, Jesus' character was seamless. Coordinated. Unified. He was like His robe: uninterrupted perfection.

"Woven from top." Jesus wasn't led by His own mind; He was led by the mind of His Father. Listen to His words:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner" (John 5:19).

"I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge" (John 5:30).

The character of Jesus was a seamless fabric woven from heaven to earth . . . from God's thoughts to Jesus' actions. From God's tears to Jesus' compassion. From God's word to Jesus' response. All one piece. All a picture of the character of Jesus.

But when Christ was nailed to the Cross, He took off His robe of seamless perfection and assumed a different wardrobe, the wardrobe of indignity.

The indignity of nakedness. Stripped before His own mother and loved ones. Shamed before His family.

The indignity of failure. For a few pain-filled hours, the religious leaders were the victors, and Christ appeared the loser. Shamed before His accusers.

Worst of all, He wore *the indignity of sin.* Christ "bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24).

The clothing of Christ on the Cross? Sin—yours and mine. The sins of all humanity. (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1503.

a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

38 Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all.

Taking the Place of Barabbas

39 "But you have a custom that I should release someone to you at the Passover. Do you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews?"

40 Then they all cried again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber.

The Soldiers Mock Jesus

19 So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged *Him.* 2 And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put *it* on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. 3 Then they said,[a] "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck Him with their hands.

4 Pilate then went out again, and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him."

Pilate's Decision

5 Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And *Pilate* said to them, "Behold the Man!"

6 Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, "Crucify *Him,* crucify *Him!*"

Pilate said to them, "You take Him and crucify *Him,* for I find no fault in Him."

7 The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to our[a] law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God."

8 Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid, 9 and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.

10 Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?"

11 Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin."

12 From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar."

13 When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called *The* Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. 14 Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!"

15 But they cried out, "Away with *Him,* away with *Him!* Crucify Him!"

19:3 [a]NU-Text reads *And they came up to Him and said.* **19:7** [a]NU-Text reads *the law.*

that it may bear more fruit" (John 15:2). The verb "to cut off" is from the Greek word *airo.* It has at least two meanings; one is to "cut off," and the other is to "pick up" or "lift up." I believe both are implied.

Before God cuts a fruitless branch, He lifts it up. A gardener does this. He repositions the fruitless branch so it can get more sun or more space. Grapes are not like squash or pumpkins. They don't develop while lying on the ground. They grow better hanging free. A good vine dresser will stretch the vine on the arbor to afford it more air and sun.

You've seen gardeners realign a plant, and you've probably seen God realign a life. The family uprooted and transferred to another city—was it so they could learn to trust God? The person so healthy, suddenly sick—was it to remind him to rely on the Gardener? The income stream dried up—was it God's way of lifting you out of the soil of self and drawing you closer to Himself? Leaders with questionable motives and morals are elected. Is it God's way of stirring people to revival?

God "has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). (Did I just hear someone say "Amen"?) God is up to something. He is the busy, active Gardener who clears the field and removes the stones. He constructs the trellises and plants the seeds. He inspects the plants and pulls the weeds. And, most of all, He is good. He is the Good Gardener who cares for His vine. (From

A Gentle Thunder by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What fruit do you see in your life? Do you see how God may be pruning you so that you can bear more and better fruit? Grow closer to Jesus. Yield your life to Him, and allow Him to do anything in your life if it will lead to bearing more fruit.

EXPLORATION
Bearing Fruit—Psalm 1:2, 3; Micah 3:8; Zechariah 4:6; Matthew 13:23; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 5:22, 23; Ephesians 3:16, 17; Philippians 1:6; 2 Peter 1:5–8; 1 John 3:6.

Life LESSONS

John 16:4b–33

SITUATION
The disciples, who lived and worked with Jesus, had been His close friends for three years. They were saddened and afraid to hear Him talk of leaving them. Jesus tried to help His friends see the bigger picture—that God had a purpose and a plan. But He also comforted them by promising to be with them through His Spirit.

OBSERVATION
The Holy Spirit was sent to complete several purposes among both Believers and non-believers, including pointing out sin and allowing people to understand truth. The Spirit always gives glory to Jesus. That should be our goal, too.

INSPIRATION
The Spirit seals you. The verb *sealed* stirs a variety of images. To protect a letter, you seal the envelope. To keep air out of a jar,

Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?"
The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!"
16 Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. Then they took Jesus and led *Him* away.[a]

The King on a Cross

17 And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called *the Place* of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, 18 where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center. 19 Now Pilate wrote a title and put *it* on the cross. And the writing was:

JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

20 Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, *and* Latin.
21 Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'He said, "I am the King of the Jews."' "
22 Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."
23 Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. 24 They said therefore among themselves, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be," that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says:

"They divided My garments among them,
And for My clothing they cast lots."[a]

Therefore the soldiers did these things.

Behold Your Mother

25 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the *wife* of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" 27 Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own *home.*

It Is Finished

28 After this, Jesus, knowing[a] that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" 29 Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put *it* on hyssop, and put *it* to His mouth. 30 So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

19:16 [a]NU-Text omits *and led Him away.* **19:24** [a]Psalm 22:18 **19:28** [a]M-Text reads *seeing.*

Jesus' Side Is Pierced

31 Therefore, because it was the Preparation *Day,* that the bodies
should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was
a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and
that they might be taken away. 32 Then the soldiers came and broke
the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. 33 But
when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did
not break His legs. 34 But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a
spear, and immediately blood and water came out. 35 And he who has
seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he
is telling the truth, so that you may believe. 36 For these things were
done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, *"Not one of His bones shall
be broken."*[a] 37 And again another Scripture says, *"They shall look on
Him whom they pierced."*[a]

Jesus Buried in Joseph's Tomb

38 After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but
secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away
the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave *him* permission. So he came and
took the body of Jesus. 39 And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus
by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a
hundred pounds. 40 Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it
in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury.
41 Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in
the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. 42 So there
they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation *Day,* for the tomb
was nearby.

The Empty Tomb

20 Now the first *day* of the week Mary Magdalene went to the
tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw *that* the stone had
been taken away from the tomb. 2 Then she ran and came to Simon
Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them,
"They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know
where they have laid Him."

3 Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going
to the tomb. 4 So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran
Peter and came to the tomb first. 5 And he, stooping down and looking
in, saw the linen cloths lying *there;* yet he did not go in. 6 Then Simon
Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the
linen cloths lying *there,* 7 and the handkerchief that had been around
His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place
by itself. 8 Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went
in also; and he saw and believed. 9 For as yet they did not know the
Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. 10 Then the disciples
went away again to their own homes.

Mary Magdalene Sees the Risen Lord

11 But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept
she stooped down *and looked* into the tomb. 12 And she saw two

19:36 [a]Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; Psalm 34:20 **19:37** [a]Zechariah 12:10

you seal its mouth with a rubber-ringed lid. To keep oxygen from the wine, you seal the opening with cork and wax. To seal a deal, you might sign a contract or notarize a signature. Sealing declares ownership and secures contents.

The most famous New Testament "sealing" occurred with the tomb of Jesus. Roman soldiers rolled a rock over the entrance and "made the tomb secure, sealing the stone" (Matthew 27:66). Archaeologists envision two ribbons stretched in front of the entrance, glued together with hardened wax that bore the imprimatur of the Roman government—SPQR *(Senatus Populusque Romanus)*—as if to say, "Stay away! The contents of this tomb belong to Rome." Their seal, of course, proved futile.

The seal of the Spirit, however, proves forceful. When you accepted Christ, God sealed you with the Spirit. "Having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). When hell's interlopers come seeking to snatch you from God, the seal turns them away. He bought you, owns you, and protects you. God paid too high a price to leave you unguarded. As Paul writes later, "You were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30). . . .

Your Father has no intention of letting you fall . . . . You can't see Him, but He is present. You are "kept by the power of God" (1 Peter 1:5). He is "able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24).

Drink deeply from this truth. God is able to keep

you from falling! Does He want you living in fear? No! Just the opposite. "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:15, 16). (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Think of an area where you would like to do better or be more effective for God. Then pray that the Spirit will bring glory to God through you. Ask Him to show you how to be more of a servant so that Christ is more readily seen by others.

EXPLORATION

Bringing Glory to Jesus—Matthew 5:16; Mark 10:43–45; John 13:14; Romans 12:1; 15:4–6; 1 Corinthians 6:20.

Life LESSONS

John 17:1–26

SITUATION

This is the longest prayer of Jesus recorded in the Bible. It marked the end of Jesus' earthly ministry but looked forward to the ongoing ministry of the immediate and future disciples. Prayer was an important aspect of Jesus' ministry. Whenever a strategic time approached, Jesus spent time in prayer.

OBSERVATION

The world is a battleground. Constant spiritual and physical warfare wages between the forces of God and Satan. Jesus prayed that God would keep His people pure, give them abundant joy, give them peace and unity, and protect them from Satan's power.

angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. 13 Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."

14 Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing *there,* and did not know that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"

She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away."

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

She turned and said to Him,[a] "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher).

17 Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and *to* My God and your God.'"

18 Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord,[a] and *that* He had spoken these things to her.

The Apostles Commissioned

19 Then, the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled,[a] for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace *be* with you." 20 When He had said this, He showed them *His* hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on *them,* and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained."

Seeing and Believing

24 Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord."

So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

26 And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here,* and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

28 And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

29 Jesus said to him, "Thomas,[a] because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed."

20:16 [a]NU-Text adds *in Hebrew.* **20:18** [a]NU-Text reads *disciples, "I have seen the Lord,"*. . . **20:19** [a]NU-Text omits *assembled.* **20:29** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *Thomas.*

That You May Believe

30 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His
disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written
that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that
believing you may have life in His name.

Breakfast by the Sea

21 After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples
at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed *Himself:*
2 Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee,
the *sons* of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together.
3 Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing."

They said to him, "We are going with you also." They went out and
immediately[a] got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing.
4 But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet
the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 Then Jesus said to them,
"Children, have you any food?"

They answered Him, "No."

6 And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat,
and you will find *some.*" So they cast, and now they were not able to
draw it in because of the multitude of fish.

7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the
Lord!" Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on
his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea.
8 But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far
from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish.
9 Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there,
and fish laid on it, and bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the
fish which you have just caught."

11 Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large
fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many,
the net was not broken. 12 Jesus said to them, "Come *and* eat break-
fast." Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are You?"—know-
ing that it was the Lord. 13 Jesus then came and took the bread and
gave it to them, and likewise the fish.

14 This *is* now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples
after He was raised from the dead.

Jesus Restores Peter

15 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Si-
mon, *son* of Jonah,[a] do you love Me more than these?"

He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."

He said to him, "Feed My lambs."

16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, *son* of Jonah,[a] do
you love Me?"

He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."

He said to him, "Tend My sheep."

17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, *son* of Jonah,[a] do you love

21:3 [a]NU-Text omits *immediately.* **21:15** [a]NU-Text reads *John.* **21:16** [a]NU-Text reads *John.* **21:17** [a]NU-Text reads *John.*

INSPIRATION

Immanuel. The name appears in the same Hebrew form as it did two thousand years ago. "Immanu" means "with us." "El" refers to Elohim, or God. Not an "above us God" or a "some-where in the neighborhood God." He came as the "with us God." God with us.

Not "God with the rich" or "God with the religious." But God with *us.* All of us. Russians, Germans, Buddhists, Mormons, truckdrivers and taxi drivers, librarians. God with *us.*

God *with* us. Don't we love the word "with"? "Will you go *with* me?" we ask. "To the store, to the hospital, through my life?" God says He will. "I am *with* you always," Jesus said before He ascended to heaven, "even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Search for restrictions on the promise; you'll find none. You won't find "I'll be with you if you behave . . . when you believe. I'll be with you on Sundays in worship . . . at mass." No, none of that. There's no withholding tax on God's "with" promise. He is *with* us.

God is with us.

Prophets weren't enough. Apostles wouldn't do. Angels won't suffice. God sent more than miracles and messages. He sent himself; He sent His Son. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you have special times reserved only for praying? Remember, Jesus regularly went to a quiet place and talked to God. Set up a prayer plan, keep it for a week, and ask God to bless it.

Second Chances

The most difficult journey is back to the place where you failed.

Peter is in the boat, on the lake. Once again he's fished all night. Once again the sea has surrendered nothing.

His thoughts are interrupted by a shout from the shore. "Catch any fish?" Peter and John look up. Probably a villager. "No!" they yell. "Try the other side!" So out sails the net. Peter wraps the rope around his wrist to wait.

But there is no wait. The rope pulls taut and the net catches. Peter begins to bring in the net; reaching down, pulling up, reaching down, pulling up. He's so intense with the task, he misses the message.

John doesn't. "It's the Lord, Peter. It's the Lord!"

Peter plunges into the water, swims to the shore, and stumbles out wet and shivering and stands in front of the friend he betrayed. Jesus has prepared a bed of coals. Both are aware of the last time Peter had stood near a fire. Peter had failed God, but God had come to him.

For one of the few times in his life, Peter is silent. What words would suffice? The moment is too holy for words. God is offering breakfast to the friend who betrayed Him. And Peter is once again finding grace at Galilee.

Now, it's just you and God. You and God both know what you did. And neither one of you is proud of it. What do you do?

You might consider doing what Peter did. Stand in God's presence. Stand in His sight. Stand still and wait. Sometimes that's all a soul can do. Too repentant to speak, but too hopeful to leave—we just stand.

Stand amazed.

He has come back.

He invites you to try again. This time, with Him.

Study Guide

Read John 21:1–11.

- Why do you think there is such a stigma on admitting failure when we know that even the most successful people fail along the way?
- How do you imagine Peter felt when he saw Jesus for the first time after denying Him?
- Describe a time when you, like Peter, were too preoccupied or busy to recognize God's presence with you.
- Why do you think Peter was in a hurry to see Jesus after his failure?
- What keeps us from running to Jesus after we have failed?
- What personal fears do you think caused Peter earlier to deny Jesus?
- What kinds of fears motivate us to compromise our convictions?
- How do you imagine this experience impacted Peter for the rest of his life?
- What failure in life do you need to revisit with a greater awareness of God's presence?

Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?"

And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You."

Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep. 18 Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry *you* where you do not wish." 19 This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me."

The Beloved Disciple and His Book

20 Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" 21 Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what *about* this man?"

22 Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remain till I come, what *is that* to you? You follow Me."

23 Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "If I will that he remain till I come, what *is that* to you?"

24 This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true.

25 And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.

EXPLORATION
Prayer—Deuteronomy 4:7; Psalm 32:6; Matthew 14:23; 26:36; Luke 6:28; Ephesians 6:18.

John 18:1–27

SITUATION
Events surrounding the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus form the climax of all four Gospels. The arrest of Jesus has the stamp of divine plan. Jesus suffered to give us eternal life.

OBSERVATION
The way of the Cross provides the way to glory and victory, not defeat and humiliation.

INSPIRATION
Most of us had a hard time learning to tie our shoes. Squirting toothpaste on a brush was tough enough, but tightening shoes by wrapping strings together? Nothing easy about that. Besides, who needs them? Wear loafers. Go barefoot. Who came up with the idea of shoes anyhow?

And knees don't help. Always in your face. Leaning around them, pushing them away—a person can't concentrate.

And, oh, the advice! Everyone had a different approach. "Make a tree with the loop, and let the squirrel run around it into the hole." "Shape a rabbit ear, and then wrap it with a ribbon." Dad said, "Go fast." Your uncle said to take your time. Can't anyone agree? Only on one thing. You need to know how.

Learning to tie your shoes is a rite of passage. Right in there with first grade and first bike is first shoe tying. But, oh, how dreadful is the process.

Just when you think you've made the loops and circled the tree . . . you get the rabbit ears in either hand and give them a triumphant yank and, voilà!— a knot. Unbeknownst to you, you've just been inducted into reality.

My friend Roy used to sit on a park bench for a few minutes each morning. He liked to watch the kids gather and play at the bus stop. One day he noticed a little fellow, maybe five or six years of age, struggling to board the bus. While others were climbing on, he was leaning down, frantically trying to disentangle a knotted shoestring. He grew more anxious by the moment, frantic eyes darting back and forth between the shoe and the ride.

All of a sudden it was too late. The door closed.

The boy fell back on his haunches and sighed. That's when he saw Roy. With tear-filled eyes he looked at the man on the bench and asked, "Do you untie knots?"

Jesus loves that request.

Life gets tangled. People mess up. You never outgrow the urge to look up and say, "Help!"

Jesus had a way of appearing at such moments. Peter's empty boat. Nicodemus's empty heart. Matthew has a friend issue. A woman has a health issue. Look who shows up.

Jesus, our next door Savior.

"Do you untie knots?"

"Yes." (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Remember, God joins our suffering—strengthening and lifting us up so that we can share in His glory.

EXPLORATION
Suffering—Exodus 5:4–9; Leviticus 26:40–45; Job 3:23–26; Psalm 44:9–26; Mark 8:31–38; Romans 8:17; Philippians 1:29; Hebrews 2:10, 18; James 1:2–4; Revelation 2:10, 11.

Life LESSONS

John 18:28—19:42

SITUATION
Jewish leaders hoped to crucify Jesus but did not have the authority to do this, so they brought Him to the Roman governor, Pilate. Shrewd Pilate knew that the Jewish leaders wanted him to act as their executioner. He pronounced Jesus innocent and tried to save Him, but finally consented to the crucifixion because of public pressure.

OBSERVATION
Jesus knew that His trial was according to God's will and faced it with humility and self-control. In His cry, "It is finished," we hear the triumphant recognition that He has now fully accomplished God's will and paid for our sins in full.

INSPIRATION
Pilate wants to let Jesus go. *Just give me a reason,* he thinks, almost aloud. *I'll set you free.*

His thoughts are interrupted by a tap on the shoulder. A messenger leans and whispers. Strange. Pilate's wife has sent word not to get involved in the case. Something about a dream she had.

Pilate walks back to his chair, sits, and stares at Jesus. "Even the gods are on your side?" he states with no explanation. . . .

How many wide eyes have stared at him, pleading for mercy, begging for acquittal?

But the eyes of this Nazarene are calm, silent. . . .

He's not angry with me. He's not afraid . . . He seems to understand. . . .

"What should I do with Jesus, the one called the Christ?" . . .

What do you do with a man who claims to be God, yet hates religion? . . . What do you do with a man who knows the place and time of his death, yet goes there anyway? . . .

You can reject Him. . . .

Or you can accept Him. You can journey with Him. You can listen for His voice amidst the hundreds of voices and follow Him. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What resources do you call upon to make tough decisions? Where do you go for advice? How do you process the options? Next time you need to make a decision, pray first. Then pray again all along the way until you decide.

EXPLORATION
God's Will—Psalm 40:8; 143:10; Micah 6:8; Matthew 6:10; 7:21; John 6:38; Philippians 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Hebrews 10:1–10.

Life LESSONS

John 20:1–31

SITUATION
Tombs in ancient times were closed by a circular stone across the mouth of a cave. Matthew tells us that authorities sealed the tomb and guarded it (Matthew 27:66). When Mary saw the stone rolled away, she was shocked and amazed. She ran to tell Peter and John.

OBSERVATION
The resurrection of Jesus is true. We worship a living Savior and can live forever because He does.

INSPIRATION
There is something about a living testimony that gives us courage. Once we see someone else emerging from life's dark tunnels we realize that we, too, can overcome. . . .

In the eyes of humanity, death was still the black veil that separated them from joy. There was no victory over this hooded foe. Its putrid odor invaded the nostrils of every human, convincing them that life was only meant to end abruptly and senselessly.

It was left to the Son of God to disclose the true nature of this force. It was on the Cross that the showdown occurred. Christ called for Satan's cards. Weary of seeing humanity fooled by a cover-up, He entered the tunnel of death to prove that there was indeed an exit. And, as the world darkened, creation held her breath. . . .

Christ emerged from death's tunnel, lifted a triumphant fist toward the sky, and freed all from the fear of death.

"Death has been swallowed up in victory!" (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Pretend for a moment that you are a prisoner of a heartless regime, working in a labor camp, awaiting your execution. Overnight you are liberated, almost miraculously. Life is yours again. Describe the feelings. Now be glad, for Jesus has done that for you.

EXPLORATION
Resurrection—Matthew 22:31, 32; John 11:25; Acts 1:21, 22; 4:2, 33; Romans 1:3, 4; 6:5; 1 Peter 1:3; 3:21.

Life LESSONS

John 21:1–25

SITUATION
John explained that the story has not ended. Jesus Christ formed, commissioned, and empowered His church. The church continued Jesus' ministry.

OBSERVATION
Jesus does not let His followers wallow in failure. He forgave Peter, and He forgives us.

INSPIRATION
Tether your heart to this promise, and tighten the knot. Remember the words of John's epistle: "If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things" (1 John 3:20). When you feel unforgiven, evict the feelings. Emotions don't get a vote. Go back to Scripture. God's Word holds rank over self-criticism and self-doubt.

As Paul told Titus, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. . . . Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you" (Titus 2:11, 15). Do you know God's grace? Then you can love boldly, live robustly. You can swing from trapeze to trapeze; His safety net will break your fall.

Nothing fosters courage like a clear grasp of grace.

And nothing fosters fear like an ignorance of mercy. May I speak candidly? If you haven't accepted God's forgiveness, you are doomed to fear. Nothing can deliver you from the gnawing realization that you have disregarded your Maker and disobeyed his instruction. No pill, pep talk, psychiatrist, or possession can set the sinner's heart at ease. You may deaden the fear, but you can't remove it. Only God's grace can.

Have you accepted the forgiveness of Christ? If not, do so. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Your prayer can be as simple as this: *Dear Father, I need forgiveness. I admit that I have turned away from You. Please forgive me. I place my soul in Your hands and my trust in Your grace. Through Jesus I pray, amen.*

Having received God's forgiveness, live forgiven! Jesus has healed your legs, so walk. Jesus has opened the cage of the kennel, so step out. When Jesus sets you free, you are free indeed. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Name the biggest blunders of your life—have you faced them, admitted them, wondered about them? Because Jesus restores and heals, you can be forgiven.

EXPLORATION
Failure—Joshua 7; 1 Samuel 15; 1 Chronicles 28:20; Luke 22:31–34, 54–62.

THE BOOK OF

ACTS

INTRODUCTION

They aren't the same men.

Oh, I know they look like it. They have the same names. The same faces. The same mannerisms. They look the same. But they aren't. On the surface they appear no different. Peter is still brazen. Nathanael is still reflective. Philip is still calculating.

They look the same. But they aren't. They aren't the same men you read about in the last four books. The fellows you got to know in the Gospels? These are the ones, but they're different.

You'll see it. As you read you'll see it. In their eyes. You hear it in their voices. You feel it in their passion. These men have changed.

As you read you'll wonder—are these the same guys? The ones who doubted in Galilee? The ones who argued in Capernaum? The ones who ran for their lives in Gethsemane? You'll wonder, "Are these the same men?"

The answer is no. They are different. They have stood face-to-face with God. They have sat at the feet of the resurrected King. They are different.

Within them dwells a fire not found on earth. Christ has taught them. The Father has forgiven them. The Spirit indwells them. They are not the same.

And because they are different, so is the world.

Read their adventures and be encouraged. Read their adventures and be listening. What God did to them, He longs to do for you.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Luke, the doctor and Gospel writer

Date Written: c. A.D. 60

Key Themes:

- The foundations of the early church were established in the aftermath of Jesus' resurrection and ascension.
- The Holy Spirit empowered the disciples to spread the gospel into the world as Jesus commanded.
- The first struggle of the gospel was to stand independently of Jewish tradition and faith.
- The sacrifice Jesus made was for all people.

Key Verse:

"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Contents:

I. The Gospel in Jerusalem 1:1—7:60

II. The Gospel in Judea and Samaria 8:1—12:25

III. The Gospel in the Non-Jewish World 13:1—28:31

Prologue

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began
both to do and teach, 2until the day in which He was taken up,
after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the
apostles whom He had chosen, 3to whom He also presented Himself
alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them
during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the king-
dom of God.

The Holy Spirit Promised

4And being assembled together with *them,* He commanded them
not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the
Father, "which," *He said,* "you have heard from Me; 5for John truly
baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not
many days from now." 6Therefore, when they had come together, they
asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom
to Israel?" 7And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or
seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 8But you shall
receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall
be witnesses to Me[a] in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and
to the end of the earth."

Jesus Ascends to Heaven

9Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He
was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10And while
they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two
men stood by them in white apparel, 11who also said, "Men of Galilee,
why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was
taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you
saw Him go into heaven."

The Upper Room Prayer Meeting

12Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet,
which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. 13And when
they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they
were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas;
Bartholomew and Matthew; James *the son* of Alphaeus and Simon
the Zealot; and Judas *the son* of James. 14These all continued with
one accord in prayer and supplication,[a] with the women and Mary the
mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Matthias Chosen

15And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples[a]
(altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty),
and said, 16"Men *and* brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled,
which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning
Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; 17for he was
numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry."

18(Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity;

1:8 [a]NU-Text reads *My witnesses.* **1:14** [a]NU-Text omits *and supplication.*
1:15 [a]NU-Text reads *brethren.*

Life LESSONS

Acts 1:1—2:47

SITUATION
The Book of Acts was written to give an accurate report of what happened to Jesus' followers and how the early church began and spread. It was written by Luke, the physician and historian, as a sequel to the Gospel that bears his name. Luke told how the gospel spread from Jerusalem to Samaria and finally to every part of the world.

OBSERVATION
God planned that the Holy Spirit would come to empower believers. Jesus gave this plan to the apostles, His last promise before He ascended to heaven.

INSPIRATION
The empty tomb never resists honest investigation. A lobotomy is not a prerequisite of discipleship. Following Christ demands faith, but not blind faith. "Come and see," the angel invites. Shall we?

Take a look at the vacated tomb. Did you know the opponents of Christ never challenged its vacancy? No Pharisee or Roman soldier ever led a contingent back to the burial site and declared, "The angel was wrong. The body is here. It was all a rumor."

They would have if they could have. Within weeks disciples occupied every Jerusalem street corner, announcing a risen Christ. What quicker way for the enemies of the church to shut them up than to produce a cold and lifeless body? Display the cadaver, and Christianity is stillborn.

and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. 19And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.)

20"For it is written in the Book of Psalms:

'Let his dwelling place be desolate,
And let no one live in it';[a]

and,

'Let[b] *another take his office.'*[c]

21"Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection."

23And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. 24And they prayed and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen 25to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." 26And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Coming of the Holy Spirit

2 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord[a] in one place. 2And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. 4And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

The Crowd's Response

5And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. 6And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. 7Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? 8And how *is it that* we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? 9Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God." 12So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "Whatever could this mean?"

13Others mocking said, "They are full of new wine."

1:20 [a]Psalm 69:25 [b]Psalm 109:8 [c]Greek *episkopen,* position of overseer
2:1 [a]NU-Text reads *together.*

But they had no cadaver to display.

Helps explain the Jerusalem revival. When the apostles argued for the empty tomb, the people looked to the Pharisees for a rebuttal. But they had none to give. . . .

Remember the followers' fear at the crucifixion? They ran. Scared as cats in a dog pound. Peter cursed Christ at the fire. Emmaus-bound disciples bemoaned the death of Christ on the trail. After the crucifixion, "the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews" (John 20:19).

These guys were so chicken we could call the Upper Room a henhouse.

But fast-forward forty days. Bankrupt traitors have become a force of life-changing fury. Peter is preaching in the very precinct where Christ was arrested. Followers of Christ defy the enemies of Christ. Whip them and they'll worship. Lock them up and they'll launch a jailhouse ministry. As bold after the Resurrection as they were cowardly before it.

Explanation:

Greed? They made no money.

Power? They gave all the credit to Christ.

Popularity? Most were killed for their beliefs.

Only one explanation remains—a resurrected Christ and His Holy Spirit. The courage of these men and women was forged in the fire of the empty tomb. The disciples did not dream up a resurrection. The Resurrection fired up the disciples. Have doubts about the empty tomb? Come and see the disciples. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you nervous about sharing your faith? Be

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: The Name That Saves

Imagine I've invited you for a day of sailing. Imagine yourself accepting the invitation and boarding the boat.

You begin to worry when you notice that I lift the sail only a few inches on the mast. You think it even stranger that I position myself behind the partially raised sail and begin to blow.

"Why don't you raise the sail?" you ask.

"Because I can't blow on the whole thing," I pant.

"Let the wind blow it," you urge.

"Oh, I can't do that. I'm sailing this boat by myself."

Those are the words of a legalist, huffing and puffing to push his vessel to heaven. (Ever wonder why so many religious folk seem out of breath?)

With time we drift out to sea, and a powerful storm hits. Rain splatters on the deck, and the little vessel bounces on the waves. "I'm going to set the anchor!" I yell. You're relieved that I at least know where the anchor is, but then you are stunned at where I put it.

First, I take the anchor and set it up near the bow. "That should steady the boat!" I shout. But, of course, it doesn't. Next I carry the anchor to the stern. "Now we are secure!" But the bouncing continues. I hang the anchor on the mast, but it doesn't help. Finally, in fear and frustration, you take the anchor and throw it out to the deep and scream, "Don't you know you have to anchor to something other than yourself!"

A legalist doesn't know that. He anchors only to himself. His security comes from what he does; his lineage, his law, and his tattoo. When the storm blows the legalist casts his anchor on his own works. He will save himself. After all, isn't he in the right group? Doesn't he have the right law? And hasn't he passed through the right initiation? (Ever wonder why so many religious people have such stormy lives?)

Here is the point: Salvation is God's business.

. . . God is the One who saves His children. There is only one name under heaven that has the power to save, and that name is not yours. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1509.

bold. Open your mouth to share and let the reliable Holy Spirit direct your conversation.

EXPLORATION

Promises About the Spirit—John 14:16, 26, 15:26, 27; 16:7, 8, 13; Romans 8:11, 26; 2 Corinthians 1:21, 22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13, 14; Hebrews 10:23.

Be careful when you judge. That doesn't mean we shouldn't discern. That does mean we shouldn't pass the verdict.

—Max Lucado (A Gentle Thunder)

Peter's Sermon

14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven,
raised his voice and said to them, "Men of
Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this
be known to you, and heed my words. 15 For
these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it
is *only* the third hour of the day. 16 But this is
what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

17 *'And it shall come to pass in the last days,*
says God,
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all
flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall
prophesy,
Your young men shall see visions,
Your old men shall dream dreams.
18 *And on My menservants and on My*
maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days;
And they shall prophesy.
19 *I will show wonders in heaven above*
And signs in the earth beneath:
Blood and fire and vapor of smoke.
20 *The sun shall be turned into darkness,*
And the moon into blood,
Before the coming of the great and
awesome day of the Lord.
21 *And it shall come to pass*
That whoever calls on the name of the
Lord
Shall be saved.' [a]

22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus
of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by
miracles, wonders, and signs which God did
through Him in your midst, as you yourselves
also know— 23 Him, being delivered by the
determined purpose and foreknowledge of
God, you have taken[a] by lawless hands, have
crucified, and put to death; 24 whom God
raised up, having loosed the pains of death,
because it was not possible that He should be
held by it. 25 For David says concerning Him:

'I foresaw the Lord *always before my*
face,
For He is at my right hand, that I may not
be shaken.
26 *Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my*
tongue was glad;
Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope.
27 *For You will not leave my soul in Hades,*
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see
corruption.
28 *You have made known to me the ways of*
life;
You will make me full of joy in Your
presence.' [a]

29 "Men *and* brethren, let *me* speak freely
to you of the patriarch David, that he is both
dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to
this day. 30 Therefore, being a prophet, and
knowing that God had sworn with an oath to
him that of the fruit of his body, according to
the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on
his throne,[a] 31 he, foreseeing this, spoke con-
cerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His
soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh
see corruption. 32 This Jesus God has raised
up, of which we are all witnesses. 33 Therefore
being exalted to the right hand of God, and
having received from the Father the promise
of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which
you now see and hear.

34 "For David did not ascend into the heav-
ens, but he says himself:

'The Lord *said to my Lord,*
" Sit at My right hand,
35 *Till I make Your enemies Your*
footstool." [a]

36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know
assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom
you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

37 Now when they heard *this,* they were cut
to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of
the apostles, "Men *and* brethren, what shall
we do?"

38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let
every one of you be baptized in the name of
Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you
shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For
the promise is to you and to your children,
and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord
our God will call."

2:21 [a]Joel 2:28–32 **2:23** [a]NU-Text omits *have taken.* **2:28** [a]Psalm 16:8–11 **2:30** [a]NU-Text omits *according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ* and completes the verse with *He would seat one on his throne.* **2:35** [a]Psalm 110:1

A Vital Church Grows

40 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them,
saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." 41 Then those who
gladly[a] received his word were baptized; and that day about three
thousand souls were added *to them.* 42 And they continued steadfastly
in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and
in prayers. 43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and
signs were done through the apostles. 44 Now all who believed were
together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions
and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.
46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking
bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and sim-
plicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people.
And the Lord added to the church[a] daily those who were being saved.

A Lame Man Healed

3 Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour
of prayer, the ninth *hour.* 2 And a certain man lame from his
mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the
temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered
the temple; 3 who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple,
asked for alms. 4 And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said,
"Look at us." 5 So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive
something from them. 6 Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not
have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Naz-
areth, rise up and walk." 7 And he took him by the right hand and lifted
him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.
8 So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with
them—walking, leaping, and praising God. 9 And all the people saw
him walking and praising God. 10 Then they knew that it was he who
sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were
filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Preaching in Solomon's Portico

11 Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John,
all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Sol-
omon's, greatly amazed. 12 So when Peter saw *it,* he responded to the
people: "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so
intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made
this man walk? 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of
our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and
denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let *Him*
go. 14 But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a mur-
derer to be granted to you, 15 and killed the Prince of life, whom God
raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. 16 And His name,
through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see
and know. Yes, the faith which *comes* through Him has given him this
perfect soundness in the presence of you all.
17 "Yet now, brethren, I know that you did *it* in ignorance, as *did*
also your rulers. 18 But those things which God foretold by the mouth

2:41 [a]NU-Text omits *gladly.* **2:47** [a]NU-Text omits *to the church.*

Life Lessons

Acts 3:1—4:37

SITUATION
At the end of this chapter, Luke described the beginning of the early church—a group that was marked by its generosity, its unity, and its care for each other.

OBSERVATION
God desires that His followers live in unity, generosity, and love with one another. This account stands in sharp contrast with the example of Ananias and Sapphira found in chapter 5.

INSPIRATION
Of all the lessons we can draw from [John 13:35], don't miss the most important: Unity matters to God. The Father does not want His kids to squabble. Disunity disturbs Him. Why? Because "all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Unity creates belief. How will the world believe that Jesus was sent by God? Not if we agree with each other. Not if we solve every controversy. Not if we are unanimous on each vote. Not if we never make a doctrinal error. But if we love one another.

Unity creates belief. Disunity fosters disbelief. Who wants to board a ship of bickering sailors? Life on the ocean may be rough, but at least the waves don't call us names.

Paul Billheimer may very well be right when he says: "The continuous and widespread fragmentation of the Church has been the scandal of the ages. It has been Satan's master strategy. The sin of disunity

probably has caused more souls to be lost than all other sins combined."

"All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other." Stop and think about this verse for a minute. Could it be that unity is the key to reaching the world for Christ?

If unity is the key to evangelism, shouldn't it have precedence in our prayers? Shouldn't we, as Paul said, "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3)? If unity matters to God, then shouldn't unity matter to us? If unity is a priority in heaven, then shouldn't it be a priority on earth?

Nowhere, by the way, are we told to build unity. We are told simply to keep unity. From God's perspective there is but "one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16). Unity does not need to be created; it simply needs to be protected.

How do we do that? How do we make every effort to keep the unity? Does that mean we compromise our convictions? No. Does that mean we abandon the truths we cherish? No. But it does mean we look long and hard at the attitudes we carry. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

If unity is the way to reach the world for Christ, is there anything keeping you from pursuing that in your local church and with other believers? When attending church meetings or working on committees, ask God for a sense of oneness and unity.

EXPLORATION

Unity—Romans 12:16; 15:5; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 2:2.

of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. 19 Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, 20 and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before,[a] 21 whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. 22 For Moses truly said to the fathers, *'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you.* 23 *And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'*[a] 24 Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold[a] these days. 25 You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, *'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'*[a] 26 To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one *of you* from your iniquities."

Peter and John Arrested

4 Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, 2 being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And they laid hands on them, and put *them* in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. 4 However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

Addressing the Sanhedrin

5 And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, 6 as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?"

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: 9 If we this day are judged for a good deed *done* to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, 10 let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. 11 This is the *'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.'*[a] 12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

The Name of Jesus Forbidden

13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled.

3:20 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *Christ Jesus, who was ordained for you before.* **3:23** [a]Deuteronomy 18:15, 18, 19 **3:24** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *proclaimed.* **3:25** [a]Genesis 22:18; 26:4; 28:14 **4:11** [a]Psalm 118:22

And they realized that they had been with Jesus. 14 And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. 15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, 16 saying, "What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them *is* evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny *it*. 17 But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name."

18 So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. 20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." 21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done. 22 For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.

Prayer for Boldness

23 And being let go, they went to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. 24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You *are* God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, 25 who by the mouth of Your servant David[a] have said:

'Why did the nations rage,
And the people plot vain things?
26 *The kings of the earth took their stand,*
And the rulers were gathered together
Against the Lord *and against His Christ.'*[a]

27 "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. 29 Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, 30 by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus."

31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

Sharing in All Things

32 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. 33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. 34 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

36 And Joses,[a] who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, 37 having land, sold *it,* and brought the money and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

Lying to the Holy Spirit

5 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. 2 And he kept back *part* of the proceeds, his wife also being aware *of it,* and brought a certain part and laid *it* at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back *part* of the price of the land for yourself? 4 While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

5 Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. 6 And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried *him* out, and buried *him*.

4:25 [a]NU-Text reads *who through the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father, Your servant David.* **4:26** [a]Psalm 2:1, 2
4:36 [a]NU-Text reads *Joseph.*

Life LESSONS

Acts 5:1–42

SITUATION
When God empowered the apostles to perform miracles and amazing signs, the disciples caught the attention of jealous and skeptical religious leaders. Even some Pharisees came to believe in Jesus.

OBSERVATION
The story of the deceit of Ananias and Sapphira follows the account in Acts 4:32–35 where the believers shared their property and goods and gave to those in need.

INSPIRATION
Ananias and Sapphira represent just how much we humans do not trust the truth. They sold a piece of property and gave half the money to the church. They lied to Peter and the apostles, claiming that the land sold for the amount they gave. Their sin was not in holding back some of the money for themselves; it was in misrepresenting the truth. Their deceit resulted in their deaths. Luke writes: "Great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things" (Acts 5:11).

More than once I've heard people refer to this story with a nervous chuckle and say, "I'm glad God doesn't still strike people dead for lying." I'm not so sure he doesn't. It seems to me that the wages of deceit is still death. Not death of the body, perhaps, but the death of:

- a marriage—Falsehoods are termites in the trunk of the family tree.
- a conscience—The tragedy of the second lie is

7 Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not
knowing what had happened. 8 And Peter answered her, "Tell me
whether you sold the land for so much?"
She said, "Yes, for so much."
9 Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together
to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried
your husband *are* at the door, and they will carry you out." 10 Then
immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the
young men came in and found her dead, and carrying *her* out, buried
her by her husband. 11 So great fear came upon all the church and
upon all who heard these things.

Continuing Power in the Church

12 And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders
were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in
Solomon's Porch. 13 Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the peo-
ple esteemed them highly. 14 And believers were increasingly added to
the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, 15 so that they brought
the sick out into the streets and laid *them* on beds and couches, that
at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.
16 Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem,
bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spir-
its, and they were all healed.

Imprisoned Apostles Freed

17 Then the high priest rose up, and all those who *were* with him
(which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indig-
nation, 18 and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the
common prison. 19 But at night an angel of the Lord opened the
prison doors and brought them out, and said, 20 "Go, stand in the
temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."
21 And when they heard *that,* they entered the temple early in the
morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and
called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel,
and sent to the prison to have them brought.

Apostles on Trial Again

22 But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison,
they returned and reported, 23 saying, "Indeed we found the prison
shut securely, and the guards standing outside[a] before the doors; but
when we opened them, we found no one inside!" 24 Now when the
high priest,[a] the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard
these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. 25 So one
came and told them, saying,[a] "Look, the men whom you put in prison
are standing in the temple and teaching the people!"
26 Then the captain went with the officers and brought them with-
out violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned.
27 And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council.
And the high priest asked them, 28 saying, "Did we not strictly com-

5:23 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *outside.* **5:24** [a]NU-Text omits *the high priest.*
5:25 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *saying.*

mand you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!"

29 But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: "We ought to

Christ Through The Bible

The Power of Christ

For three days Jesus' body decayed. It did not rest, mind you. It decayed. The cheeks sank and the skin paled. But after three days the process was reversed. There was a stirring, a stirring deep within the grave . . . and the living Christ stepped forth.

And the moment He stepped forth, everything changed. . . . The resurrection is an exploding flare announcing to all sincere seekers that it is safe to believe. Safe to believe in ultimate justice. Safe to believe in eternal bodies. Safe to believe in heaven as our estate and the earth as its porch. Safe to believe in a time when questions won't keep us awake and pain won't keep us down. Safe to believe in open graves and endless days and genuine praise.

Because we can accept the Resurrection story, it is safe to accept the rest of the story.

Because of the Resurrection, everything changes.

Death changes. It used to be the end; now it is the beginning.

The cemetery changes. People once went there to say good-bye; now they go to say, "We'll be together again."

Even the coffin changes. The casket is no longer a box where we hide bodies, but rather a cocoon in which the body is kept until God sets it free to fly.

And someday, according to Christ, He will set us free. He will come back. "I will come again and receive you to Myself" (John 14:3). And to prove that He was serious about His promise, the stone was rolled and His body was raised.

For He knows that someday this world will shake again. In the blink of an eye, as fast as the lightning flashes from the east to the west, He will come back. And everyone will see Him—you will, I will. Bodies will push back the dirt and break the surface of the sea. The earth will tremble, the sky will roar, and those who do not know Him will shudder. But in that hour you will not fear, because you know Him. (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1521.

that it is always easier to tell than the first.

- a career—Just ask the student who got booted out for cheating or the employee who got fired for embezzlement if the lie wasn't fatal.
- faith—The language of faith and the language of falsehood have two different vocabularies. Those fluent in the language of falsehood find terms like "confession" and "repentance" hard to pronounce.

We could also list the deaths of intimacy, trust, peace, credibility, and self-respect. But perhaps the most tragic death that occurs from deceit is our witness. The court won't listen to the testimony of a perjured witness. Neither will the world. Do we think our coworkers will believe our words about Christ when they can't even believe our words about how we handled our expense account? Even more significantly, do we think God will use us as a witness if we won't tell the truth?

Every high school football team has a player whose assignment is to carry the play from the coach to the huddle. What if the player doesn't tell the truth? What if the coach calls for a pass but the courier says the coach called for a run? One thing is certain: the coach won't call on that player very long. God says if we are faithful with the small things, He'll trust us with the greater things (Matthew 25:21). Can He trust you with the small things? (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Dishonesty can affect—and infect—every aspect of your life. In what areas of your life do you need to clear

up deceitfulness? Ask the Holy Spirit to point out any deceitfulness in your life and pray for the courage to remove it from your life.

EXPLORATION
Deceit—Psalm 32:1–5; 50:19; 55:23; Proverbs 12:5; Jeremiah 17:9.

Life LESSONS

Acts 6:1–15

SITUATION
The twelve apostles established their priorities and recognized they needed additional help, so they recruited others to assist them.

OBSERVATION
With the recruiting of the seven men, the apostles were able to give their full attention to prayer and the teaching of the Word of God.

INSPIRATION
Some of us have tried to have a daily quiet time and have not been successful. Others of us have a hard time concentrating. And all of us are busy. So rather than spend time with God, listening for His voice, we'll let others spend time with Him and then benefit from their experience. Let them tell us what God is saying. After all, isn't that why we pay preachers? Isn't that why we read Christian books? These folks are good at daily devotions. I'll just learn from them.

If that is your approach, if your spiritual experiences are secondhand and not firsthand, I'd like to challenge you with this thought: Do you do that with other parts of your life? I don't think so.

You don't do that with vacations. You don't

obey God rather than men. 30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. 31 Him God has exalted to His right hand *to be* Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are His witnesses to these things, and *so* also *is* the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."

Gamaliel's Advice

33 When they heard *this,* they were furious and plotted to kill them. 34 Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. 35 And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. 36 For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. 37 After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. 38 And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; 39 but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God."

40 And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten *them,* they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His[a] name. 42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus *as* the Christ.

Seven Chosen to Serve

6 Now in those days, when *the number of* the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists,[a] because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; 4 but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, 6 whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Stephen Accused of Blasphemy

8 And Stephen, full of faith[a] and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. 9 Then there arose some from what is called the

5:41 [a]NU-Text reads *the name;* M-Text reads *the name of Jesus.* **6:1** [a]That is, Greek-speaking Jews **6:8** [a]NU-Text reads *grace.*

Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. 10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. 11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." 12 And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon *him,* seized him, and brought *him* to the council. 13 They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous[a] words against this holy place and the law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us." 15 And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

Stephen's Address: The Call of Abraham

7 Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?"

2 And he said, "Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, 3 and said to him, *'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.'*[a] 4 Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell. 5 And *God* gave him no inheritance in it, not even *enough* to set his foot on. But even when *Abraham* had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him. 6 But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress *them* four hundred years. 7 *'And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,'*[a] said God, *'and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.'*[b] 8 Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so *Abraham* begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac *begot* Jacob, and Jacob *begot* the twelve patriarchs.

The Patriarchs in Egypt

9 "And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him 10 and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. 11 Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance. 12 But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. 13 And the second *time* Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh. 14 Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to *him,* seventy-five[a] people. 15 So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers. 16 And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, *the father* of Shechem.

God Delivers Israel by Moses

17 "But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt 18 till

6:13 [a]NU-Text omits *blasphemous.* **7:3** [a]Genesis 12:1 **7:7** [a]Genesis 15:14 [b]Exodus 3:12 **7:14** [a]Or *seventy* (compare Exodus 1:5)

say, "Vacations are such a hassle, packing bags and traveling. I'm going to send someone on vacation for me. When he returns, I'll hear all about it and be spared all the inconvenience." Would you do that? No! You want the experience firsthand. You want the sights firsthand, and you want to rest firsthand. Certain things no one can do for you.

You don't do that with romance. You don't say, "I'm in love with that wonderful person, but romance is such a hassle. I'm going to hire a surrogate lover to enjoy the romance in my place. I'll hear all about it and be spared the inconvenience." Who would do that? Perish the thought. You want the romance firsthand. You don't want to miss a word or a date, and you certainly don't want to miss the kiss, right? Certain things no one can do for you.

You don't let someone eat on your behalf, do you? You don't say, "Chewing is such a bother. My jaws grow so tired, and the variety of tastes is so overwhelming. I'm going to hire someone to chew my food, and I'll just swallow whatever he gives me." Would you do that? Yuck! Of course not! Certain things no one can do for you.

And one of those is spending time with God.

Listening to God is a firsthand experience. When He asks for your attention, God doesn't want you to send a substitute; He wants you. He invites you to vacation in His splendor. He invites you to feel the touch of His hand. He invites you to feast at His table. He wants to spend time with you. And with a little training, your time with God can be the highlight of your day. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

another king arose who did not know Joseph. 19 This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live. 20 At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father's house for three months. 21 But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. 22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.

23 "Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. 24 And seeing one of *them* suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. 25 For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand. 26 And the next day he appeared to *two of* them as they were fighting, and *tried to* reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?' 27 But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, *'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? 28 Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?'*[a] 29 Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons.

30 "And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord[a] appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. 31 When Moses saw *it,* he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, 32 *saying, 'I am the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'*[a] And Moses trembled and dared not look. 33 *'Then the Lord said to him, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. 34 I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt."'*[a]

35 "This Moses whom they rejected, saying, *'Who made you a ruler and a judge?'*[a] is the one God sent *to be* a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. 36 He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

Israel Rebels Against God

37 "This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel,[a] *'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.'*[b]

38 "This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and *with* our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give us, 39 whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, 40 saying to Aaron, *'Make us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'*[a] 41 And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

7:28 [a]Exodus 2:14 **7:30** [a]NU-Text omits *of the Lord.* **7:32** [a]Exodus 3:6, 15 **7:34** [a]Exodus 3:5, 7, 8, 10 **7:35** [a]Exodus 2:14 **7:37** [a]Deuteronomy 18:15 [b]NU-Text and M-Text omit *Him you shall hear.* **7:40** [a]Exodus 32:1, 23

APPLICATION
How much time do you spend a day—or a week—in prayer and Bible study? Set aside a certain place and time each day to be alone with the Lord. Recognize that it has to be a priority if you want to know Him better.

EXPLORATION
Prayer and Bible Study—Acts 17:11; Ephesians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:14, 15.

Life Lessons

Acts 7:1—8:1a

SITUATION
Stephen's speech summarized Jewish history. God had blessed the Hebrew nation magnificently, Stephen recalled, but once again their leaders had turned against God.

OBSERVATION
Stephen's speech repeatedly referred to human rebelliousness toward God. It shows how desperately we try to avoid God's truth—even to the extent of killing the messenger. At his death, Stephen looked to Christ.

INSPIRATION
The story of young Matthew Huffman came across my desk the week I was writing this chapter. He was the six-year-old son of missionaries in Salvador, Brazil. One morning he began to complain of fever. As his temperature went up, he began losing his eyesight. His mother and father put him in the car and raced him to the hospital.

As they were driving and he was lying on his mother's lap, he did something his

42 Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven,
as it is written in the book of the Prophets:

'Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices during forty
years in the wilderness,
O house of Israel?
43 *You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch,*
And the star of your god Remphan,
Images which you made to worship;
And I will carry you away beyond Babylon.'[a]

God's True Tabernacle

44 "Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as
He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern
that he had seen, 45 which our fathers, having received it in turn, also
brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom
God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David,
46 who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the
God of Jacob. 47 But Solomon built Him a house.

48 "However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with
hands, as the prophet says:

49 *'Heaven is My throne,*
And earth is My footstool.
What house will you build for Me? says the Lord,
Or what is the place of My rest?
50 *Has My hand not made all these things?'*[a]

Israel Resists the Holy Spirit

51 "*You* stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You
always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did,* so *do* you. 52 Which
of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those
who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have
become the betrayers and murderers, 53 who have received the law by
the direction of angels and have not kept *it.*"

Stephen the Martyr

54 When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and
they gnashed at him with *their* teeth. 55 But he, being full of the Holy
Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing
at the right hand of God, 56 and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened
and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran
at him with one accord; 58 and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned
him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young
man named Saul. 59 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God*
and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 Then he knelt down and
cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin."
And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

7:43 [a]Amos 5:25–27 **7:50** [a]Isaiah 66:1, 2

parents will never forget. He extended his hand in the air. His mother took it and he pulled it away. He extended it again. She again took it and he, again, pulled it back and reached into the air. Confused, the mother asked her son, "What are you reaching for, Matthew?"

"I'm reaching for Jesus' hand," he answered. And with those words he closed his eyes and slid into a coma from which he never would awaken. He died two days later, a victim of bacterial meningitis.

Of all the things he didn't learn in his short life, he'd learned the most important: who to reach for in the hour of death. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Have you developed the practice of constantly looking to Jesus? If you have, you will reach to Him during your most difficult hour. If you haven't, ask Him to accompany you in all your thoughts.

EXPLORATION
Spiritual Battle—Ephesians 6:10–18; Philippians 1:27, 28; 1 Thessalonians 5:8; 1 Timothy 6:12; James 1:2–4; 1 Peter 1:6, 7.

Life Lessons

Acts 8:1b–40

SITUATION
Persecution against the church after Stephen's death forced Believers to go beyond Jerusalem to share the gospel. Philip was the first example of such missionary activity.

OBSERVATION
The gospel is for everyone regardless of ethnic group. Therefore, believers should

be ready to witness to anyone who may be seeking.

INSPIRATION

You've heard the voice whispering your name, haven't you? You've felt the nudge to go and sensed the urge to speak. Hasn't it occurred to you?

You invite a couple over for coffee. Nothing heroic, just a nice evening with old friends. But from the moment you enter, you can feel the tension. Colder than glaciers, they are. You can tell something is wrong. Typically you're not one to inquire, but you feel a concern that won't be silent. So you ask.

You are in a business meeting where one of your co-workers gets raked over the coals. Everyone else is thinking, *I'm glad that wasn't me.* But the Holy Spirit is leading you to think, *How hard this must be.* So, after the meeting you approach the employee and express your concern.

You notice the fellow on the other side of the church auditorium. He looks a bit out of place, what with his strange clothing and all. You learn that he is from Africa, in town on business. The next Sunday he is back. And the third Sunday he is present. You introduce yourself. He tells you how he is fascinated by the faith and how he wants to learn more. Rather than offer to teach him, you simply urge him to read the Bible.

Later in the week, you regret not being more direct. You call the office where he is consulting and learn that he is leaving today for home. You know in your heart you can't let him leave. So you rush to the airport and find him awaiting his flight, with a Bible open on his lap.

"Do you understand

Saul Persecutes the Church

8 Now Saul was consenting to his death.

At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And devout men carried Stephen *to his burial,* and made great lamentation over him.

3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison.

Christ Is Preached in Samaria

4 Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. 5 Then Philip went down to the[a] city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. 6 And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. 8 And there was great joy in that city.

The Sorcerer's Profession of Faith

9 But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, 10 to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." 11 And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. 12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. 13 Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

The Sorcerer's Sin

14 Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, 15 who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. 16 For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

18 And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, 19 saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

20 But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! 21 You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. 22 Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. 23 For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

24 Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."

25 So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord,

8:5 [a]Or *a*

they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

Christ Is Preached to an Ethiopian

26 Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go
toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to
Gaza." This is desert. 27 So he arose and went. And behold, a man of
Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the
Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jeru-
salem to worship, 28 was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was
reading Isaiah the prophet. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near
and overtake this chariot."

30 So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah,
and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he
asked Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 The place in the Scripture
which he read was this:

"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter;
And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.
33 *In His humiliation His justice was taken away,*
And who will declare His generation?
For His life is taken from the earth."[a]

34 So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom
does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" 35 Then
Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached
Jesus to him. 36 Now as they went down the road, they came to some
water. And the eunuch said, "See, *here is* water. What hinders me from
being baptized?"

37 Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may."

And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son
of God."[a]

38 So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and
the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. 39 Now
when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught
Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his
way rejoicing. 40 But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through,
he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.

The Damascus Road: Saul Converted

9 Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples
of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked letters from him
to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were
of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to
Jerusalem.

3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light

8:33 [a]Isaiah 53:7, 8 **8:37** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit this verse. It is found in Western texts, including the Latin tradition.

what you are reading?" you inquire.

"How can I, unless someone explains it to me?"

And so you, like Philip, explain. And he, like the Ethiopian, believes. Baptism is requested and baptism is offered. He catches a later flight and you catch a glimpse of what it means to be led by the Spirit.

Were there lights? You just lit one. Were there voices? You just were one. Was there a miracle? You just witnessed one. Who knows? If the Bible were being written today, that might be your name in the eighth chapter of Acts.

(From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Is there anyone you are not willing to tell about Jesus? Is there any place you are not willing to take the Good News? Ask God to give you the willingness and the courage. Let Him direct you where He wants, not where you want.

EXPLORATION

Witnessing—Acts 13:46, 47; Romans 1:14–16; 10:8, 9; 1 Corinthians 15:1–4; Galatians 2:7–9; 2 Timothy 1:8; 1 Peter 1:23–25.

Life Lessons

Acts 9:1–43

SITUATION

Saul (later known as Paul) continued his aggressive persecution of the church. Many believers had fled Jerusalem to seek refuge in other cities. Saul went as far as Damascus, Syria (150 miles from Jerusalem), to track down Christians. It was on this trip that

shone around him from heaven. 4Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

5And he said, "Who are You, Lord?"

Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.[a] It *is* hard for you to kick against the goads."

6So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?"

Then the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

7And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. 8Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought *him* into Damascus. 9And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Ananias Baptizes Saul

10Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias."

And he said, "Here I am, Lord."

11So the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for *one* called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. 12And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting *his* hand on him, so that he might receive his sight."

13Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. 14And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."

15But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. 16For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

17And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus,[a] who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

19So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

Saul Preaches Christ

20Immediately he preached the Christ[a] in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

21Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?"

22But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.

9:5 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit the last sentence of verse 5 and begin verse 6 with *But arise and go.* **9:17** [a]M-Text omits *Jesus.* **9:20** [a]NU-Text reads *Jesus.*

God saved him. After Saul's conversion, the church enjoyed a time of peace during which Peter ministered in Lydda and Joppa.

OBSERVATION
Even such an unlikely prospect as Saul, who was a fanatical enemy of the church, can be saved by God's power.

INSPIRATION
No one could fault Ananias's reluctance. Saul saw Christians as couriers of a plague. He stood near the high priest at Stephen's trial. He watched over the coats of stone throwers at the execution. He nodded in approval at Stephen's final breath. And when the Sanhedrin needed a hit man to terrorize the church, Saul stepped forward. He became the Angel of Death. He descended on the Christians in a fury "breathing threats and murder" (Acts 9:1). He "persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it" (Galatians 1:13).

Ananias knew what Saul had done to the church in Jerusalem. What he was about to learn, however, is what Jesus had done to Saul on the road to Damascus. . . .

By the time Ananias arrives, blind Saul has begun to see Jesus in a different light.

Ananias enters and sits on the stone floor. He takes the hand of the had-been terrorist and feels it tremble. He observes Saul's quivering lips. Taking note of the sword and spear resting in the corner, Ananias realizes Christ has already done the work. All that remains is for Ananias to show Saul the next step. "Brother Saul . . . ." (How sweet those words must have

Salvation

Before he encountered Christ, Paul had been somewhat of a hero among the Pharisees. . . .

Blue-blooded and wild-eyed, this young zealot was hell-bent on keeping the kingdom pure—and that meant keeping the Christians out. He marched through the countryside like a general demanding that backslidden Jews salute the flag of the motherland or kiss their family and hopes good-bye.

All this came to a halt, however, on the shoulder of a highway. . . . That's when someone slammed on the stadium lights, and he heard the voice.

When he found out whose voice it was, his jaw hit the ground, and his body followed. He braced himself for the worst. He knew it was all over. . . . He prayed that death would be quick and painless.

But all he got was silence and the first of a lifetime of surprises.

He ended up bewildered and befuddled in a borrowed bedroom. God left him there a few days with scales on his eyes so thick that the only direction he could look was inside himself. And he didn't like what he saw.

He saw himself for what he really was—to use his own words, the worst of sinners.

. . . Alone in the room with his sins on his conscience and blood on his hands, he asked to be cleansed.

. . . The legalist Saul was buried, and the liberator Paul was born. He was never the same afterwards. And neither was the world. . . .

The message is gripping: Show a man his failures without Jesus, and the result will be found in the roadside gutter. Give a man religion without reminding him of his filth, and the result will be arrogance in a three-piece suit. But get the two in the same heart—get sin to meet Savior and Savior to meet sin—and the result just might be another Pharisee turned preacher who sets the world on fire.

Study Guide

Read Acts 9:3–20.

- Think of a time you have seen God's power revealed in the life of a friend. What happened to that person?
- How would you describe the power of God that was revealed in Saul's life during his conversion experience?
- With which person in Saul's story do you most identify: Saul, Ananias, Saul's companions or Paul?
- What does Saul's conversion teach you about God?
- Think about your own conversion experience. What are the parallels?
- Think of a time when God used you to encourage someone in his or her faith. What did you do?
- How can you minister to someone who has not yet experienced God's saving power?
- What is the most mysterious thing to you about salvation?

sounded. Saul surely wept upon hearing them.) "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17).

Tears rush like a tide against the crusts on Saul's eyes. The scaly covering loosens and falls away. He blinks and sees the face of his new friend.

Within the hour he's stepping out of the waters of baptism. Within a few days he's preaching in a synagogue. The first of a thousand sermons. Saul soon becomes Paul, and Paul preaches from the hills of Athens, pens letters from the bowels of prisons, and ultimately sires a genealogy of theologians, including Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin.

God used Paul to touch the world. But He first used Ananias to touch Paul. Has God given you a similar assignment? Has God given you a Saul? (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Have you met people who are hostile to Christians? Maybe a popular celebrity or prominent people in your community make a stand against the church. Pray for these people by name. Ask God to save them. Look at people who oppose your faith as needy people—not enemies.

EXPLORATION

Conversion—John 3:3–8, 16–21; 6:44, 65; 11:25, 26; Acts 22:13–16; Romans 10:9, 10; Galatians 6:12–16.

Saul Escapes Death

23 Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. 24 But
their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and
night, to kill him. 25 Then the disciples took him by night and let *him*
down through the wall in a large basket.

Saul at Jerusalem

26 And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the dis-
ciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was
a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought *him* to the apostles.
And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road,
and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at
Damascus in the name of Jesus. 28 So he was with them at Jerusalem,
coming in and going out. 29 And he spoke boldly in the name of the
Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to
kill him. 30 When the brethren found out, they brought him down to
Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.

The Church Prospers

31 Then the churches[a] throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria
had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and
in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

Aeneas Healed

32 Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all *parts of the coun-*
try, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda. 33 There
he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden
eight years and was paralyzed. 34 And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus
the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed." Then he arose imme-
diately. 35 So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned
to the Lord.

Dorcas Restored to Life

36 At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is
translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable
deeds which she did. 37 But it happened in those days that she became
sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid *her* in an upper
room. 38 And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard
that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring *him* not
to delay in coming to them. 39 Then Peter arose and went with them.
When he had come, they brought *him* to the upper room. And all
the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments
which Dorcas had made while she was with them. 40 But Peter put
them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body
he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw
Peter she sat up. 41 Then he gave her *his* hand and lifted her up; and
when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive.
42 And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on
the Lord. 43 So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon,
a tanner.

9:31 [a]NU-Text reads *church . . . was edified.*

Cornelius Sends a Delegation

10 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, 2 a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. 3 About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!"

4 And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, "What is it, lord?"

So he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. 5 Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. 6 He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea.[a] He will tell you what you must do." 7 And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually. 8 So when he had explained all *these* things to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Peter's Vision

9 The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. 10 Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance 11 and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. 13 And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat."

14 But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean."

15 And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." 16 This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

Summoned to Caesarea

17 Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate. 18 And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there.

19 While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you. 20 Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them."

21 Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius,[a] and said, "Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?"

22 And they said, "Cornelius *the* centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you." 23 Then he invited them in and lodged *them.*

10:6 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit the last sentence of this verse. **10:21** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *who had been sent to him from Cornelius.*

Life LESSONS

Acts 10:1—11:30

SITUATION
Peter explained to Jewish believers what happened to Cornelius. They needed clarification because they mistakenly thought that salvation was only for Jews.

OBSERVATION
Peter convinced the Jewish church leaders of the rightness of reaching out to the Gentiles, and many Gentiles were subsequently added to the church, notably at Antioch.

INSPIRATION
The Father sighs because He has a dream. "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16).

God has only one flock. Somehow we missed that. Religious division is not His idea. Franchises and sectarianism are not in God's plan. God has one flock. The flock has one shepherd. And though we may think there are many, we are wrong. There is only one.

Never in the Bible are we told to create unity. We are simply told to maintain the unity that exists. Paul exhorts us to preserve "the unity of the Spirit" (Ephesians 4:3). Our task is not to invent unity, but to acknowledge it.

I have two sisters and a brother. We are siblings because we came from the same family. We have the same father and mother. I'm sure there have been times when they didn't want to call me their brother, but they don't have that choice.

Nor do we. When I see someone calling God "Father" and Jesus "Savior," I meet a brother or a sister—regardless of the name of their church or denomination.

By the way, the church names we banter about? They do not exist in heaven. The Book of Life does not list your denomination next to your name. Why? Because it is not the denomination that saves you. And I wonder, if there are no denominations in heaven, why do we have denominations on earth?

What would happen (I know this is a crazy thought), but what would happen if all the churches agreed, on a given day, to change their names to simply "church"? What if any reference to any denomination were removed and we were all just Christians? And then when people chose which church to attend, they wouldn't do so by the sign outside . . . they'd do so by the hearts of the people inside. And then when people were asked what church they attended, their answer wouldn't be a label but just a location.

And then we Christians wouldn't be known for what divides us; instead we'd be known for what unites us—our common Father.

Crazy idea? Perhaps.

But I think God would like it. It was His to begin with. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

We are instructed to build up the body of Christ. Make a list of ways you can be involved. If there are certain ways you could be tearing down the body of Christ, list those as well. Be brutally honest. Ask a family

On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

Peter Meets Cornelius

24 And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius
was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close
friends. 25 As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at
his feet and worshiped *him.* 26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand
up; I myself am also a man." 27 And as he talked with him, he went
in and found many who had come together. 28 Then he said to them,
"You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with
or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should
not call any man common or unclean. 29 Therefore I came without
objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have
you sent for me?"

30 So Cornelius said, "Four days ago I was fasting until this hour;
and at the ninth hour[a] I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood
before me in bright clothing, 31 and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer
has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God.
32 Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is
Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.[a] When
he comes, he will speak to you.' 33 So I sent to you immediately, and
you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before
God, to hear all the things commanded you by God."

Preaching to Cornelius' Household

34 Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that
God shows no partiality. 35 But in every nation whoever fears Him and
works righteousness is accepted by Him. 36 The word which *God* sent
to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is
Lord of all— 37 that word you know, which was proclaimed through-
out all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John
preached: 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit
and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who
were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. 39 And we are wit-
nesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in
Jerusalem, whom they[a] killed by hanging on a tree. 40 Him God raised
up on the third day, and showed Him openly, 41 not to all the people,
but to witnesses chosen before by God, *even* to us who ate and drank
with Him after He arose from the dead. 42 And He commanded us to
preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by
God *to be* Judge of the living and the dead. 43 To Him all the prophets
witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive
remission of sins."

The Holy Spirit Falls on the Gentiles

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell
upon all those who heard the word. 45 And those of the circumcision
who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because

10:30 [a]NU-Text reads *Four days ago to this hour, at the ninth hour.* **10:32** [a]NU-Text omits the last sentence of this verse. **10:39** [a]NU-Text and M-Text add *also.*

the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.

Then Peter answered, 47 "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *have*?" 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

member or good friend to be honest with you.

EXPLORATION
Unity—John 13:35; Ephesians 4:3; Colossians 3:14.

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: The Judge of the Living and the Dead

"You are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things" (Romans 2:1).

Who is this person? It could be anyone ("O man, whoever you are") who filters God's grace through his own opinion. Anyone who dilutes God's mercy with his own prejudice. He is the prodigal son's elder brother who wouldn't attend the party (see Luke 15:11–32). He is the ten-hour worker, upset because the one-hour worker got the same wage (see Matthew 20:1–16). He is the fault-finding brother obsessed by his brother's sins and oblivious to his own.

If you "judge another" (Romans 2:1), Paul has a stern reminder for you. It's not your job to hold the gavel. "God judges those who do wrong things, and we know that his judging is right" (Romans 2:2 NCV).

The key word here is "judges." It's one thing to have an opinion. It's quite another to pass a verdict. It's one thing to have a conviction; it's another to convict the person. It's one thing to be repulsed at the acts of a Jeffrey Dahmer (and I am). It's another entirely to claim that I am superior (I'm not) or that he is beyond the grace of God (no one is).

As John Stott writes: "This [verse] is not a call either to suspend our critical faculties or to renounce all criticism and rebuke of others as illegitimate: it is rather a prohibition of standing in judgment on other people and condemning them (which as human beings we have no right to do), especially when we fail to condemn ourselves."

It's our job to hate the sin. But it's God's job to deal with the sinner. God has called us to despise evil, but He's never called us to despise the evildoer.

But, oh, how we would like to. Is there any act more delightful than judging others? There is something smug and self-satisfying about donning the robe, stepping behind the bench, and slamming down the gavel. "Guilty!"

Besides, judging others is the quick and easy way to feel good about ourselves. A convenience-store ego-boost. Standing next to all the Mussolinis and Hitlers and Dahmers of the world, we boast, "Look, God, compared to them, I'm not too bad."

But that's the problem. God doesn't compare us to them. They aren't the standard. God is. And compared to Him, Paul will argue, "There is none who does good, no, not one" (Romans 3:12). (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1568.

Peter Defends God's Grace

11 Now the apostles and brethren who
were in Judea heard that the Gentiles
had also received the word of God. 2 And when
Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the cir-
cumcision contended with him, 3 saying, "You
went in to uncircumcised men and ate with
them!"

4 But Peter explained *it* to them in order
from the beginning, saying: 5 "I was in the
city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw
a vision, an object descending like a great
sheet, let down from heaven by four cor-
ners; and it came to me. 6 When I observed
it intently and considered, I saw four-footed
animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping
things, and birds of the air. 7 And I heard a
voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.'
8 But I said, 'Not so, Lord! For nothing com-
mon or unclean has at any time entered my
mouth.' 9 But the voice answered me again
from heaven, 'What God has cleansed you
must not call common.' 10 Now this was done
three times, and all were drawn up again into
heaven. 11 At that very moment, three men
stood before the house where I was, hav-
ing been sent to me from Caesarea. 12 Then
the Spirit told me to go with them, doubt-
ing nothing. Moreover these six brethren
accompanied me, and we entered the man's
house. 13 And he told us how he had seen
an angel standing in his house, who said to
him, 'Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon
whose surname is Peter, 14 who will tell you
words by which you and all your household
will be saved.' 15 And as I began to speak, the
Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the
beginning. 16 Then I remembered the word of
the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized
with water, but you shall be baptized with the
Holy Spirit.' 17 If therefore God gave them the
same gift as *He gave* us when we believed on
the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could
withstand God?"

18 When they heard these things they
became silent; and they glorified God, saying,
"Then God has also granted to the Gentiles
repentance to life."

Barnabas and Saul at Antioch

19 Now those who were scattered after the
persecution that arose over Stephen traveled
as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch,
preaching the word to no one but the Jews
only. 20 But some of them were men from
Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come
to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching
the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was
with them, and a great number believed and
turned to the Lord.

22 Then news of these things came to the
ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent
out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. 23 When
he came and had seen the grace of God, he
was glad, and encouraged them all that with
purpose of heart they should continue with
the Lord. 24 For he was a good man, full of
the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many
people were added to the Lord.

25 Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to
seek Saul. 26 And when he had found him,
he brought him to Antioch. So it was that
for a whole year they assembled with the
church and taught a great many people. And
the disciples were first called Christians in
Antioch.

Relief to Judea

27 And in these days prophets came from
Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 Then one of them,
named Agabus, stood up and showed by the
Spirit that there was going to be a great famine
throughout all the world, which also hap-
pened in the days of Claudius Caesar. 29 Then
the disciples, each according to his ability,
determined to send relief to the brethren
dwelling in Judea. 30 This they also did, and
sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas
and Saul.

Herod's Violence to the Church

12 Now about that time Herod the king
stretched out *his* hand to harass some
from the church. 2 Then he killed James the
brother of John with the sword. 3 And because
he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded
further to seize Peter also. Now it was *during*
the Days of Unleavened Bread. 4 So when he
had arrested him, he put *him* in prison, and
delivered *him* to four squads of soldiers to
keep him, intending to bring him before the
people after Passover.

Peter Freed from Prison

5 Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant[a] prayer was
offered to God for him by the church. 6 And when Herod was about to
bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains
between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping
the prison. 7 Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by *him,* and a
light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised
him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off *his* hands.
8 Then the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and tie on your sandals";
and so he did. And he said to him, "Put on your garment and follow
me." 9 So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what
was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.
10 When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they
came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them
of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and
immediately the angel departed from him.

11 And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know
for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me
from the hand of Herod and *from* all the expectation of the Jewish
people."

12 So, when he had considered *this,* he came to the house of Mary,
the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gath-
ered together praying. 13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate,
a girl named Rhoda came to answer. 14 When she recognized Peter's
voice, because of *her* gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in
and announced that Peter stood before the gate. 15 But they said to
her, "You are beside yourself!" Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So
they said, "It is his angel."

16 Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened *the door*
and saw him, they were astonished. 17 But motioning to them with his
hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought
him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and
to the brethren." And he departed and went to another place.

18 Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the
soldiers about what had become of Peter. 19 But when Herod had
searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and
commanded that *they* should be put to death.

And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed *there.*

Herod's Violent Death

20 Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and
Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made
Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace,
because their country was supplied with food by the king's *country.*

21 So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne
and gave an oration to them. 22 And the people kept shouting, "The
voice of a god and not of a man!" 23 Then immediately an angel of the
Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was
eaten by worms and died.

24 But the word of God grew and multiplied.

12:5 [a]NU-Text reads *constantly* (or *earnestly*).

Life Lessons

Acts 12:1–25

SITUATION
The Romans appointed Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great, to rule much of Palestine during this time. He persecuted Christians, killed James, and planned to kill Peter.

OBSERVATION
God can rescue believers, like Peter, from the most difficult situations.

INSPIRATION
On God's anvil. Perhaps you've been there.

Melted down. Formless. Undone.

I know. I've been on it. It's rough. It's a spiritual slump, a famine. The fire goes out. Although the fire may flame for a moment, it soon disappears. We drift downward. Downward into the foggy valley of question, the misty lowland of discouragement. . . .

Passion? It slips out the door.

Enthusiasm? Are you kidding?

Anvil time. . . .

Pound, pound, pound.

I hope you're not on the anvil. (Unless you need to be, and, if so, I hope you are.) Anvil time is not to be avoided; it's to be experienced. . . . To escape it could be to escape God.

God sees our life from beginning to end. He may lead us through a storm at age thirty so we can endure a hurricane at age sixty. An instrument is useful only if it's in the right shape. A dull ax or a bent screwdriver needs attention, and so do we. A good blacksmith keeps his tools in shape. So does God.

Should God place you

Prayer

King Herod suffered from a Hitler-level obsession with popularity. He murdered the apostle James to curry favor with the populace. The execution bumped his approval rating, so he jailed Peter and resolved to behead him on the anniversary of Jesus' death. (Would you like a little salt with that wound?)

He placed the apostle under the watchful eye of sixteen Navy Seal sorts and told them, with no tongue in cheek, "He escapes, you die." (Quality control, Herod style.) They bound Peter in chains and secured him three doors deep into the prison.

And what could the church do about it? The problem of an imprisoned Peter stood Goliath-tall over the humble community. They had no recourse: no clout, no political chips to cash. They had nothing but fear-drenched questions. "Who's next? First James, then Peter. Is Herod going to purge the church leadership?"

The church still faces her Goliaths. World hunger. Clergy scandal. Stingy Christians. Corrupt officials. Pea-brained and hard-hearted dictators. Peter in prison is just the first of a long list of challenges too big for the church.

So our Jerusalem ancestors left us a strategy. When the problem is bigger than we are—we pray! "But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him" (Acts 12:5 NLT).

They didn't picket the prison, petition the government, protest the arrest, or prepare for Peter's funeral. They prayed. They prayed as if prayer was their only hope, for indeed it was. They prayed "very earnestly for him." . . .

When the children of Israel went to battle against the Amalekites, Moses selected the mountain of prayer over the valley of battle (Exodus 17:8–13). The Israelites won.

When Abraham learned about the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, he "remained standing before the Lord" rather than rush out to warn the cities (Genesis 18:22 NIV).

Advisers informed Nehemiah that Jerusalem was in ruins. He laid a foundation of prayer before he laid a foundation of stone (Nehemiah 1:4).

Paul's letters contain more requests for prayer than they do appeals for money, possessions, or comforts.

And Jesus. Our prayerful Jesus.

Awaking early to pray (Mark 1:35).

Dismissing people to pray (Matthew 14:23).

Ascending a mountain to pray (Luke 9:28).

Crafting a model prayer to teach us to pray (Matthew 6:9–13).

Cleansing the temple so others could pray (Matthew 21:12–13).

Stepping into a garden to pray (Luke 22:39–46).

Jesus immersed His words and work in prayer. Powerful things happen when we do the same. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

Study Guide

Read Acts 12:1–19.

- Describe the kinds of things you tend to pray about. Do you consider some things too small to take to God?
- Is prayer your "first resort" in most situations? Why or why not?
- Why are we sometimes so surprised when our prayers are answered?
- How do the examples of the prayers of Bible people inspire you?
- What does Jesus' life teach about prayer?
- What steps might you take to revitalize your personal prayer life?

Barnabas and Saul Appointed

25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from[a] Jerusalem when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.

13 Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away.

Preaching in Cyprus

4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. 5 And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as *their* assistant.

6 Now when they had gone through the island[a] to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name *was* Bar-Jesus, 7 who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. 9 Then Saul, who also *is called* Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him 10 and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, *you* son of the devil, *you* enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? 11 And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord *is* upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time."

And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. 12 Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

At Antioch in Pisidia

13 Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem. 14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. 15 And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Men *and* brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on."

16 Then Paul stood up, and motioning with *his* hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: 17 The God of this people Israel[a] chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it. 18 Now for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness. 19 And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land to them by allotment.

12:25 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *to*. **13:6** [a]NU-Text reads *the whole island*.
13:17 [a]M-Text omits *Israel*.

on His anvil, be thankful. It means He thinks you're still worth reshaping. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
As a result of your faith, relatives may give you a hard time or friends might write you off. Remember that you are following Jesus' footsteps. Pray for the joy that overcomes troubles, given by God, just for you.

EXPLORATION
Attitudes During Trouble—Matthew 5:10–12; 10:22; Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 4:8, 9, 16, 17; Hebrews 10:32–34; James 5:10; 1 Peter 2:20, 21; 4:12, 13; 5:10.

Life Lessons

Acts 13:1–52

SITUATION
Luke shifts the focus of his book to Paul's ministry and the worldwide spread of the church. Paul stopped at key population and cultural centers, and spoke to both Jews and Gentiles.

OBSERVATION
God desires that the church will reach new people with the message of Jesus' hope. The preaching of the gospel will always draw new converts, in spite of difficulties, opposition, and outright persecution.

INSPIRATION
Maria Dutton, my Portuguese teacher when I was a missionary in Brazil, grew up in an aristocratic and influential family. When she became a Christian, her father disowned her. He didn't attend her wedding or see her at holidays. For several years he had nothing to do with her or her children.

Persecution happens. . . .

Peter said it this way. "Don't give the opposition a second thought. Through thick and thin, keep your hearts at attention, in adoration before Christ, your Master. Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy" (1 Peter 3:14, 15 MSG).

As we meditate on Christ's life, we find strength for our own. . . .

Would you be bold tomorrow? Then be with Jesus today. Be in His Word. Be with His people. Be in His presence. And when persecution comes (and it will), be strong. Who knows? People may realize that you, like the disciples, have been with Christ. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Make no mistake about it—we are in a battle. The minute we sided with Jesus, we gain ourselves an enemy who is bent on stopping the progress of the gospel message. Fortunately, we are on the winning side. Thankfully, persecution did not stop the apostles. Don't let it stop you.

EXPLORATION

Universality of Gospel—Isaiah 53:12; Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 1:8; 16:9, 10; 2 Corinthians 10:15, 16; 1 Timothy 2:3–6.

20 "After that He gave *them* judges for about four hundred and
fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. 21 And afterward they asked for
a king; so God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of
Benjamin, for forty years. 22 And when He had removed him, He raised
up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said,
'I have found David[a] the *son* of Jesse, *a man after My own heart, who
will do all My will.'*[b] 23 From this man's seed, according to *the* prom-
ise, God raised up for Israel a Savior—Jesus—[a] 24 after John had first
preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the
people of Israel. 25 And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'Who
do you think I am? I am not *He*. But behold, there comes One after me,
the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose.'

26 "Men *and* brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those
among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been
sent. 27 For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because
they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are
read every Sabbath, have fulfilled *them* in condemning *Him*. 28 And
though they found no cause for death *in Him,* they asked Pilate that
He should be put to death. 29 Now when they had fulfilled all that was
written concerning Him, they took *Him* down from the tree and laid
Him in a tomb. 30 But God raised Him from the dead. 31 He was seen
for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jeru-
salem, who are His witnesses to the people. 32 And we declare to you
glad tidings—that promise which was made to the fathers. 33 God has
fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it
is also written in the second Psalm:

'You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You.'[a]

34 And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corrup-
tion, He has spoken thus:

'I will give you the sure mercies of David.'[a]

35 Therefore He also says in another *Psalm:*

'You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.'[a]

36 "For David, after he had served his own generation by the will
of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption;
37 but He whom God raised up saw no corruption. 38 Therefore let it be
known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the
forgiveness of sins; 39 and by Him everyone who believes is justified
from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of
Moses. 40 Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets
come upon you:

41 *'Behold, you despisers,*
Marvel and perish!

13:22 [a]Psalm 89:20 [b]1 Samuel 13:14 **13:23** [a]M-Text reads *for Israel salvation.*
13:33 [a]Psalm 2:7 **13:34** [a]Isaiah 55:3 **13:35** [a]Psalm 16:10

For I work a work in your days,
A work which you will by no means believe,
Though one were to declare it to you.'" [a]

Blessing and Conflict at Antioch

42 So when the Jews went out of the synagogue,[a] the Gentiles
begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.
43 Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and
devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to
them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear
the word of God. 45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were
filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed
the things spoken by Paul. 46 Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and
said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to
you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of
everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. 47 For so the Lord has
commanded us:

'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles,
That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'" [a]

48 Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified
the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal
life believed.

49 And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the
region. 50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women
and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and
Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. 51 But they shook off
the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium. 52 And the
disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

At Iconium

14 Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the
synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude
both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed. 2 But the unbelieving
Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the
brethren. 3 Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in
the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting
signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

4 But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews,
and part with the apostles. 5 And when a violent attempt was made
by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone
them, 6 they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of
Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region. 7 And they were preaching
the gospel there.

Idolatry at Lystra

8 And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sit-
ting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked. 9 *This*

13:41 [a]Habakkuk 1:5 **13:42** [a]Or *And when they went out of the synagogue of the Jews;* NU-Text reads *And when they went out, they begged.* **13:47** [a]Isaiah 49:6

Life Lessons

Acts 14:1–28

SITUATION
After being expelled from Antioch, Paul and Barnabas continued to preach the gospel. They ventured into Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe performing great miracles and winning over great multitudes for Christ. Their adversaries, however, continued to oppose them in every city.

OBSERVATION
Their higher calling would not let Paul and Barnabas quit. They even went into hostile regions to deliver God's message of salvation.

INSPIRATION
They're talking layoffs at work, slowdowns in the economy, flare-ups in the Middle East, turnovers at headquarters, downturns in the housing market, upswings in global warming, breakouts of al Qaeda cells. Some demented dictator is collecting nuclear warheads the way others collect fine wines. A strain of swine flu is crossing the border. The plague of our day, terrorism, begins with the word *terror*. News programs disgorge enough hand-wringing information to warrant an advisory: "Caution: this news report is best viewed in the confines of an underground vault in Iceland."

We fear being sued, finishing last, going broke; we fear the mole on the back, the new kid on the block, the sound of the clock as it ticks us closer to the grave. We sophisticate investment plans, create elaborate security systems, and legislate stronger

military, yet we depend on mood-altering drugs more than any other generation in history. . . .

Fear, it seems, has taken a hundred-year lease on the building next door and set up shop. Oversize and rude, fear is unwilling to share the heart with happiness. Happiness complies and leaves. Do you ever see the two together? Can one be happy and afraid at the same time? Clear thinking and afraid? Confident and afraid? Merciful and afraid? No. Fear is the big bully in the high school hallway: brash, loud, and unproductive. For all the noise fear makes and room it takes, fear does little good.

Fear never wrote a symphony or poem, negotiated a peace treaty, or cured a disease. Fear never pulled a family out of poverty or a country out of bigotry. Fear never saved a marriage or a business. Courage did that. Faith did that. People who refused to consult or cower to their timidities did that. But fear itself? Fear herds us into a prison and slams the doors.

Wouldn't it be great to walk out?

Imagine your life wholly untouched by angst. What if faith, not fear, was your default reaction to threats? If you could hover a fear magnet over your heart and extract every last shaving of dread, insecurity, and doubt, what would remain? Envision a day, just one day, absent the dread of failure, rejection, and calamity. Can you imagine a life with no fear? (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Is there a project in your life that you've given up on because of discouragement or fear of failure? No matter how great the task, God

man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, 10 said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked. 11 Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian *language,* "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" 12 And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13 Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.

14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out 15 and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, 16 who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. 17 Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." 18 And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them.

Stoning, Escape to Derbe

19 Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul *and* dragged *him* out of the city, supposing him to be dead. 20 However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

Strengthening the Converts

21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying,* "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." 23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. 24 And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. 25 Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. 26 From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed.

27 Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. 28 So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

Conflict over Circumcision

15 And certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

3 So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through
Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles;
and they caused great joy to all the brethren. 4 And when they had
come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles
and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with
them. 5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up,
saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command *them* to
keep the law of Moses."

The Jerusalem Council

6 Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this mat-
ter. 7 And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up *and* said
to them: "Men *and* brethren, you know that a good while ago God
chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word
of the gospel and believe. 8 So God, who knows the heart, acknowl-
edged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us, 9 and
made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by
faith. 10 Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the
neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to
bear? 11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ[a]
we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

12 Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and
Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked
through them among the Gentiles. 13 And after they had become
silent, James answered, saying, "Men *and* brethren, listen to me:
14 Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take
out of them a people for His name. 15 And with this the words of the
prophets agree, just as it is written:

16 *'After this I will return*
And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down;
I will rebuild its ruins,
And I will set it up;
17 *So that the rest of mankind may seek the* Lord,
Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name,
Says the Lord *who does all these things.'*[a]

18 "Known to God from eternity are all His works.[a] 19 Therefore I
judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who
are turning to God, 20 but that we write to them to abstain from things
polluted by idols, *from* sexual immorality,[a] *from* things strangled, and
from blood. 21 For Moses has had throughout many generations those
who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every
Sabbath."

The Jerusalem Decree

22 Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church,
to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and

15:11 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *Christ.* **15:17** [a]Amos 9:11, 12 **15:18** [a]NU-Text (combining with verse 17) reads *Says the Lord, who makes these things known from eternity (of old).* **15:20** [a]Or *fornication*

promises to help us through if we are obedient to Him. Today, get back on track with your project and hold fast to the promise that God will see you through it.

EXPLORATION
Perseverance—1 Corinthians 15:58; Galatians 6:9; Philippians 3:12–14; 2 Timothy 3:11–14; Hebrews 3:6; 1 Peter 5:8, 10.

Acts 15:1–41

SITUATION
Many Jewish Christians insisted that Gentile Christians had to follow Jewish traditions in order to become true Christians. The Jerusalem council decided that only God's grace and individual faith in Jesus were necessary for salvation.

OBSERVATION
The law can never save you. God saves only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

INSPIRATION
Colorado aspens provide a living picture of the church. Have you noticed how they grow in groups, often on the otherwise bald sides of mountains? They are sun seekers and root sharers. Unlike firs or pines, which prefer shade, aspens worship warmth. Unlike oaks, whose roots go deep, aspen roots go wide. They intertwine with other roots and share the same nutrients.

Light lovers. Root sharers. Sounds like a healthy church.

Oddly, some people enjoy the shade of the church while refusing to set down any roots. God, yes. Church, no. They like the benefits, but resist commitment.

The music, the message, the clean conscience—they accept church perks. So they date her, visit her. Enjoy an occasional rendezvous. They use the church. But commit to the church? Can't do that. Got to keep options open. Don't want to miss out on any opportunities.

I propose they already are. Miss the church and miss God's sanctioned tool for God promotion. For church is a key place to do what you do best to the glory of God.

Scripture calls the church a poem. "We are His workmanship" (Ephesians 2:10). "Workmanship" descends from the Greek word *poeo* or "poetry." We are God's poetry! What Longfellow did with pen and paper, our Maker does with us. We express his creative best.

You aren't God's poetry. I'm not God's poetry. *We* are God's poetry. Poetry demands variety. "There are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all" (1 Corinthians 12:6). God uses all types to type His message. Logical thinkers. Emotional worshipers. Dynamic leaders. Docile followers. The visionaries who lead, the studious who ponder, the generous who pay the bills. Action-packed verbs. Rock-solid nouns. Enigmatic question marks. Alone, we are meaningless symbols on a page. But collectively, we inspire. "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually" (1 Corinthians 12:27). (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How do you react to Christians whose worship style is different from your own? Remember God's gift of eternal life is free and for everybody, whatever

Barnabas, *namely,* Judas who was also named Barsabas,[a] and Silas, leading men among the brethren.

23 They wrote this *letter* by them:

The apostles, the elders, and the brethren,

To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia:

Greetings.

24 Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "*You must* be circumcised and keep the law"[a]—to whom we gave no *such* commandment—25 it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. 28 For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: 29 that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.[a] If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.

Farewell.

Continuing Ministry in Syria

30 So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. 31 When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement. 32 Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words. 33 And after they had stayed *there* for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles.[a]

34 However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there.[a] 35 Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

Division over John Mark

36 Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and see* how they are doing." 37 Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. 38 But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. 39 Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; 40 but Paul chose Silas

15:22 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *Barsabbas.* **15:24** [a]NU-Text omits *saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law."* **15:29** [a]Or *fornication* **15:33** [a]NU-Text reads *to those who had sent them.* **15:34** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit this verse.

and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God.
41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Timothy Joins Paul and Silas

16 Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, *the* son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father *was* Greek. 2 He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. 3 Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took *him* and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek. 4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.

The Macedonian Call

6 Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. 7 After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit[a] did not permit them. 8 So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Lydia Baptized at Philippi

11 Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next *day* came to Neapolis, 12 and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. 13 And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met *there.* 14 Now a certain woman named Lydia heard *us.* She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. 15 And when she and her household were baptized, she begged *us,* saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.

Paul and Silas Imprisoned

16 Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. 17 This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." 18 And this she did for many days.

But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour. 19 But when her masters saw that their hope

16:7 [a] NU-Text adds *of Jesus.*

the color, race, or worship preference. Have the same gracious attitude toward others that Jesus had.

EXPLORATION
Grace—Romans 3:24; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:5–8.

Life LESSONS

Acts 16:1–40

SITUATION
During his second missionary journey, Paul visited and encouraged churches established during his first journey. Despite persecution, Paul boldly shared the gospel wherever he went.

OBSERVATION
Even when we are persecuted for the sake of the gospel, God can make us a powerful testimony. His Holy Spirit will work through us as we reach out to those around us.

INSPIRATION
Receiving the unseen is not easy. Most Christians find the cross of Christ easier to accept than the Spirit of Christ. Good Friday makes more sense than Pentecost. Christ, our substitute. Jesus taking our place. The Savior paying for our sins. These are astounding, yet embraceable, concepts. They fall in the arena of transaction and substitution, familiar territory for us. But Holy Spirit discussions lead us into the realm of the supernatural and unseen. We grow quickly quiet and cautious, fearing what we can't see or explain.

It helps to consider the Spirit's work from this angle. What Jesus did in Galilee is what the Holy Spirit does in us. Jesus *dwelt among* the people, teaching,

comforting, and convicting. The Holy Spirit *dwells within* us, teaching, comforting, and convicting. The preferred New Testament word for this promise is *oikeo,* which means "live or dwell." *Oikeo* descends from the Greek noun *oikos,* which means "house." The Holy Spirit indwells the believer in the same way a homeowner indwells a house. (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Where can you witness for Christ today: your home, church, school, community? Put your trust in Him. Say a word for Jesus.

EXPLORATION

Trust—Psalm 9:10; 22:4; 37:5; 125:1; Proverbs 28:25; 29:25; Isaiah 28:16; Nahum 1:7; 1 Corinthians 4:2.

of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged *them* into the marketplace to the authorities.

20 And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; 21 and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." 22 Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded *them* to be beaten with rods. 23 And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw *them* into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. 24 Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

The Philippian Jailer Saved

25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. 27 And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. 28 But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

29 Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

31 So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his *family* were baptized. 34 Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

Paul Refuses to Depart Secretly

35 And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go."

36 So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace."

37 But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, *and* have thrown *us* into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out."

38 And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. 39 Then they came and pleaded with them and brought *them* out, and asked *them* to depart from the city. 40 So they went out of the prison and entered *the house of* Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

Preaching Christ at Thessalonica

17 Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the

Jews. 2 Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying,* "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ." 4 And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.

Assault on Jason's House

5 But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious,[a] took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. 6 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. 7 Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus." 8 And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. 9 So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

Ministering at Berea

10 Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so. 12 Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men. 13 But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds. 14 Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there. 15 So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed.

The Philosophers at Athens

16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. 17 Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the *Gentile* worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. 18 Then[a] certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbler want to say?"

Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.

19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine *is* of which you speak? 20 For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want

17:5 [a]NU-Text omits *who were not persuaded;* M-Text omits *becoming envious.*
17:18 [a]NU-Text and M-Text add *also.*

Life LESSONS

Acts 17:1–34

SITUATION
Banished from Philippi, Paul and his companions visited the cities of Thessalonica and Athens. In both places Paul boldly testified to the saving grace of God.

OBSERVATION
When we speak about Jesus, we should understand our audience well.

INSPIRATION
It's been about six months since Paul left Thessalonica. He, Timothy, and Silas spent three fruitful weeks in the city. The result of their stay was a nucleus of believers. Luke provides a one-sentence profile of the church when he writes: "Some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas" (Acts 17:4).

An eclectic group attended the first church service: Some were Jews, some were Greeks, some were influential females, but all were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. And in a short time, all paid a price for their belief. Literally. The young believers were dragged into the presence of the city leaders and forced to post bond for their own release. That night they helped Paul, Timothy, and Silas sneak out of the city.

Paul moves on, but part of his heart is still in Thessalonica. The little church is so young, so fragile, but oh-so-special. Just the thought of them makes him proud. He longs to see them again. "We give thanks to God always

for you all, making mention of you in our prayers" (1 Thessalonians 1:2). He dreams of the day he might see them again and, even more, dreams of the day they see Christ together.

Note what he says to them: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?" (1 Thessalonians 2:19). . . . In this case Paul will meet with the Thessalonians. He will search the sea of faces for his friends. They will find him, and he will find them. And, in the presence of Christ, they will enjoy an eternal reunion.

Try to imagine doing the same. Think about the day Christ comes. There you are in the great circle of the redeemed. Your body has been made new—no more pain or problems. Your mind has been made new—what you once understood in part, you now understand clearly. You feel no fear, no danger, no sorrow. Though you are one of a throng, it's as if you and Jesus are all alone.

And He asks you this question. I'm speculating now, but I wonder if Christ might say these words to you: "I'm so proud that you let Me use you. Because of you, others are here today. Would you like to meet them?"

Chances are you'd be surprised at such a statement. It's one thing for the apostle Paul to hear such words. He was an apostle. We can imagine a foreign missionary or famous evangelist hearing these words—but us? (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

When you were introduced to the faith, what kind of testimony intrigued you? Is

to know what these things mean." 21 For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

Addressing the Areopagus

22 Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; 23 for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription:

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.

Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: 24 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. 26 And He has made from one blood[a] every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' 29 Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. 30 Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, 31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this *matter.*" 33 So Paul departed from among them. 34 However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Ministering at Corinth

18 After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. 2 And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. 3 So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.

5 When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews *that* Jesus *is* the Christ. 6 But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook *his* garments and said to them, "Your blood *be* upon your *own* heads; I

17:26 [a]NU-Text omits *blood.*

am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." 7And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain *man* named Justus,[a]*one* who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. 8Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.

9Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; 10for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city." 11And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

12When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, 13saying, "This *fellow* persuades men to worship God contrary to the law."

14And when Paul was about to open *his* mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. 15But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look *to it* yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such *matters*." 16And he drove them from the judgment seat. 17Then all the Greeks[a] took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat *him* before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things.

Paul Returns to Antioch

18So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila *were* with him. He had *his* hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow. 19And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. 20When they asked *him* to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, 21but took leave of them, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem;[a] but I will return again to you, God willing." And he sailed from Ephesus.

22And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch. 23After he had spent some time *there,* he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.

Ministry of Apollos

24Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man *and* mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. 25This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. 27And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; 28for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

18:7 [a]NU-Text reads *Titius Justus.* **18:17** [a]NU-Text reads *they all.* **18:21** [a]NU-Text omits *I must* through *Jerusalem.*

there someone in your life who may be in the same Situation you were in? How can you share with them what you have found? If there is no one, find a circle of friends where you can share what Christ has done for you.

EXPLORATION
God Communicates—Isaiah 1:1; Daniel 5:5–28; Matthew 1:20; 2:12, 13; 3:13–17; Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10; Acts 18:9; Hebrews 1:1, 2.

Life Lessons

Acts 18:1–28

SITUATION
Corinth, the commercial center of Greece, was a haven of corruption. It also held great ministry opportunities.

OBSERVATION
We must rejoice in the victories Jesus gives us and remain positive during persecution and suffering.

INSPIRATION
Joy snatchers infiltrated the Roman church. Paul had to remind them, "But people are declared righteous because of their faith, not because of their work" (Romans 4:5 NLT).

Philippian Christians heard the same foolishness. Big brothers weren't telling them to wear a ring on their thumb, but they were insisting "you must be circumcised to be saved" (Philippians 3:2 NLT).

Even the Jerusalem church, the flagship congregation, heard the solemn monotones of the Quality Control Board. Non-Jewish believers were being told, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you

cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1).

The churches suffered from the same malady: grace blockage. The Father might let you in the gate, but you have to earn your place at the table. God makes the down payment on your redemption, but you pay the monthly installments. Heaven gives the boat, but you have to row it if you ever want to see the other shore.

Grace blockage. Taste, but don't drink. Wet your lips, but never slake your thirst. Can you imagine such instruction over a fountain? "No swallowing, please. Fill your mouth but not your belly."

Absurd. What good is water if you can't drink it? And what good is grace if you don't let it go deep?

Do you? What image best describes your heart? A water-drenched kid dancing in front of an open fire hydrant? Or a bristled desert tumbleweed? Here is how you know. One question. Does God's grace *define* you? Deeply flowing grace clarifies, once and for all, who we are. (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

It's not generated in your own mind or heart; it's not bought at a store. True joy is God's gift.

EXPLORATION

Joy—Nehemiah 8:10; Psalm 94:19; Proverbs 10:28; Isaiah 35:10; Habakkuk 3:17–19; John 15:11; 1 Thessalonians 1:6.

Life LESSONS

Acts 19:1–41

SITUATION

On Paul's third missionary

Paul at Ephesus

19 And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples [2]he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."

[3]And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?"

So they said, "Into John's baptism."

[4]Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

[5]When they heard *this,* they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. [6]And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. [7]Now the men were about twelve in all.

[8]And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. [9]But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. [10]And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

Miracles Glorify Christ

[11]Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, [12]so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them. [13]Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "We[a] exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." [14]Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so.

[15]And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?"

[16]Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered[a] them, and prevailed against them,[b] so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. [17]This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. [18]And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. [19]Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned *them* in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and *it* totaled fifty thousand *pieces* of silver. [20]So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

The Riot at Ephesus

[21]When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."

19:13 [a]NU-Text reads *I.* **19:16** [a]M-Text reads *and they overpowered.* [b]NU-Text reads *both of them.*

22 So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him,
Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time.
23 And about that time there arose a great commotion about the
Way. 24 For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made
silver shrines of Diana, [a]brought no small profit to the craftsmen. 25 He
called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said:
"Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. 26 Moreover
you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all
Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying
that they are not gods which are made with hands. 27 So not only is
this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the tem-
ple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence
destroyed, [a]whom all Asia and the world worship."
28 Now when they heard *this,* they were full of wrath and cried out,
saying, "Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians!" 29 So the whole city was
filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord,
having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel com-
panions. 30 And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples
would not allow him. 31 Then some of the officials of Asia, who were
his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the
theater. 32 Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the
assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had
come together. 33 And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the
Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand,
and wanted to make his defense to the people. 34 But when they found
out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours,
"Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians!"
35 And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: "Men of
Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the
Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the
image which fell down from Zeus? 36 Therefore, since these things
cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly. 37 For
you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples
nor blasphemers of your [a]goddess. 38 Therefore, if Demetrius and his
fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and
there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another.
39 But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in
the lawful assembly. 40 For we are in danger of being called in ques-
tion for today's uproar, there being no reason which we may give to
account for this disorderly gathering." 41 And when he had said these
things, he dismissed the assembly.

Journeys in Greece

20 After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to *him-
self,* embraced *them,* and departed to go to Macedonia. 2 Now
when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many
words, he came to Greece 3 and stayed three months. And when the
Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to
return through Macedonia. 4 And Sopater of Berea accompanied him

19:24 [a]Greek *Artemis* **19:27** [a]NU-Text reads *she be deposed from her magnificence.*
19:37 [a]NU-Text reads *our.*

journey he corrected doctrinal misunderstandings that had been creeping into the churches.

OBSERVATION

The power to change comes from God. Magical formulas and magic words cannot secure this power. Christ conquered evil.

INSPIRATION

Texas State Fair, 1963. A big place and a big night for a wide-eyed eight-year-old boy whose week peaked out at the Dairy Queen on Saturday. The sights and lights of the midway left me quoting Dorothy, "Toto, we're not in Kansas anymore."

The carnival rumbled with excitement. Roller coasters. Ferris wheels. Candied apples, cotton candy, and the Cotton Bowl. And, most of all, the voices.

"Step right up and try your luck!"

"This way, young man. Three shots for a dollar."

"Come on, fellow. Win your mom a teddy bear."

Odysseus and his men never heard sweeter sirens. Do I cut the cards with the lanky fellow at the stand-up booth? Or heed the call of the hefty lady and heave a ball at the dairy bottles? The guy in the top hat and tails dares me to explore the haunted house. "Come in. What's wrong? Afraid?"

A gauntlet of barkers—each taking his turn. Dad had warned me about them. He knew the way of the midway. I can't recall his exact instructions, but I remember the impact. I stuck next to him, my little hand lost in his big one. And every time I heard the voices, I turned to his face. He gave either protection or permission. A roll of the eyes meant "Move on." He smelled a huckster. A smile

and a nod said, "Go on—no harm here."

My father helped me handle the voices.

Could you use a little help yourself? When it comes to faith, you likely could. Ever feel as if you are walking through a religious midway?

The Torah sends you to Moses. The Koran sends you to Muhammad. Buddhists invite you to meditate; spiritists, to levitate. A palm reader wants your hand. The TV evangelist wants your money. One neighbor consults her stars. Another reads the cards. The agnostic believes no one can know. The hedonist doesn't care to know. Atheists believe there is nothing to know.

"Step right up. Try my witchcraft."

"Pssst! Over here. Interested in some New Age channels?"

"Hey, you! Ever tried Scientology?"

What do you do? Where's a person to go? Mecca? Salt Lake City? Rome? Therapy? Aromatherapy?

Oh, the voices. . . .

Jesus won't be diminished. Besides, do you want Him to be? Don't you need a distinctive voice in your noisy world? Of course you do. Don't walk the midway alone. Keep your hand in His and your eyes on Him, and when He speaks: "Listen to Him." (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Many voices vie for your attention. Which ones are a constant presence in your life? Ask God to guide you through the cacophony so that you can hear only one voice—His.

EXPLORATION

Occult—Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 18:10–12.

to Asia—also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. [5]These men, going ahead, waited for us at Troas. [6]But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days.

Ministering at Troas

[7]Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. [8]There were many lamps in the upper room where they[a] were gathered together. [9]And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. [10]But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing *him* said, "Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him." [11]Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed. [12]And they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted.

From Troas to Miletus

[13]Then we went ahead to the ship and sailed to Assos, there intending to take Paul on board; for so he had given orders, intending himself to go on foot. [14]And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. [15]We sailed from there, and the next *day* came opposite Chios. The following *day* we arrived at Samos and stayed at Trogyllium. The next *day* we came to Miletus. [16]For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost.

The Ephesian Elders Exhorted

[17]From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. [18]And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, [19]serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; [20]how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, [21]testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. [22]And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, [23]except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. [24]But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself,[a] so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

[25]"And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. [26]Therefore

20:8 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *we.* **20:24** [a]NU-Text reads *But I do not count my life of any value or dear to myself.*

I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all *men.*
27 For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.
28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God[a] which He purchased with His own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. 31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

32 "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. 33 I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. 34 Yes,[a] you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. 35 I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. 37 Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, 38 sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.

Warnings on the Journey to Jerusalem

21 Now it came to pass, that when we had departed from them and set sail, running a straight course we came to Cos, the following *day* to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. 2 And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. 3 When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload her cargo. 4 And finding disciples,[a] we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. 5 When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till *we were* out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. 6 When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home.

7 And when we had finished *our* voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day. 8 On the next *day* we who were Paul's companions[a] departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was *one* of the seven, and stayed with him. 9 Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied. 10 And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 11 When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his *own* hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles.' "

12 Now when we heard these things, both we and those from

20:28 [a]M-Text reads *of the Lord and God.* **20:34** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *Yes.*
21:4 [a]NU-Text reads *the disciples.* **21:8** [a]NU-Text omits *who were Paul's companions.*

Life Lessons

Acts 20:1–38

SITUATION
Paul strengthened and encouraged those who were believers. He traveled to several recently planted churches and spent time with Christians there. Paul, knowing that he would never be back at Ephesus again, was careful to explain that his sacrificial love for the Ephesians was like Jesus' love for the church.

OBSERVATION
True Christianity is more than just going to church on Sundays. It's a genuine love for other people—a sacrificial love.

INSPIRATION
Who wants to live with yesterday's rubble? Who wants to hoard the trash of the past? You don't, do you?

Or do you?

Not in your house, mind you, but in your heart? Not the junk of papers and boxes, but the remnants of anger and hurt. Do you pack-rat pain? Amass offenses? Record slights?

A tour of your heart might be telling. A pile of rejections stockpiled in one corner. Accumulated insults filling another. Images of unkind people lining the wall, littering the floor.

No one can blame you. Innocence takers, promise breakers, wound makers—you've had your share. Yet doesn't it make sense to get rid of their trash? Want to give every day a chance? Jesus says: *Give the grace you've been given.* (From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Do inventory on your care-

giving, locally and globally. Who gets your help? What does it take for you to agree to meet someone's need? Ask God to help you do more. Give something extra today—there are many unmet needs around you.

EXPLORATION
Caring—2 Kings 4:32–36; Nahum 1:7; John 11:33–38; Galatians 4:13, 14.

Life LESSONS

Acts 21:1–40

SITUATION
After an emotional goodbye, Paul continued to visit many other churches throughout the region. When he was warned that he would be captured by the Jews and imprisoned, Paul assured the people that he was ready to die for the sake of the gospel.

OBSERVATION
Paul met hardships with the confidence that God's will would be accomplished.

INSPIRATION
Let's pray, first. Traveling to help the hungry? Be sure to bathe your mission in prayer. Working to disentangle the knots of injustice? Pray. Weary with a world of racism and division? So is God. And He would love to talk to you about it.

Let's pray, most. Did God call us to preach without ceasing? Or teach without ceasing? Or have committee meetings without ceasing? Or sing without ceasing? No, but He did call us to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Did Jesus declare: My house shall be called a house of study? Fellowship? Music? A house of exposition? A house of activities? No, but He did

that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

14 So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "The will of the Lord be done."

Paul Urged to Make Peace

15 And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem. 16 Also some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge.

17 And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. 18 On the following *day* Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. 19 When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. 20 And when they heard *it,* they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; 21 but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children nor to walk according to the customs. 22 What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will[a] hear that you have come. 23 Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. 24 Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave *their* heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but *that* you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law. 25 But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written *and* decided that they should observe no such thing, except[a] that they should keep themselves from *things* offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality."

Arrested in the Temple

26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them.

27 Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, 28 crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all *men* everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." 29 (For they had previously[a] seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

30 And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately

21:22 [a]NU-Text reads *What then is to be done? They will certainly.* **21:25** [a]NU-Text omits *that they should observe no such thing, except.* **21:29** [a]M-Text omits *previously.*

the doors were shut. 31 Now as they were seeking to kill him, news
came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an
uproar. 32 He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down
to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they
stopped beating Paul. 33 Then the commander came near and took
him, and commanded *him* to be bound with two chains; and he asked
who he was and what he had done. 34 And some among the multitude
cried one thing and some another.

So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he
commanded him to be taken into the barracks. 35 When he reached
the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence
of the mob. 36 For the multitude of the people followed after, crying
out, "Away with him!"

Addressing the Jerusalem Mob

37 Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the
commander, "May I speak to you?"

He replied, "Can you speak Greek? 38 Are you not the Egyptian who
some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assas-
sins out into the wilderness?"

39 But Paul said, "I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no
mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people."

40 So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs
and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a
great silence, he spoke to *them* in the Hebrew language, saying,

22 "Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now." 2 And
when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew lan-
guage, they kept all the more silent.

Then he said: 3 "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but
brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the
strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all
are today. 4 I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering
into prisons both men and women, 5 as also the high priest bears me
witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received
letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even
those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.

6 "Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at
about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me.
7 And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul,
why are you persecuting Me?' 8 So I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?'
And He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecut-
ing.'

9 "And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were
afraid,[a] but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me. 10 So
I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and
go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are
appointed for you to do.' 11 And since I could not see for the glory of
that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came
into Damascus.

12 "Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, hav-

22:9 [a]NU-Text omits *and were afraid.*

say, "My house shall be
called a house of prayer"
(Mark 11:17).

No other spiritual activity
is guaranteed such results.
"When two of you get
together on anything at all
on earth and make a prayer
of it, my Father in heaven
goes into action" (Matthew
18:19 MSG). He is moved
by the humble, prayerful
heart. (From *Outlive Your
Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How bold are you to share
your faith? Have you known
people for years but have
never shared Christ with
them? Do your neighbors
know you are a Christian?
Look for an opportunity to
share with someone new.

EXPLORATION

Persecution—Matthew
10:22; John 7:7; 15:18–21;
Acts 9:16; 20:23, 24.

Life Lessons

Acts 22:1–29

SITUATION

Paul was saved from the
angry mob in Jerusalem
by the Roman garrison
commander. Then he was
placed in prison.

OBSERVATION

God can work in
unconventional or unusual
ways to accomplish His will.

INSPIRATION

I ran into a friend in a
bookstore. He recently
celebrated his fiftieth
wedding anniversary. He
teared up as he described
the saint he married and
the jerk his wife married.
"I didn't believe in God.
I didn't treat people with
respect. Six weeks into the
marriage, I came home one
day to find her crying in the
bathtub about the mistake

she had made. But she never gave up on me."

Another Saul, another Ananias.

And you? Everyone else has written off your Saul. "He's too far gone." "She's too hard . . . too addicted . . . too old . . . too cold." No one gives your Saul a prayer. But you are beginning to realize that maybe God is at work behind the scenes. Maybe it's too soon to throw in the towel . . . You begin to believe.

Don't resist these thoughts.

Joseph didn't. His brothers sold him into Egyptian slavery. Yet he welcomed them into his palace.

David didn't. King Saul had a vendetta against David, but David had a soft spot for Saul. He called him "the Lord's anointed" (1 Samuel 24:10).

Hosea didn't. His wife, Gomer, was queen of the red-light district, but Hosea kept his front door open. And she came home.

Of course, no one believed in people more than Jesus did. He saw something in Peter worth developing, in the adulterous woman worth forgiving, and in John worth harnessing. He saw something in the thief on the cross, and what He saw was worth saving. And in the life of a wild-eyed, bloodthirsty extremist, He saw an apostle of grace. He believed in Saul. And He believed in Saul through Ananias.

"Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Don't give up on your Saul. When others write him off, give him another chance. Stay strong. Call

ing a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt *there,* 13 came to me; and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that same hour I looked up at him. 14 Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. 15 For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'

17 "Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance 18 and saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.' 19 So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. 20 And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death,[a] and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' 21 Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.' "

Paul's Roman Citizenship

22 And they listened to him until this word, and *then* they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a *fellow* from the earth, for he is not fit to live!" 23 Then, as they cried out and tore off *their* clothes and threw dust into the air, 24 the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him. 25 And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?"

26 When the centurion heard *that,* he went and told the commander, saying, "Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman."

27 Then the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?"

He said, "Yes."

28 The commander answered, "With a large sum I obtained this citizenship."

And Paul said, "But I was born *a citizen.*"

29 Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

The Sanhedrin Divided

30 The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from *his* bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them.

23 Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." 2 And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. 3 Then Paul said to him, "God will

22:20 [a] NU-Text omits *to his death.*

strike you, *you* whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?"

4 And those who stood by said, "Do you revile God's high priest?"

5 Then Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, *'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'*" [a]

6 But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!"

7 And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. 8 For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. 9 Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, "We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God." [a]

10 Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring *him* into the barracks.

The Plot Against Paul

11 But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."

12 And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. 13 Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy. 14 They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, "We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul. 15 Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, [a] as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near."

16 So when Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. 17 Then Paul called one of the centurions to *him* and said, "Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to tell him." 18 So he took him and brought *him* to the commander and said, "Paul the prisoner called me to *him* and asked *me* to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you."

19 Then the commander took him by the hand, went aside, and asked privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?"

20 And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him. 21 But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an

23:5 [a]Exodus 22:28 **23:9** [a]NU-Text omits last clause and reads *what if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?* **23:15** [a]NU-Text omits *tomorrow.*

him brother. Call her sister. Tell your Saul about Jesus, and pray. And remember this: God never sends you where He hasn't already been. By the time you reach your Saul, who knows what you'll find. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Have you ever found refuge or support in an unexpected place? Have problems resolved themselves in ways you didn't expect? Ask God today to make you the unexpected solution to someone else's problem—God's miracle channel.

EXPLORATION
God's Will—2 Chronicles 18:28–33; Esther 4:13, 14; Acts 16:6.

Life Lessons

Acts 22:30—23:35

SITUATION
In Jerusalem, Paul escaped a flogging by asserting his Roman citizenship. Claudius Lysias, the commander who stopped the riot and was about to flog him, brought Paul before the Sanhedrin (Jewish council) to further investigate the incident.

OBSERVATION
Even if the civil rights of a believer are abused, God still holds the situation in His hand.

INSPIRATION
To the spiritually hungry, the church offers nourishment: "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38, 39).

To the fugitive, the church offers weapons of truth: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Bread and blades. Food and equipment. The church exists to provide both. Does she succeed in doing so? Not always. People-helping is never a tidy trade, because people who need help don't lead tidy lives. . . .

Jesus calls the church to lean in the direction of compassion. . . .

He brings bread for their souls. "Peace be with you" (John 20:19). He brings a sword for the struggle. "Receive the Holy Spirit" (v. 22).

Bread and swords. He gives both to the desperate.

Still. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Is your church in the business of helping people? In what ways can you better serve the community in which God has placed your church? Serving is not easy or tidy, but it's what God calls His people to do.

EXPLORATION

Determination—Philippians 3:12–14. Faithfulness—2 Samuel 22:26. Steadfastness—Psalm 51:10.

oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you."

22 So the commander let the young man depart, and commanded *him,* "Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me."

Sent to Felix

23 And he called for two centurions, saying, "Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night; 24 and provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring *him* safely to Felix the governor." 25 He wrote a letter in the following manner:

26 Claudius Lysias,

To the most excellent governor Felix:

Greetings.

27 This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. 28 And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council. 29 I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains. 30 And when it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man,[a] I sent him immediately to you, and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him.

Farewell.

31 Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought *him* by night to Antipatris. 32 The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him, and returned to the barracks. 33 When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. 34 And when the governor had read *it,* he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that *he was* from Cilicia, 35 he said, "I will hear you when your accusers also have come." And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium.

Accused of Sedition

24 Now after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and a certain orator *named* Tertullus. These gave evidence to the governor against Paul.

2 And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation, saying: "Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight, 3 we accept *it* always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. 4 Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us. 5 For we have found this man a plague,

23:30 [a]NU-Text reads *there would be a plot against the man.*

a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. 6 He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him,[a] and wanted to judge him according to our law. 7 But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took *him* out of our hands, 8 commanding his accusers to come to you. By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him." 9 And the Jews also assented,[a] maintaining that these things were so.

The Defense Before Felix

10 Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: "Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself, 11 because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. 12 And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. 13 Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me. 14 But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. 15 I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of *the* dead,[a] both of *the* just and *the* unjust. 16 This *being* so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.

17 "Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, 18 in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult. 19 They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me. 20 Or else let those who are *here* themselves say if they found any wrongdoing[a] in me while I stood before the council, 21 unless *it is* for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, 'Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.'"

Felix Procrastinates

22 But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of *the* Way, he adjourned the proceedings and said, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case." 23 So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let *him* have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him.

24 And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. 25 Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." 26 Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might

24:6 [a]NU-Text ends the sentence here and omits the rest of verse 6, all of verse 7, and the first clause of verse 8. **24:9** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *joined the attack.* **24:15** [a]NU-Text omits *of the dead.* **24:20** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *say what wrongdoing they found.*

Life Lessons

Acts 24:1–27

SITUATION
Foiled in their attempts to kill Paul, the priests hoped to manipulate the law against him before the Roman governor. Paul became Christ's mouthpiece; he defended himself and his faith against their accusations. Paul's powerful arguments thwarted the priests and won new converts at the governor's court, although some remained hesitant to receive God's Word.

OBSERVATION
Although God's wisdom is wiser than any other type of wisdom, some non-Christians will never accept it.

INSPIRATION
If you don't like yourself, if you are ashamed, embarrassed, or angry, other people are going to know it. . . .

Which takes us to the question, "How *does* a person get relief?"

Which, in turn, takes us to one of the kindest verses in the Bible, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28, 29).

You knew I was going to say that. I can see you . . . shaking your head. "I've tried that. I've read the Bible, I've sat on the pew—but I've never received relief."

If that is the case, could I ask a delicate but deliberate question? Could it be that you went to religion and

didn't go to God? Could it be that you went to a church but never saw Christ?

"Come to me," the verse reads.

It's easy to go to the wrong place. . . .

It's not that you haven't tried—you've tried for years to deal with your past. Alcohol. Affairs. Workaholism. Religion.

Jesus says He is the solution for weariness of soul.

Go to Him. Be honest with him. Admit you have soul secrets you've never dealt with. He already knows what they are. He's just waiting for you to ask Him to help. (From *When God Whispers Your Name* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

You've probably met people who attend church regularly but are unmoved by the preaching of God's Word. Their attendance seems more of a social obligation than a means for sharing and being enriched with God's Word. Is that how life is for you or your family? Think about your relationship with Christ. Does it have a true and real meaning? Make your goal next Sunday to worship God through active participation and listening.

EXPLORATION

Acceptance—Judges 11:3; Luke 4:24; 9:1–6.

Life LESSONS

Acts 25:1–27

SITUATION

After two years in prison, Paul awaited a new trial before the Romans and the Jews. He hoped his appeal to be heard by Caesar would fulfill part

release him.[a] Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him.

27 But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.

Paul Appeals to Caesar

25 Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem. 2 Then the high priest[a] and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him, 3 asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem—while *they* lay in ambush along the road to kill him. 4 But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was going *there* shortly. 5 "Therefore," he said, "let those who have authority among you go down with *me* and accuse this man, to see if there is any fault in him."

6 And when he had remained among them more than ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day, sitting on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought. 7 When he had come, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about and laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove, 8 while he answered for himself, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all."

9 But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?"

10 So Paul said, "I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. 11 For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar."

12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, "You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!"

Paul Before Agrippa

13 And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus. 14 When they had been there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying: "There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix, 15 about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed *me,* when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him. 16 To them I answered, 'It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction[a] before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him.' 17 Therefore when they had come together, without any delay, the next day I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought in. 18 When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed, 19 but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed

24:26 [a]NU-Text omits *that he might release him.* **25:2** [a]NU-Text reads *chief priests.*
25:16 [a]NU-Text omits *to destruction,* although it is implied.

to be alive. 20 And because I was uncertain of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters. 21 But when Paul appealed to be reserved for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I could send him to Caesar."

22 Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself."

"Tomorrow," he said, "you shall hear him."

23 So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus' command Paul was brought in. 24 And Festus said: "King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer. 25 But when I found that he had committed nothing deserving of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus, I decided to send him. 26 I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write. 27 For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him."

Paul's Early Life

26 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself."

So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself: 2 "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, 3 especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently.

4 "My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. 5 They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. 6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. 7 To this *promise* our twelve tribes, earnestly serving *God* night and day, hope to attain. For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. 8 Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?

9 "Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against *them*. 11 And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted *them* even to foreign cities.

Paul Recounts His Conversion

12 "While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, 13 at midday, O king, along

of his task to spread the gospel.

OBSERVATION

Paul never lost hope or vision and made the most of his Situation to obtain safe passage to Rome to await trial. While preaching to everyone he came in touch with, Paul developed a positive and respected reputation among those he met.

INSPIRATION

Buried like a grass burr in Matthew's rose bed is this disclosure: "Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but *some doubted*" (Matthew 28:16, 17, emphasis mine). Three years of miracles weren't enough. Nor were forty days at the Resurrection Retreat Center. They've seen Him vacate tombs and dictate weather patterns, but still they doubt.

You have to be kidding. Who knows Him better than they? Ask them a Christ question. Go ahead. Anything. Did He hum as He walked? Pray before He ate? Did He talk to storms in His sleep? And, if He did, did storms listen? They know. They know the person of Christ.

And, my, how they could speak on the passion of Christ. John winced as the hammer clanged. Mary wept as her son groaned. Close enough to be splattered by His blood, they knew His passion. When it came time to prepare the body for burial, they did.

And when it came time to see the empty tomb, they did that, too. Peter ran a finger down the stone slab. Thomas studied Christ's pierced hands like a palm reader. And for forty days

Jesus taught them. Forty days! Can you imagine a six-week seminar with the mind behind the microbes? "Tell us again, Jesus. Tell us how you got the hell out of hell."

Hand trained by Christ. Witnesses to the hinge moments of history. These folks are ready, aren't they? Apparently not. "Some of them still doubted."

Questions keep buzzing like a summer fly. Even after a thousand campfire conversations and a scrapbook full of jaw-dropping moments, some disciples resist. *I'm still not sure.*

What will Jesus do with them? We'd like to know, wouldn't we? We'd really like to know. *Still* stalks our sentences too.

"I still worry."

"I still gossip."

"Permafrost still chills my marriage."

"I'm still torn between the AA meeting and the corner bar."

"I still clench my teeth every time I get a call from that speck-of-dandruff ex-boyfriend of mine."

We find odd comfort in the lingering doubts of the disciples. For we still have our own. And so we wonder, *Does Christ have a word for those who linger near the dis*-still-*ery of doubt?*

His "yes" resounds. . . .

To those who still struggle, God says, "Wait on Me." (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Perhaps you have been in a discouraging rut that caused you to lose your Christian witness. Did you stop being a good Christian because you had a bad day? Make the most of every situation, even the bad times. Wait on God. Your dark cloud may have a surprise silver lining.

the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. 14 And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? *It is* hard for you to kick against the goads.' 15 So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 16 But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. 17 I will deliver you from the *Jewish* people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now[a] send you, 18 to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'

Paul's Post-Conversion Life

19 "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, 20 but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. 21 For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill *me.* 22 Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come— 23 that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles."

Agrippa Parries Paul's Challenge

24 Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!"

25 But he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. 26 For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe."

28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."

29 And Paul said, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains."

30 When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them; 31 and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, "This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains."

32 Then Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

The Voyage to Rome Begins

27 And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to *one* named Julius,

26:17 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *now.*

a centurion of the Augustan Regiment. [2]So, entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us. [3]And the next *day* we landed at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave *him* liberty to go to his friends and receive care. [4]When we had put to sea from there, we sailed under *the shelter of* Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. [5]And when we had sailed over the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, *a city* of Lycia. [6]There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, and he put us on board.

[7]When we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under *the shelter of* Crete off Salmone. [8]Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city *of* Lasea.

Paul's Warning Ignored

[9]Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, [10]saying, "Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives." [11]Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul. [12]And because the harbor was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, *and* winter *there.*

In the Tempest

[13]When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained *their* desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete. [14]But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon.[a] [15]So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let *her* drive. [16]And running under *the shelter of* an island called Clauda,[a] we secured the skiff with difficulty. [17]When they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship; and fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis[a] *Sands,* they struck sail and so were driven. [18]And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next *day* they lightened the ship. [19]On the third *day* we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands. [20]Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on *us,* all hope that we would be saved was finally given up.

[21]But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. [22]And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. [23]For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, [24]saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.' [25]Therefore take heart, men, for I believe

27:14 [a]NU-Text reads *Euraquilon.* **27:16** [a]NU-Text reads *Cauda.*
27:17 [a]M-Text reads *Syrtes.*

EXPLORATION
Opportunities—Exodus 2:7, 8; 2 Corinthians 4:17; Philippians 1:12–14.

Acts 26:1–32

SITUATION
Festus asked Agrippa for advice on Paul's case. When Agrippa asked to hear Paul's case, Paul recounted how Jesus had changed his life.

OBSERVATION
Christ fills a believer's new life with joy, hope, love, and peace. People still in the "old life" can see the difference but do not always understand it.

INSPIRATION
Consider the case [of the apostle Paul]. Like Moses, this young scholar displayed a youthful love of the law. He studied at the feet of Jerusalem's finest teachers. He followed the Torah with razor-sharp precision. He aligned himself with the Pharisees, ardent observers of Scripture. They defended the law with zeal. And "zeal" is the term he used to describe his youth. "Zealous?" he wrote. "Yes, in fact, I harshly persecuted the church" (Philippians 3:6 NLT).

Young Saul's ardor prompted his initial appearance in Scripture. Just like Moses, a murder brought him to the stage. Angry members of the Jewish council "they cast [Stephen] out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul" (Acts 7:58).

Call Saul misguided, misled, or mistaken—but don't call Saul mild. If you

scratched him, he bled commitment. Whether he was Saul, the legalist, or Paul, the apostle of grace, he couldn't sit still. Cause driven. Single-minded. Focused like a hawk on prey. Peter might tolerate the hypocrisy of the church. Not Paul. With him, you were either in or out, cold or hot. Whether persecuting disciples or making them, Paul impacted people. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Are you haunted by your past? Are you less accepting of other believers because of their pasts? Take a page from the apostle Paul. God can soften even the hardest heart. Continue to walk forward with Him, one step at a time.

EXPLORATION
Witnessing—Acts 1:8, 21, 22; 1 Corinthians 1:18–31.

Life LESSONS

Acts 27:1–44

SITUATION
Paul proved to be a calming presence on board the ship as he was taken to Rome. His faith and confidence remained like a rock when trouble engulfed the ship.

OBSERVATION
Trust in God to fulfill His promises. He provides hope when there seems to be no way out.

INSPIRATION
We can't outlive our lives if we can't get beyond our biases. . . . Whom have you been taught to distrust and avoid?

It's time to remove a few bricks.

Welcome the day God takes you to your Samaria—

God that it will be just as it was told me. [26]However, we must run aground on a certain island."

[27]Now when the fourteenth night had come, as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic *Sea,* about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land. [28]And they took soundings and found *it* to be twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found *it* to be fifteen fathoms. [29]Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come. [30]And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow, [31]Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." [32]Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off.

[33]And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored *them* all to take food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing. [34]Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you." [35]And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken *it* he began to eat. [36]Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves. [37]And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship. [38]So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea.

Shipwrecked on Malta

[39]When it was day, they did not recognize the land; but they observed a bay with a beach, onto which they planned to run the ship if possible. [40]And they let go the anchors and left *them* in the sea, meanwhile loosing the rudder ropes; and they hoisted the mainsail to the wind and made for shore. [41]But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves.

[42]And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape. [43]But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from *their* purpose, and commanded that those who could swim should jump *overboard* first and get to land, [44]and the rest, some on boards and some on *parts* of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land.

Paul's Ministry on Malta

28 Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta. [2]And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold. [3]But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid *them* on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. [4]So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live." [5]But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. [6]However, they were expecting that he

would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

7 In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days. 8 And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. 9 So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed. 10 They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary.

Arrival at Rome

11 After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island. 12 And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days. 13 From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli, 14 where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome. 15 And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.

16 Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.

Paul's Ministry at Rome

17 And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: "Men *and* brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, 18 who, when they had examined me, wanted to let *me* go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. 19 But when the Jews[a] spoke against *it,* I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation. 20 For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see *you* and speak with *you,* because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain."

21 Then they said to him, "We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. 22 But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere."

23 So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at *his* lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. 24 And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. 25 So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after

28:19 [a] That is, the ruling authorities

not so distant in miles but different in styles, tastes, tongues, and traditions. . . .

Don't let class, race, gender, politics, geography, or culture hinder God's work. For the end of the matter is this: when we cross the field and cheer for the other side, everyone wins. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Imagine yourself on a plane flying through rough weather with engine trouble. Would you be bold enough to provide hope to the person next to you? Would you quickly share Christ with that person? Anyone you know could be close to death. An unfortunate accident could claim the lives of a couple of your friends. What keeps you from sharing Christ with them?

EXPLORATION

God's Love—Psalm 136; Jeremiah 31:3; John 3:16; 11:33–38; 1 John 3:1; Revelation 3:20.

Life LESSONS

Acts 28:1–31

SITUATION

Paul, Luke, and the others survived the wreck. Paul arrived in Rome and attempted to bring the message of Jesus to the Jewish community in Rome, but they rejected the message.

OBSERVATION

The message of God is meant for all people. It cannot be limited by race or culture.

INSPIRATION

Racism couldn't keep [Jesus] from the Samaritan woman, demons couldn't keep

Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our[a] fathers, 26 saying,

'Go to this people and say:
"Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand;
And seeing you will see, and not perceive;
27 *For the hearts of this people have grown dull.*
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them."'[a]

28 "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" 29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.[a]

30 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

28:25 [a]NU-Text reads *your*. **28:27** [a]Isaiah 6:9, 10 **28:29** [a]NU-Text omits this verse.

Him from the demoniac. His Facebook page included the likes of Zacchaeus the Ponzi-meister, Matthew the IRS agent, and some floozy He met at Simon's house. Jesus spent thirty-three years walking in the mess of this world. "[He] being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:6, 7).

His example sends this message: no playground displays of superiority. "Don't call any person common or unfit."

My friend Roosevelt would agree. He is a leader in our congregation and one of the nicest guys in the history of humanity. He lives next door to a single mom who was cited by their home-owners' association for an unkempt lawn. A jungle of overgrown bushes and untrimmed trees obscured her house. The association warned her to get her yard cleaned up. It was a blight on the street, maybe even a health hazard.

Roosevelt, however, paid his neighbor, Terry, a visit. There is always a story behind the door, and he found a sad one. She had just weathered a rough divorce, was undergoing chemotherapy, and was working a night shift at the hospital and extra hours to make ends meet. She was in survival mode: alone, sick, and exhausted. Lawn care? The least of her concerns.

So Roosevelt recruited several neighbors, and the families spent a Saturday morning getting things in order. They cut shrubs and branches and carted out a dozen bags of leaves. . . .

Roosevelt's response was a Christlike response. Rather than see people as problems, Christ saw them as opportunities. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Give thanks to God for the sacrifice of the early Christians who spread the Good News from Judea. Learn a little bit more this month about someone who helped pass on the gospel throughout the centuries—Augustine, Luther, Wesley, Carey, or Zinzendorf for starters.

EXPLORATION

Good News for Everyone—Isaiah 40:28; John 3:31–35; Philippians 2:5–11; Titus 2:11, 12; Revelation 14:6.

THE BOOK OF

ROMANS

INTRODUCTION

At the moment I don't feel too smart. I just got off the wrong plane that took me to the wrong city and left me at the wrong airport. I went east instead of west and ended up in Houston instead of Denver.

It didn't look like the wrong plane, but it was. I walked through the wrong gate, dozed off on the wrong flight, and ended up in the wrong place.

Paul says we've all done the same thing. Not with airplanes and airports, but with our lives and God. He tells the Roman readers,

"There is none righteous, no, not one" (3:10).

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23).

We are all on the wrong plane, he says. All of us. Gentile and Jew. Every person has taken the wrong turn. And we need help.

In this profound epistle, Paul explores all the wrong options and takes us to the only correct one. The wrong solutions are pleasure and pride (chapters 1 and 2); the correct solution is Christ Jesus (3:21–26). According to Paul, we are saved by grace, (undeserved, unearned favor) through faith (complete trust) in Jesus and His work.

The letter concludes with practical instruction for a growing church, including thoughts on spiritual gifts (12:3–8); genuine love (12:9–21); good citizenship (chapter 13). The final chapters provide brilliant instruction for dealing with everything from church division to difficult brethren.

Romans is a life-changing letter for people who are willing to admit they are sinners. For those who admit they are on the wrong plane, the letter provides the correct itinerary.

Read it and take note. That flight home is one you don't want to miss.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Paul

Date Written: c. A.D. 57

Key Themes:

- All people are in need of a relationship with God.
- God has prepared for that relationship through His own sacrifice.
- Faith is the requirement of that relationship.
- Forgiveness is available from God for anyone.

Key Verse:

"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Contents:

I. The Bad News—The Nature of Humanity 1:1—3:20

II. The Good News 3:21—5:21

III. The Ongoing Problem of Sin 6:1—8:39

IV. Israel's Place in God's Plan 9:1—11:36

V. Christian Living 12:1—16:27

Life LESSONS

Romans 1:1–32

SITUATION
Paul wrote this letter to teach the Christian faith to the first Believers in Rome. He taught that no one deserves God's love.

OBSERVATION
Sin paints an ugly picture in people and in a culture. Without God's intervention, we have no way to deal with sin.

INSPIRATION
An uninfected computer can be bought—but an uninfected person? Impossible. Trace a computer virus back to a hacker. Trace our mental viruses back to the fall of the first man, Adam. Because of sin, our minds are full of dark thoughts. "Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:21, 22). . . .

Sin messes with the mind. But what if the virus never entered? Suppose a person never opened Satan's e-mails? What would that person be like?

A lot like the twelve-year-old boy seated in the temple of Jerusalem. Though He was beardless and unadorned, this boy's thoughts were profound. Just ask the theologians with whom He conversed. Luke gives this account: "[His parents] found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him

Greeting

Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated to the gospel of God 2 which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, 4 *and* declared *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. 5 Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, 6 among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;

7 To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be* saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Desire to Visit Rome

8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. 9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, 10 making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. 11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established— 12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

13 Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. 14 I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. 15 So, as much as is in me, *I am* ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.

The Just Live by Faith

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ,[a] for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, *"The just shall live by faith."*[a]

God's Wrath on Unrighteousness

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, 21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible

1:16 [a]NU-Text omits *of Christ.* **1:17** [a]Habakkuk 2:4

Anger of God

We have to see the mess we are in before we can appreciate the God we have. Before presenting the grace of God, we must understand the wrath of God.

Many don't understand God's anger because they confuse the wrath of God with the wrath of man. The two have little in common. Human anger is typically self-driven and prone to explosions of temper and violent deeds. We get ticked off because we've been overlooked, neglected, or cheated. This is the anger of man. It is not, however, the anger of God.

God doesn't get angry because He doesn't get his way. He gets angry because disobedience always results in self-destruction. What kind of father sits by and watches his child hurt himself?

What kind of God would do the same? Do we think He giggles at adultery or snickers at murder? Do you think He looks the other way when we produce television talk shows based on perverse pleasures? Does He shake His head and say, "Humans will be humans"?

I don't think so. Mark it down and underline it in red. God is rightfully angry. God is a holy God. Our sins are an affront to His holiness. His eyes "cannot look on wickedness" (Habakkuk 1:13).

God is angry at the evil that ruins his children.

The question is not, "How dare a loving God be angry?" but rather, "How could a loving God feel anything less?"

Study Guide

Read Romans 1:18–20.

- When have you seen righteous anger?
- Describe in your own words the difference between God's anger and human anger.
- Compare God's discipline to the way a parent disciplines a child.
- What does it mean to you that a God powerful enough to destroy us, loves us enough to discipline us?
- What feelings or attitudes keep us from returning to God after we have suffered the consequences of our own sin?
- If we know that sin destroys us, why do we keep on sinning?
- In what ways does God's anger lead us to His grace?
- In the last few weeks, how has God helped you resist temptation?

were astonished at His understanding and answers" (Luke 2:46, 47).

For three days Joseph and Mary were separated from Jesus. The temple was the last place they thought to search. But it was the first place Jesus went. He didn't go to a cousin's house or a buddy's playground. Jesus sought the place of godly thinking and, in doing so, inspires us to do the same. By the time Joseph and Mary located their son, He had confounded the most learned men in the temple. This boy did not think like a boy.

Why? What made Jesus different? The Bible is silent about His IQ. When it comes to the RAM size of His mental computer, we are told nothing. But when it comes to His purity of mind, we are given this astounding claim: Christ "knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Peter says Jesus "committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22). John lived next to Him for three years and concluded, "In Him there is no sin" (1 John 3:5). . . .

Guess what. That is God's goal for you! You are made to be like Christ! God's priority is that you be "transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). You may have been born virus-prone, but you don't have to live that way. There is hope for your head! Are you a worrywart? Don't have to be one forever. Guilt plagued and shame stained? Prone to anger? Jealousy? God can take care of that. God can change your mind. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How does the bleak side of life reflect your experience? Is that where you were? Is

God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

[24]Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, [25]who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

[26]For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. [27]Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

[28]And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; [29]being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality,[a] wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers, [30]backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, [31]undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving,[a] unmerciful; [32]who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

God's Righteous Judgment

2 Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. [2]But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. [3]And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? [4]Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? [5]But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, [6]who *"will render to each one according to his deeds"*: [a7]eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; [8]but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, [9]tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; [10]but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [11]For there is no partiality with God.

[12]For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law [13](for not the hearers of the law *are* just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; [14]for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, [15]who show the work of the

1:29 [a]NU-Text omits *sexual immorality.* **1:31** [a]NU-Text omits *unforgiving.*
2:6 [a]Psalm 62:12; Proverbs 24:12

law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*) 16 in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

The Jews Guilty as the Gentiles

17 Indeed[a] you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, 18 and know *His* will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, 19 and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, 20 an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. 21 You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? 22 You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? 24 For *"the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,"*[a] as it is written.

Circumcision of No Avail

25 For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. 26 Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? 27 And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, *even* with *your* written *code* and circumcision, *are* a transgressor of the law? 28 For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; 29 but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.

God's Judgment Defended

3 What advantage then has the Jew, or what *is* the profit of circumcision? 2 Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God. 3 For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? 4 Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written:

"That You may be justified in Your words,
And may overcome when You are judged."[a]

5 But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? *Is* God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) 6 Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world?

7 For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? 8 And *why* not *say,* "Let us do evil that good may come"?—as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just.

2:17 [a]NU-Text reads *But if.* **2:24** [a]Isaiah 52:5; Ezekiel 36:22 **3:4** [a]Psalm 51:4

that where you are? If it is, switch sides—join God's side. If you already have, then thank Him throughout the day for His mercy.

EXPLORATION
Righteousness—1 Samuel 26:23; 1 Kings 10:9; Psalm 111:3; Habakkuk 2:4; Zephaniah 2:3; Malachi 4:2; Romans 3:21; 8:10; Galatians 3:11; 2 Timothy 3:16.

Life LESSONS

Romans 2:1—3:8

SITUATION
Paul encouraged the church in Rome to be set apart from the world. God made a right relationship with Him available to all people.

OBSERVATION
God hates sin and desires all to follow Him in word and action.

INSPIRATION
I've wondered, at times, what kind of man this Judas was. What he looked like, how he acted, who his friends were. . . .

But for all the things we don't know about Judas, there is one thing we know for sure: he had no relationship with the Master. He had seen Jesus, but he did not know Him. He had heard Jesus, but he did not understand Him. He had religion, but no relationship.

As Satan worked his way around the table in the Upper Room, he needed a special kind of man to betray our Lord. He needed a man who had seen Jesus, but did not know Him. He needed a man who knew the actions of Jesus, but had missed out on the mission of Jesus. Judas was this man. He knew the empire

but had never known the Man.

We learn this timeless lesson from the betrayer. Satan's best tools of destruction are not from outside the church, they are from within the church. A church will never die from the immorality in Hollywood or the corruption in Washington. But it will die from corrosion within—from those who bear the name of Jesus but have never met him, and from those who have religion, but no relationship.

Judas bore the cloak of religion, but he never knew the heart of Christ. Let's make it our goal to know . . . deeply. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Spend uninterrupted time with Christ today. Tell Him your thoughts, dreams, worries, sins.

EXPLORATION
Relationship with Christ—Matthew 12:50; John 1:12; 15:5; Romans 8:15–17; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 6:18; Philippians 3:8.

Life LESSONS

Romans 3:9–31

SITUATION
Paul showed that no one can claim innocence. Everyone has sinned. But through Christ's death on the Cross God has redeemed us.

OBSERVATION
Willing and ready, God will forgive us if we come to Him in faith.

INSPIRATION
God is building a family. A permanent family. Earthly families enjoy short shelf lives. Even those

All Have Sinned

9 What then? Are we better *than they?* Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.
10 As it is written:

"There is none righteous, no, not one;
11 *There is none who understands;*
There is none who seeks after God.
12 *They have all turned aside;*
They have together become unprofitable;
There is none who does good, no, not one."[a]
13 *"Their throat is an open tomb;*
With their tongues they have practiced deceit";[a]
"The poison of asps is under their lips";[b]
14 *"Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness."*[a]
15 *"Their feet are swift to shed blood;*
16 *Destruction and misery are in their ways;*
17 *And the way of peace they have not known."*[a]
18 *"There is no fear of God before their eyes."*[a]

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

God's Righteousness Through Faith

21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all[a] who believe. For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth *as* a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Boasting Excluded

27 Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. 28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. 29 Or *is He* the God of the Jews only? *Is He* not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, 30 since *there is* one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. 31 Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

3:12 [a]Psalms 14:1–3; 53:1–3; Ecclesiastes 7:20 **3:13** [a]Psalm 5:9 [b]Psalm 140:3 **3:14** [a]Psalm 10:7 **3:17** [a]Isaiah 59:7, 8 **3:18** [a]Psalm 36:1 **3:22** [a]NU-Text omits *and on all.*

Abraham Justified by Faith

4 What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found
according to the flesh?[a] 2 For if Abraham was justified by works,
he has *something* to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does
the Scripture say? *"Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to
him for righteousness."*[a] 4 Now to him who works, the wages are not
counted as grace but as debt.

David Celebrates the Same Truth

5 But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies
the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, 6 just as David
also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes
righteousness apart from works:

7 *"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,*
And whose sins are covered;
8 *Blessed is the man to whom the* Lord *shall not impute sin."*[a]

Abraham Justified Before Circumcision

9 *Does* this blessedness then *come* upon the circumcised *only,* or
upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to
Abraham for righteousness. 10 How then was it accounted? While he
was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while
uncircumcised. 11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of
the righteousness of the faith which *he had while still* uncircumcised,
that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are
uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also,
12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only *are* of the cir-
cumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father
Abraham *had while still* uncircumcised.

The Promise Granted Through Faith

13 For the promise that he would be the heir of the world *was* not to
Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteous-
ness of faith. 14 For if those who are of the law *are* heirs, faith is made
void and the promise made of no effect, 15 because the law brings
about wrath; for where there is no law *there is* no transgression.

16 Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that
the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are
of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who
is the father of us all 17 (as it is written, *"I have made you a father of
many nations"*[a]) in the presence of Him whom he believed—God,
who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as
though they did; 18 who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he
became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken,
"So shall your descendants be."[a] 19 And not being weak in faith, he
did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a
hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. 20 He did not
waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened

4:1 [a]Or *Abraham our (fore)father according to the flesh has found?* **4:3** [a]Genesis 15:6 **4:8** [a]Psalm 32:1, 2 **4:17** [a]Genesis 17:5 **4:18** [a]Genesis 15:5

that sidestep divorce are eventually divided by death. God's family, however, will outlive the universe. "I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (Ephesians 3:14, 15).

Jesus even defined His family according to faith not flesh. "A multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, 'Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You.' But He answered them, saying, 'Who is My mother, or My brothers? . . . Whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother'" (Mark 3:32, 33, 35).

When you transfer your trust into Christ, He not only pardons you; He places you in His family of friends.

Common belief identifies members of God's family. And common affection unites them. Paul gives this relationship rule for the church: "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love" (Romans 12:10). The apostle plays the wordsmith here, bookending the verse with fraternal-twin terms. He begins with *philostorgos* (*philos* means friendly; *storgos* means family love) and concludes with *philadelphia* (*phileo* means tender affection; *adelphia* means brethren). An awkward but accurate translation of the verse might be "Have a friend/family devotion to each other in a friend/family sort of way." If Paul doesn't get us with the first adjective, he catches us with the second. In both he reminds us: the church is God's family.

You didn't pick me. I didn't pick you. You may not like me. I may not like you. But since God picked

and likes us both, we are family. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Have you accepted the free gift of God, forgiveness and eternal life, won for you by Christ? Submit to Christ's rule in your life and kneel to his lordship. Don't wait. Join God's forever family.

EXPLORATION
Faith—Acts 13:38, 39; Romans 4:25; 5:16, 18; 10:10; Galatians 2:16; Titus 3:7.

Life Lessons

Romans 4:1–25

SITUATION
Paul showed that Abraham's leadership in God's family was due to faith.

OBSERVATION
We accept God's gift by faith; we cannot earn it by good works.

INSPIRATION
Jesus makes no mention of Nicodemus's VIP status, good intentions, or academic credentials, not because they don't exist, but because, in Jesus' algorithm, they don't matter. He simply issues this proclamation: "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Behold the Continental Divide of Scripture, the international date line of faith. Nicodemus stands on one side, Jesus on the other, and Christ pulls no punches about their differences.

Nicodemus inhabits a land of good efforts, sincere gestures, and hard work. Give God your best, his philosophy says, and God does the rest.

in faith, giving glory to God, [21] and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. [22] And therefore *"it was accounted to him for righteousness."*[a]

[23] Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, [24] but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, [25] who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

Faith Triumphs in Trouble

5 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have[a] peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, [2] through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. [3] And not only *that,* but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; [4] and perseverance, character; and character, hope. [5] Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Christ in Our Place

[6] For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. [7] For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. [8] But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. [9] Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. [10] For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. [11] And not only *that,* but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Death in Adam, Life in Christ

[12] Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned— [13] (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. [14] Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. [15] But the free gift *is* not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. [16] And the gift *is* not like *that which came* through the one who sinned. For the judgment *which came* from one *offense resulted* in condemnation, but the free gift *which came* from many offenses *resulted* in justification. [17] For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)

[18] Therefore, as through one man's offense *judgment came* to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act *the free gift came* to all men, resulting in justification of life. [19] For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

4:22 [a] Genesis 15:6 **5:1** [a] Another ancient reading is, *let us have peace.*

Disappointment

If God is good, why do I hurt so bad?

Though the circumstances have changed, the questions haven't. They are asked anytime the faithful suffer the consequences of the faithless. Anytime a person takes a step in the right direction, only to have her feet knocked out from under her, anytime a person does a good deed but suffers evil results, anytime a person takes a stand, only to end up flat on his face . . . the questions fall like rain.

"If God is really there, why am I here?"

"What did I do to deserve this?"

"Why are the righteous persecuted?"

Does God sometimes sit on His hands? Does God sometimes choose to do nothing? Does God sometimes opt for silence even when I'm screaming my loudest?

If you've asked for a mate, but you are still sleeping alone . . . if you've asked for a child, but your womb stays barren . . . if you've asked for healing, but are still hurting . . . don't think God isn't listening. He is. And He is answering requests you are not even making.

Study Guide

Read Romans 5:1–8.

- How would you answer the question, "Why is life so unfair?"
- What helps you keep going when life is unfair?
- What unfair treatment did Christ endure? Why?
- How can Christ's example help us endure unfair hardships?
- What was the goal Christ had in mind that helped Him endure His suffering?
- What kind of mindset can help carry us through life's difficulties?
- Why does God allow the godly to suffer?
- What have you prayed for that you feel has not been heard?
- What can you do this week as a step of faith that God is still listening?

Jesus' response? Your best won't do. Your works don't work. Your finest efforts don't mean squat. Unless you are born again, you can't even see what God is up to.

Nicodemus hesitates on behalf of us all. Born again? "How can a man be born when he is old?" (v. 4). You must be kidding. Put life in reverse? Rewind the tape? Start all over? We can't be born again.

Oh, but wouldn't we like to? A do-over. A try-again. A reload. Broken hearts and missed opportunities bob in our wake. A mulligan would be nice. Who wouldn't cherish a second shot? But who can pull it off? Nicodemus scratches his chin and chuckles.

"Yeah, a graybeard like me gets a maternity-ward recall." Jesus doesn't crack a smile. "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (v. 5). About this time a gust of wind blows a few leaves through the still-open door. Jesus picks one off the floor and holds it up. God's power works like that wind, Jesus explains. Newborn hearts are born of heaven. You can't wish, earn, or create one. New birth? Inconceivable. God handles the task, start to finish.

Nicodemus looks around the room at the followers. Their blank expressions betray equal bewilderment.

Old Nick has no hook upon which to hang such thoughts. He speaks self-fix. But Jesus speaks—indeed introduces—a different language. Not works born of men and women, but a work done by God. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Picture yourself at a department store. On the

[20]Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, [21]so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Dead to Sin, Alive to God

6 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? [2]Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? [3]Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? [4]Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

[5]For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of *His* resurrection, [6]knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him,* that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. [7]For he who has died has been freed from sin. [8]Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, [9]knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. [10]For *the death* that He died, He died to sin once for all; but *the life* that He lives, He lives to God. [11]Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[12]Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. [13]And do not present your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God. [14]For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

From Slaves of Sin to Slaves of God

[15]What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! [16]Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness? [17]But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. [18]And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. [19]I speak in human *terms* because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members *as* slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness *leading* to *more* lawlessness, so now present your members *as* slaves *of* righteousness for holiness.

[20]For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. [21]What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things *is* death. [22]But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. [23]For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Freed from the Law

7 Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?

2 For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to *her* husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of *her* husband. 3 So then if, while *her* husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. 4 Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. 5 For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. 6 But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not *in* the oldness of the letter.

Sin's Advantage in the Law

7 What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, *"You shall not covet."*[a] 8 But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all *manner of* evil desire. For apart from the law sin *was* dead. 9 I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. 10 And the commandment, which *was* to *bring* life, I found to *bring* death. 11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed *me.* 12 Therefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

Law Cannot Save from Sin

13 Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful. 14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. 15 For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. 16 If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that *it is* good. 17 But now, *it is* no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. 18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. 19 For the good that I will *to do,* I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do,* that I practice. 20 Now if I do what I will not *to do,* it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. 22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

7:7 [a]Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21

shelf you see something you've wanted for years, but the price is still too high. How would you feel if a caring friend or relative bought the item, wrapped it, and gave it to you? Thank God for giving you a gift you could never afford.

EXPLORATION
Faith—Genesis 15:6; 2 Chronicles 20:20; Psalm 32:1, 2; Isaiah 7:9; Habakkuk 2:4; Matthew 9:29; Acts 15:9; Romans 4:16; 5:1; 10:17.

Life LESSONS

Romans 5:1–21

SITUATION
Paul described the experience of salvation for Christians. He outlined the magnitude of God's love revealed in Jesus Christ.

OBSERVATION
God proved His love by giving His Son to die on the Cross on our behalf while we were still sinners. Christians now have peace with God because they have been forgiven. They rejoice because they are assured of their salvation.

INSPIRATION
"Free flight: Rio de Janeiro to Miami, Florida." I wasn't the only person to hear about the offer but one of the few to phone and request details. The courier service offered an airline ticket to anyone willing to carry a bag of mail to the States. The deal was tantalizingly simple. . . . No company makes such offers anymore. But this was 1985—years before intense airport security. My dad was dying of ALS, airline tickets were expensive, and my checking account was as thin as a Paris supermodel.

Free ticket? The offer sounded too good to be true.

So I walked away from it.

Many do the same with John 3:16. Millions read the verse. Only a handful trust it. Wary of a catch perhaps? Not needy enough maybe? Cautioned by guarded friends?

I was. Other Rio residents saw the same offer. Some read it and smelled a rat. "Don't risk it," one warned me. "Better to buy your own ticket."

But I couldn't afford one. Each call to Mom brought worse news.

"He's back in the hospital."

"Unable to breathe without oxygen."

"The doctor says it's time to call hospice."

So I revisited the flyer. Desperation heightened my interest.

Doesn't it always?

When he asks for a divorce or she says, "It's over." When the coroner calls, the kids rebel, or the finances collapse. When desperation typhoons into your world, God's offer of a free flight home demands a second look. John 3:16 morphs from a nice verse to a life vest.

Some of you are wearing it. You can recount the day you put it on. For you, the passage comforts like your favorite blanket:

God so loved . . .
believes in Him . . .
shall not perish . . .
eternal life.

These words have kept you company through multiple wind-swept winters. I pray they warm you through the ones that remain.

Others of you are still studying the flyer. Still pondering the possibility, wrestling with the promise. One day wondering what

Free from Indwelling Sin

8 *There* is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in
Christ Jesus,[a] who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has
made me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could
not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His
own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 that the righteous requirement of the law
might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but
according to the Spirit. 5 For those who live according to the flesh set
their minds on the things of the flesh, but those *who live* according to
the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For to be carnally minded *is* death,
but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. 7 Because the carnal
mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor
indeed can be. 8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

9 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of
God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ,
he is not His. 10 And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of
sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit
of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised
Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through
His Spirit who dwells in you.

Sonship Through the Spirit

12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live
according to the flesh. 13 For if you live according to the flesh you will
die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you
will live. 14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons
of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear,
but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba,
Father." 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are
children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint
heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him,* that we may also be
glorified together.

From Suffering to Glory

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. 19 For
the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing
of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not
willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; 21 because the
creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption
into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the
whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.
23 Not only *that,* but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even
we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption,
the redemption of our body. 24 For we were saved in this hope, but
hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he
sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for *it*
with perseverance.

8:1 [a] NU-Text omits the rest of this verse.

Adopted

Can you imagine prospective parents saying, "We'd like to adopt Johnny, but first we want to know a few things. Does he have a house to live in? Does he have money for tuition? Does he have a ride to school every morning and clothes to wear every day? Can he prepare his own meals and mend his own clothes?"

No agency would stand for such talk. Its representative would lift her hand and say, "Wait a minute. You don't understand. You don't adopt Johnny because of what he has; you adopt him because of what he needs. He needs a home."

The same is true with God. He doesn't adopt us because of what we have. He doesn't give us His name because of our wit or wallet or good attitude. . . . adoption is something we receive, not something we earn.

We are welcome in God's house because we have been adopted by the owner. God has adopted you. God sought you, found you, signed the papers and took you home.

It would be enough if God just cleansed your name, but He does more. He gives you His name. It would be enough if God just set you free, but He does more. He takes you home. . . God adopted you simply because He wanted to. You were in His good will and pleasure. Knowing full well the trouble you would be and the price He would pay, He signed His name next to yours and changed your name to His and took you home. Your Abba adopted you and became your Father.

Study Guide

Read Romans 8:12–17.

- How does salvation compare with adoption?
- List some advantages of being God's child rather than just His creation.
- How has God been like a good father to you?
- How would your life be different if you didn't belong to God?
- In what ways have you tried to work for your "sonship" rather than just accepting your adoption into God's family?
- Why do people expect punishment rather than grace when they think about returning to God?
- What is our inheritance as God's children?
- In what ways do we share our inheritance with Jesus Christ?
- As children of God, how do we share in Christ's sufferings?

kind of fool offer this is, the next wondering what kind of fool would turn it down.

I urge you not to. Don't walk away from this one. Who else can get you home? Who else has turned his grave into a changing closet and offered to do the same with yours? Take Jesus' offer. Get on board. You don't want to miss this chance to see your Father.

I didn't. I called the company and signed up. Denalyn drove me to the airport. I found the courier employee, accepted the passage, checked the bag, and took my seat on the plane, smiling as though I'd just found a forgotten gift under the Christmas tree.

Do likewise. You don't need to go to the airport, but you do need to make a move. You need to give God your answer:

"Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in" (Eph. 3:17 MSG). Say yes to him. Your prayer needs no eloquence, just honesty. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

When God's love impacts our lives, it completely changes us so that selfishness turns to generosity. How would you describe your life before and after becoming a Christian? What major changes have you experienced since becoming a Christian? Write your story down and read it when you feel discouraged.

EXPLORATION

Love—Exodus 15:13; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 7:12; Psalm 33:5; Isaiah 63:9; Joel 2:13; Matthew 5:43–48; John 13:34; Romans 13:10; 1 Corinthians 13.

26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not
know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself
makes intercession for us[a] with groanings which cannot be uttered.
27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit
is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will
of* God.
28 And we know that all things work together for good to those
who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.
29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the
image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many breth-
ren. 30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom
He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He
also glorified.

God's Everlasting Love

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can
be* against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him
up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?
33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? *It is* God who justifies.
34 Who *is* he who condemns? *It is* Christ who died, and furthermore
is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes
intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness,
or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written:

"For Your sake we are killed all day long;
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."[a]

37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him
who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor
angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things
to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall
be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus
our Lord.

Israel's Rejection of Christ

9 I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bear-
ing me witness in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and
continual grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were
accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen[a] according
to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites, to whom *pertain* the adoption, the
glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service *of God,* and the
promises; 5 of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the
flesh, Christ *came,* who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God. Amen.

Israel's Rejection and God's Purpose

6 But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they *are*
not all Israel who *are* of Israel, 7 nor *are they* all children because they
are the seed of Abraham; but, *"In Isaac your seed shall be called."*[a]

8:26 [a]NU-Text omits *for us.* **8:36** [a]Psalm 44:22 **9:3** [a]Or *relatives* **9:7** [a]Genesis 21:12

8 That is, those who *are* the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. 9 For this *is* the word of promise: *"At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son."*[a]

10 And not only *this,* but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, *even* by our father Isaac 11 (for *the children* not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), 12 it was said to her, *"The older shall serve the younger."*[a] 13 As it is written, *"Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."*[a]

Israel's Rejection and God's Justice

14 What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! 15 For He says to Moses, *"I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."*[a] 16 So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, *"For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth."*[a] 18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" 20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed *it,* "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

22 *What* if God, wanting to show *His* wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, 24 even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

25 As He says also in Hosea:

"I will call them My people, who were not My people,
And her beloved, who was not beloved."[a]
26 *"And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them,*
'You are not My people,'
There they shall be called sons of the living God."[a]

27 Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel:[a]

"Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea,
The remnant will be saved.
28 *For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness,*
Because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth."[a]

9:9 [a]Genesis 18:10, 14 **9:12** [a]Genesis 25:23 **9:13** [a]Malachi 1:2, 3 **9:15** [a]Exodus 33:19 **9:17** [a]Exodus 9:16 **9:25** [a]Hosea 2:23 **9:26** [a]Hosea 1:10 **9:27** [a]Isaiah 10:22, 23 **9:28** [a]NU-Text reads *For the Lord will finish the work and cut it short upon the earth.*

Life Lessons

Romans 6:1–23

SITUATION
Since Christ's righteousness brought us into a favored relationship with God, we should live by God's standards.

OBSERVATION
Christians are not slaves to sin but can overcome by the power of God.

INSPIRATION
Think of it this way. Sin put you in prison. Sin locked you behind the bars of guilt and shame and deception and fear. Sin did nothing but shackle you to the wall of misery. Then Jesus came and paid your bail. He served your time; He satisfied the penalty and set you free. Christ died, and when you cast your lot with Him, your old self died too.

The only way to be set free from the prison of sin is to serve its penalty. In this case the penalty is death. Someone has to die, either you or a heaven-sent substitute. You cannot leave prison unless there is a death. But that death has occurred at Calvary. And when Jesus died, you died to sin's claim on your life. You are free. . . .

Christ has taken your place. There is no need for you to remain in the cell. Ever heard of a discharged prisoner who wanted to stay? Nor have I. When the doors open, prisoners leave. The thought of a person preferring jail over freedom doesn't compute. Once the penalty is paid, why live under bondage? You are discharged from the penitentiary of sin. Why, in heaven's name, would you

ever want to set foot in that prison again?

Paul reminds us: "Our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin" (Romans 6:6, 7).

He is not saying that it is impossible for believers to sin; he's saying it is stupid for believers to sin. "It's not the literal impossibility . . . but the moral incongruity" of the saved returning to sin.

What does the prison have that you desire? Do you miss the guilt? Are you homesick for dishonesty? Do you have fond memories of being lied to and forgotten? Was life better when you were dejected and rejected? Do you have a longing to once again see a sinner in the mirror?

It makes no sense to go back to prison. (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Select a habit that you'd like to kick, a habit that hurts your life. Pray for help. Write down three steps you can take to remove that habit from your life. Do it today—enjoy your new life.

EXPLORATION

Freedom—Psalm 68:19–21; John 8:32; 1 Corinthians 8:9–13; Galatians 5:1.

Life Lessons

Romans 7:1–25

SITUATION

Paul taught the Romans that the law could never guarantee eternal life. He proved again that Jesus Christ could save.

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: A God of Everlasting Love

Can anything separate us from the love Christ has for us? . . .

Stepping from the throne, He removed His robe of light and wrapped Himself in skin: pigmented, human skin. The light of the universe entered a dark, wet womb. He who angels worship nestled Himself in the placenta of a peasant, was birthed into the cold night, and then slept on cow's hay.

Mary didn't know whether to give Him milk or give Him praise, but she gave Him both since He was, as near as she could figure, hungry and holy.

Joseph didn't know whether to call Him Junior or Father. But in the end called Him Jesus, since that's what the angel said and since he didn't have the faintest idea what to name a God he could cradle in his arms.

. . . [D]on't you think their heads tilted and their minds wondered, "What in the world are you doing, God?" Or, better phrased, "God, what are you doing in the world?"

"Can anything make Me stop loving you?" God asks. "Watch Me speak your language, sleep on your earth, and feel your hurts. Behold the maker of sight and sound as He sneezes, coughs, and blows His nose. You wonder if I understand how you feel? Look into the dancing eyes of the kid in Nazareth; that's God walking to school. Ponder the toddler at Mary's table; that's God spilling His milk.

"You wonder how long my love will last? Find your answer on a splintered cross, on a craggy hill. That's Me you see up there, your maker, your God, nail-stabbed and bleeding. Covered in spit and sin-soaked. That's your sin I'm feeling. That's your death I'm dying. That's your resurrection I'm living. That's how much I love you."

"Can anything come between you and Me?" asks the firstborn Son.

Hear the answer and stake your future on the triumphant words of Paul: "I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor ruling spirits, nothing now, nothing in the future, no powers, nothing above us, nothing below us, nor anything else in the whole world will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38, 39). (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1594.

29 And as Isaiah said before:

"Unless the Lord of Sabaoth[a] had left us a seed,
We would have become like Sodom,
And we would have been made like Gomorrah."[b]

Present Condition of Israel

30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; 31 but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.[a] 32 Why? Because *they did* not *seek it* by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law.[a] For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. 33 As it is written:

"Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense,
And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."[a]

Israel Needs the Gospel

10 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel[a] is that they may be saved. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. 3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. 4 For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

5 For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, *"The man who does those things shall live by them."[a]* 6 But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, *"Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'"[a]* (that is, to bring Christ down *from above*) 7 or, *"'Who will descend into the abyss?'"[a]* (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). 8 But what does it say? *"The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart"[a]* (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, *"Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."[a]* 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. 13 For *"whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."[a]*

Israel Rejects the Gospel

14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written:

9:29 [a]Literally, in Hebrew, *Hosts* [b]Isaiah 1:9 **9:31** [a]NU-Text omits *of righteousness.* **9:32** [a]NU-Text reads *by works.* **9:33** [a]Isaiah 8:14; 28:16 **10:1** [a]NU-Text reads *them.* **10:5** [a]Leviticus 18:5 **10:6** [a]Deuteronomy 30:12 **10:7** [a]Deuteronomy 30:13 **10:8** [a]Deuteronomy 30:14 **10:11** [a]Isaiah 28:16 **10:13** [a]Joel 2:32

OBSERVATION

The Bible teaches us how sinful we have become, but Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit provide the power to overcome sin.

INSPIRATION

You and I know what it is like to endure a moment of temptation or an hour of temptation, even a day of temptation. But *forty* days? That is what Jesus faced. "Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil" (Luke 4:1, 2).

We imagine the wilderness temptation as three isolated events scattered over a forty-day period. Would that it had been. In reality, Jesus' time of testing was nonstop; "the devil tempted Jesus for forty days." Satan got on Jesus like a shirt and refused to leave. Every step, whispering in His ear. Every turn of the path, sowing doubt. Was Jesus impacted by the devil?

Apparently so. Luke doesn't say that Satan *tried* to tempt Jesus. No, the passage is clear: "tempted for forty days by the devil." Jesus was *tempted*; He was tested. Tempted to change sides? Tempted to go home? Tempted to settle for a kingdom on earth? I don't know, but I know He was tempted. A war raged within. Stress stormed without.

Like Jesus we are tempted. Like Jesus we are accused. But unlike Jesus, we give up. We give out. We sit down. How can our hearts have the endurance Jesus had?

By focusing where Jesus focused: on "the joy that was set before Him" (Hebrews 12:2). He lifted His eyes beyond the

horizon and saw the table. He focused on the feast. And what He saw gave Him strength to finish—and finish strong.

Such a moment awaits us. In an hour that has no end, we will rest. Surrounded by saints and engulfed by Jesus Himself, the work will, indeed, be finished. The final harvest will have been gathered, we will be seated, and Christ will christen the meal with these words: "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:23). (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What sin do you struggle to avoid? Thank God that He will one day rescue you from the struggle. Until then, let a prayer for strength be a reflex reaction to temptations.

EXPLORATION
Victory over Sin—Genesis 4:7; Psalm 119:133; 1 John 3:4–6.

Life Lessons

Romans 8:1–39

SITUATION
Although Christians still struggle with sin, the threat of judgment for their sin was removed at the cross.

OBSERVATION
This great chapter begins with no condemnation and ends with no separation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

INSPIRATION
Why does a mother love her newborn? Because the baby is hers? Even more. Because the baby is her. Her blood. Her flesh. Her sinew and spine. Her hope. Her legacy. It bothers her not that the baby gives nothing.

"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,[a]
Who bring glad tidings of good things!"[b]

16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, *"Lord, who has believed our report?"*[a] 17 So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

18 But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed:

"Their sound has gone out to all the earth,
And their words to the ends of the world."[a]

19 But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says:

"I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation,
I will move you to anger by a foolish nation."[a]

20 But Isaiah is very bold and says:

"I was found by those who did not seek Me;
I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me."[a]

21 But to Israel he says:

"All day long I have stretched out My hands
To a disobedient and contrary people."[a]

Israel's Rejection Not Total

11 I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, *of* the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, 3 *"Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"*?[a] 4 But what does the divine response say to him? *"I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."*[a] 5 Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. 6 And if by grace, then *it is* no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.[a] But if *it is* of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.

7 What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. 8 Just as it is written:

"God has given them a spirit of stupor,
Eyes that they should not see
And ears that they should not hear,
To this very day."[a]

10:15 [a]NU-Text omits *preach the gospel of peace, Who.* [b]Isaiah 52:7; Nahum 1:15 **10:16** [a]Isaiah 53:1 **10:18** [a]Psalm 19:4 **10:19** [a]Deuteronomy 32:21 **10:20** [a]Isaiah 65:1 **10:21** [a]Isaiah 65:2 **11:3** [a]1 Kings 19:10, 14 **11:4** [a]1 Kings 19:18 **11:6** [a]NU-Text omits the rest of this verse. **11:8** [a]Deuteronomy 29:4; Isaiah 29:10

9 And David says:

"Let their table become a snare and a trap,
A stumbling block and a recompense to them.
10 *Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see,*
And bow down their back always."[a]

Israel's Rejection Not Final

11 I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation *has come* to the Gentiles. 12 Now if their fall *is* riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!

13 For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14 if by any means I may provoke to jealousy *those who are* my flesh and save some of them. 15 For if their being cast away *is* the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead?

16 For if the firstfruit *is* holy, the lump *is* also *holy;* and if the root *is* holy, so *are* the branches. 17 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, 18 do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, *remember that* you do not support the root, but the root *supports* you.

19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." 20 Well *said.* Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. 22 Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness,[a] if you continue in *His* goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who *are* natural *branches,* be grafted into their own olive tree?

25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved,[a] as it is written:

"The Deliverer will come out of Zion,
And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;
27 *For this is My covenant with them,*
When I take away their sins."[a]

28 Concerning the gospel *they are* enemies for your sake, but concerning the election *they are* beloved for the sake of the fathers. 29 For the gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable. 30 For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their

11:10 [a]Psalm 69:22, 23 **11:22** [a]NU-Text adds *of God.* **11:26** [a]Or *delivered*
11:27 [a]Isaiah 59:20, 21

She knows a newborn is helpless, weak. She knows babies don't ask to come into this world.

And God knows we didn't either.

We are His idea. We are His. His face. His eyes. His hands. His touch. We are Him. Look deeply into the face of every human being on earth, and you will see His likeness. Though some appear to be distant relatives, they are not. God has no cousins, only children.

We are, incredibly, the body of Christ. And though we may not act like our Father, there is no greater truth than this: We are His. Unalterably. He loves us. Undyingly. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (see Romans 8:38, 39).

Had God not said those words, I would be a fool to write them. But since he did, I'm a fool not to believe them. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ . . . but how difficult it is for some to embrace this truth.

You think you've committed an act that places you outside his love. A treason. A betrayal. An aborted promise. You think he would love you more if you hadn't done it, right? You think He would love you more if you did more, right? You think if you were better His love would be deeper, right?

Wrong. Wrong. Wrong.

God's love is not human. His love is not normal. His love sees your sin and loves you still. Does he approve of your error? No. Do you need to repent? Yes. But do you repent for His sake or yours? Yours. His ego needs no apology. His love needs no bolstering.

And He could not love you more than He does

right now. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Do you sometimes feel that God can't really love you? If so, look at this chapter and commit it to memory. God is there whether you walk away from Him or not. Thank God for His acceptance of you because it's based on the finished work of Christ and not on your own merit.

EXPLORATION
No Separation—John 10:27–29; 17:1–3; Romans 5:8, 9; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17.

Life LESSONS

Romans 9:1–33

SITUATION
Paul reminded the Romans that no good work could bring salvation. Rather, God saves His people through His love.

OBSERVATION
The sovereign God told Moses that He would show mercy where He wants to show mercy, although no one deserves or can earn His mercy.

INSPIRATION
When we come to Christ, God not only forgives us, He also adopts us. Through a dramatic series of events, we go from condemned orphans with no hope to adopted children with no fear. Here is how it happens. You come before the judgment seat of God full of rebellion and mistakes. Because of His justice He cannot dismiss your sin, but because of His love He cannot dismiss you. So, in an act which stunned the heavens, He punished Himself on the Cross for

disobedience, 31 even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. 32 For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.

33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out!

34 *"For who has known the mind of the Lord?*
Or who has become His counselor?"[a]
35 *"Or who has first given to Him*
And it shall be repaid to him?"[a]

36 For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen.

Living Sacrifices to God

12 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Serve God with Spiritual Gifts

3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. 4 For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. 6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them:* if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; 7 or ministry, *let us use it* in *our* ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; 8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Behave Like a Christian

9 *Let* love *be* without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. 10 *Be* kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; 11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; 13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. 16 Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but

11:34 [a]Isaiah 40:13; Jeremiah 23:18 **11:35** [a]Job 41:11

rather give place to wrath; for it is written, *"Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,"*[a] says the Lord. 20 Therefore

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
If he is thirsty, give him a drink;
For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."[a]

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Submit to Government

13 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. 4 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil. 5 Therefore *you* must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. 7 Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes *are due,* customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

Love Your Neighbor

8 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 For the commandments, *"You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness,"*[a] *"You shall not covet,"*[b] and if *there is* any other commandment, are *all* summed up in this saying, namely, *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*[c] 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love *is* the fulfillment of the law.

Put on Christ

11 And *do* this, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed. 12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. 13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts.

The Law of Liberty

14 Receive one who is weak in the faith, *but* not to disputes over doubtful things. 2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only* vegetables. 3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him

12:19 [a]Deuteronomy 32:35 **12:20** [a]Proverbs 25:21, 22 **13:9** [a]NU-Text omits *"You shall not bear false witness."* [b]Exodus 20:13–15, 17; Deuteronomy 5:17–19, 21 [c]Leviticus 19:18

your sins. God's justice and love are equally honored. And you, God's creation, are forgiven. But the story doesn't end with God's forgiveness. . . . .

It would be enough if God just cleansed your name, but He does more. He gives you *His* name. It would be enough if God just set you free, but He does more. He takes you home. He takes you home to the Great House of God.

Adoptive parents understand this more than anyone. I certainly don't mean to offend any biological parents—I'm one myself. We biological parents know well the earnest longing to have a child. But in many cases our cribs were filled easily. We decided to have a child and a child came. In fact, sometimes the child came with no decision. I've heard of unplanned pregnancies, but I've never heard of an unplanned adoption.

That's why adoptive parents understand God's passion to adopt us. They know what it means to feel an empty space inside. They know what it means to hunt, to set out on a mission, and take responsibility for a child with a spotted past and a dubious future. If anybody understands God's ardor for His children, it's someone who has rescued an orphan from despair, for that is what God has done for us.

God has adopted you. God sought you, found you, signed the papers and took you home. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Since the Father has adopted you and shown you mercy, you should show mercy to others. Make a list of those to whom it is hard for you to show

mercy. What could you do to soften your heart toward them? Act on what you know to be true.

EXPLORATION
God's Mercy to People—Exodus 34:6; Deuteronomy 4:31; Luke 1:50; Ephesians 2:4.

Life LESSONS

Romans 10:1–21

SITUATION
Though the Old Testament emphasized God's mercy and pointed to God's salvation by faith, many first-century Jews preferred to count on their own righteousness to make them acceptable to God. Paul admires their zeal but is heartbroken that they have failed to understand God's plan for salvation.

OBSERVATION
God offers salvation to every individual, regardless of ethnic background. Salvation comes through believing in Jesus—no amount of good works can ever be sufficient to win God's approval.

INSPIRATION
He was our "Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Timothy 2:5, 6). Who is a mediator but one who stands in between? And what did Christ do but stand in between God's anger and our punishment? Christ intercepted the wrath of heaven. . . .

Who does that? What kind of person would take the blame for something he didn't do?

When you find the adjective, attach it to Jesus. "The Lord has laid on Him

who eats; for God has received him. 4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

5 One person esteems *one* day above another; another esteems every day *alike.* Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who observes the day, observes *it* to the Lord;[a] and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe *it.* He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. 7 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. 8 For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. 9 For to this end Christ died and rose[a] and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. 10 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.[a] 11 For it is written:

"As I live, says the Lord,
Every knee shall bow to Me,
And every tongue shall confess to God."[a]

12 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. 13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in *our* brother's way.

The Law of Love

14 I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that *there is* nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him *it is* unclean. 15 Yet if your brother is grieved because of *your* food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. 16 Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 For he who serves Christ in these things[a] *is* acceptable to God and approved by men.

19 Therefore let us pursue the things *which make* for peace and the things by which one may edify another. 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed *are* pure, but *it is* evil for the man who eats with offense. 21 *It is* good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor *do anything* by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.[a] 22 Do you have faith?[a] Have *it* to yourself before God. Happy *is* he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *he does* not *eat* from faith; for whatever *is* not from faith is sin.[a]

Bearing Others' Burdens

15 We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please *his*

14:6 [a]NU-Text omits the rest of this sentence. **14:9** [a]NU-Text omits *and rose.* **14:10** [a]NU-Text reads *of God.* **14:11** [a]Isaiah 45:23 **14:18** [a]NU-Text reads *this.* **14:21** [a]NU-Text omits *or is offended or is made weak.* **14:22** [a]NU-Text reads *The faith which you have—have.* **14:23** [a]M-Text puts Romans 16:25–27 here.

neighbor for *his* good, leading to edification. 3For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, *"The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me."*[a] 4For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. 5Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, 6that you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Glorify God Together

7Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us,[a] to the glory of God. 8Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* to the fathers, 9and that the Gentiles might glorify God for *His* mercy, as it is written:

"For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles,
And sing to Your name."[a]

10And again he says:

"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!"[a]

11And again:

"Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles!
Laud Him, all you peoples!"[a]

12And again, Isaiah says:

"There shall be a root of Jesse;
And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles,
In Him the Gentiles shall hope."[a]

13Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

From Jerusalem to Illyricum

14Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.[a] 15Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on *some* points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, 16that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. 17Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things *which pertain* to God. 18For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to

15:3 [a]Psalm 69:9 **15:7** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *you.* **15:9** [a]2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:49 **15:10** [a]Deuteronomy 32:43 **15:11** [a]Psalm 117:1 **15:12** [a]Isaiah 11:10 **15:14** [a]M-Text reads *others.*

the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). God treated His innocent Son like the guilty human race, His Holy One like a lying scoundrel. . . .

Christ lived the life we could not live and took the punishment we could not take to offer the hope we cannot resist. His sacrifice begs us to ask this question: if He so loved us, can we not love each other? Having been forgiven, can we not forgive? Having feasted at the table of grace, can we not share a few crumbs? "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11). (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Have you understood God's plan for salvation? God welcomes you with open arms when you come to him in faith. Trust God's mercy, because it brings the joy of a relationship with God. Then share that mercy with others.

EXPLORATION

Salvation Through Faith—Genesis 15:6; John 3:16; 5:24; 20:31; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8, 9; Philippians 3:9.

Life Lessons

Romans 11:1–36

SITUATION

Were the Jews still God's chosen people? What role did the non-Jewish people have? Paul set out to answer these questions.

OBSERVATION

Christians often feel superior to other groups—as if we had done something great to earn our acceptance before God. Instead, God's gift of

salvation should make us humble and grateful.

INSPIRATION

Paul calls the Holy Spirit a foretaste. "We have the Holy Spirit . . . as a foretaste of future glory" (Romans 8:23 NLT). No person with a healthy appetite needs a definition for that word. Even as I draft this chapter, my mind drifts toward a few foretastes. Within an hour I'll be in Denalyn's kitchen sniffing the dinner trimmings like a Labrador sniffing for wild game. When she's not looking, I'll snatch a foretaste. Just a bite of turkey, a spoon of chili, a corner of bread . . . pre-dinner snacks stir appetites for the table.

Samplings from heaven's kitchen do likewise. There are moments, perhaps far too few, when time evaporates and joy modulates and heaven hands you an hors d'oeuvre.

• Your newborn has passed from restlessness to rest. Beneath the amber light of a midnight moon, you trace a soft finger across tiny, sleeping eyes and wonder, *God gave you to me?* A prelibation from heaven's winery.

• You're lost in the work you love to do, were made to do. As you step back from the moist canvas or hoed garden or rebuilt V-eight engine, satisfaction flows within like a gulp of cool water, and the angel asks, "Another aperitif?"

• The lyrics to the hymn say what you couldn't but wanted to, and for a moment, a splendid moment, there are no wars, wounds, or tax returns. Just you, God, and a silent assurance that everything is right with the world.

Rather than dismiss or disregard such moments as good luck, relish them. They can attune you to heaven.

make the Gentiles obedient— 19 in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. 20 And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, 21 but as it is written:

> *"To whom He was not announced, they shall see;*
> *And those who have not heard shall understand."*[a]

Plan to Visit Rome

22 For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you. 23 But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, 24 whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you.[a] For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your *company* for a while. 25 But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. 26 For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. 27 It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. 28 Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. 29 But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel[a] of Christ.

30 Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, 31 that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. 33 Now the God of peace *be* with you all. Amen.

Sister Phoebe Commended

16 I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, 2 that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.

Greeting Roman Saints

3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. 5 Likewise *greet* the church that is in their house.

Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia[a] to Christ. 6 Greet Mary, who labored much for us. 7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

8 Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. 9 Greet Urbanus, our fel-

15:21 [a]Isaiah 52:15 **15:24** [a]NU-Text omits *I shall come to you* (and joins *Spain* with the next sentence). **15:29** [a]NU-Text omits *of the gospel.* **16:5** [a]NU-Text reads *Asia.*

low worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. 10 Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the *household* of Aristobulus. 11 Greet Herodion, my countryman.[a] Greet those who are of the *household* of Narcissus who are in the Lord.

12 Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord. 13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. 14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them. 15 Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.

16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. The[a] churches of Christ greet you.

Avoid Divisive Persons

17 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. 18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus[a] Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. 19 For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. 20 And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. Amen.

Greetings from Paul's Friends

21 Timothy, my fellow worker, and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my countrymen, greet you.

22 I, Tertius, who wrote *this* epistle, greet you in the Lord.

23 Gaius, my host and *the host* of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother. 24 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen.[a]

Benediction

25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began 26 but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith— 27 to God, alone wise, *be* glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.[a]

16:11 [a]Or *relative* **16:16** [a]NU-Text reads *All the churches.* **16:18** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *Jesus.* **16:24** [a]NU-Text omits this verse. **16:27** [a]M-Text puts Romans 16:25–27 after Romans 14:23.

So can tough ones. "Although we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, [we] also groan to be released from pain and suffering. We, too, wait anxiously for that day when God will give us our full rights as his children, including the new bodies he has promised us" (v. 23 NLT). (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Though we have a responsibility to follow Christ, we need to recognize we could only achieve it by God's Spirit.

EXPLORATION
God's Choice in Salvation—Deuteronomy 9:4, 5; Romans 2:4; 8:28, 29; Ephesians 1:4, 5, 11; 2:8, 9; 1 Timothy 2:3, 4; Titus 3:5.

Life LESSONS

Romans 12:1–21

SITUATION
Paul told the Roman Christians how to live so that their behavior would be worshipful to God.

OBSERVATION
God desires you to surrender every part of your life to Him.

INSPIRATION
Would you buy a house if you were only allowed to see one of its rooms? Would you purchase a car if you were permitted to see only its tires and a taillight? Would you pass judgment on a book after reading only one paragraph?

Nor would I.

Good judgment requires a broad picture. Not only is that true in purchasing houses, cars, and books, it's true in evaluating life. One failure doesn't make a person a failure; one achievement doesn't make a person a success.

"The end of the matter is better than its beginning," penned the sage.

"Be patient when trouble comes . . . ," echoed the apostle Paul. . . .

We only have a fragment. Life's mishaps and horrors are only a page out of a grand book. We must be slow about drawing conclusions. We must reserve judgment on life's storms until we know the whole story. . . .

"Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself."

He should know. He is the Author of our story. And He has already written the final chapter. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What particular sin stalks you? When does it seize you with temptation? As a safeguard, memorize Romans 12:1, 2. Whenever you feel tempted, repeat these verses in your mind and by God's power plan not to sin.

EXPLORATION

Honoring God—Matthew 16:24, 25; 1 Corinthians 6:20; 2 Corinthians 5:15; Galatians 1:10

Life LESSONS

Romans 13:1–14

SITUATION

Paul encouraged Christians to obey the government even though submitting to a pagan government would be difficult. He also encouraged Christians to love each other.

OBSERVATION

Christians should be well known in their communities for their obedience to government and their love for each other as well as for those outside the church.

INSPIRATION

God calls us to change the way we look at people. Not to see them as Gentiles or Jews, insiders or outsiders, liberals or conservatives. Not to label. To label is to libel. "We have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view" (2 Corinthians 5:16 NLT).

Let's view people differently; let's view them as we do ourselves. Blemished, perhaps. Unfinished, for certain. Yet once rescued and restored, we may shed light, like the two stained-glass windows in my office.

My brother found them on a junkyard heap. Some church had discarded them. Dee, a handy carpenter, reclaimed them. He repainted the chipped wood, repaired the worn frame. He sealed some of the cracks in the colored glass. The windows aren't perfect. But if suspended where the sun can pass through, they cascade multicolored light into the room.

In our lifetimes you and I are going to come across some discarded people. Tossed out. Sometimes tossed out by a church. And we get to choose. Neglect or rescue? Label them or love them? We know Jesus' choice. Just look at what He did with us. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Say a prayer for your governmental leaders. Whether you agree with them or not, they need your prayers because God has placed them in their positions. And pray for those of your community who have been "discarded." How might you and your church help?

EXPLORATION

Love—1 Corinthians 13; 1 John 3:16; 4:7, 8.

Life LESSONS

Romans 14:1—15:13

SITUATION

Paul continued to call Christians to unity and love, particularly between those who were weak or strong in their faith and walk with God. Paul addressed the habit of holy days and the eating of meat sacrificed to idols.

OBSERVATION

The church should be marked by how we love each other rather than how we judge each other.

INSPIRATION

None of us can do what all of us can do. Remember his commission to the disciples? "You [all of you collectively] shall be witnesses to Me" (Acts 1:8). Jesus didn't issue individual assignments. He didn't move one by one down the line and knight each individual.

"You, Peter, will be My witness . . ."

"You, John, will be My witness . . ."

"You, Mary Magdalene, will be My witness . . ."

But rather, "You [the sum of you] shall be witnesses to Me." Jesus works in community. . . .

We are in this together. We are more than followers of Christ, disciples of Christ. "We are members of His body" (Ephesians 5:30). "He is the head of the body, the church" (Colossians 1:18). I am not His body; you are not His body. We—together—are His body.

But His body has been known to misbehave. The brain discounts the heart. (Academics discount worshippers.) The hands criticize the knees. (People of action criticize people of prayer.) The eyes refuse to partner with the feet. (Visionary thinkers won't work with steady laborers.) . . .

What if the whole body were an eye? If you were a collection of eyeballs, how would you function? Five eyes on your hand, which is an eye, attached to your arm-sized eye, affixed to a torso eye from which extends your neck eye, and . . . The thought is ludicrous! You'd

have to bathe in Visine. But, then again, you couldn't bathe, for you wouldn't have hands.

"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'" (1 Corinthians 12:21). . . .

No one can do everything, but everyone can do something. . . .

Our only hope is to work together. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Examine your own taboos and look for some that may be unnecessary points of contention with other Christians.

EXPLORATION

Personal Responsibilities—Deuteronomy 24:16; Job 19:4; Proverbs 9:12; Jeremiah 31:30; Ezekiel 18:20.

Life LESSONS

Romans 15:14–33

SITUATION

Having concluded his presentation of the gospel and its impact on those who believe, Paul turned his focus to his ministry.

OBSERVATION

Paul expressed his passion for the unsaved and his love for Christians.

INSPIRATION

A few nights ago a peculiar thing happened.

An electrical storm caused a blackout in our neighborhood. When the lights went out, I felt my way through the darkness into the storage closet where we keep the candles for nights like this. . . . I took my match and lit four of them. . . .

I was turning to leave with the large candle in my hand when I heard a voice, "Now, hold it right there."

"Who said that?"

"I did." The voice was near my hand.

"Who are you? What are you?"

"I'm a candle."

I lifted up the candle to take a closer look. You won't believe what I saw. There was a tiny face in the wax . . . a moving, functioning, fleshlike face full of expression and life.

"Don't take me out of here!"

"What?"

"I said, Don't take me out of this room."

"What do you mean? I have to take you out. You're a candle. Your job is to give light. It's dark out there."

"But you can't take me out. I'm not ready," the candle explained with pleading eyes. "I need more preparation."

I couldn't believe my ears. "More preparation?"

"Yeah, I've decided I need to research this job of light-giving so I won't go out and make a bunch of mistakes. You'd be surprised how distorted the glow of an untrained candle can be. . . ."

"All right then," I said. "You're not the only candle on the shelf. I'll blow you out and take the others!"

But just as I got my cheeks full of air, I heard other voices.

"We aren't going either!"

. . . I turned around and looked at the three other candles. . . . "You are candles and your job is to light dark places!"

"Well, that may be what you think," said the candle on the far left. . . . "You may think we have to go, but I'm busy. . . . I'm meditating on the importance of light. It's really enlightening." . . .

"And you other two," I asked, "are you going to stay in here as well?"

A short, fat, purple candle with plump cheeks that reminded me of Santa Claus spoke up. "I'm waiting to get my life together. I'm not stable enough."

The last candle had a female voice, very pleasant to the ear. "I'd like to help," she explained, "but lighting the darkness is not my gift. . . . I'm a singer. I sing to other candles to encourage them to burn more brightly."

. . . She began a rendition of "This Little Light of Mine.". . . The other three joined in, filling the storage room with singing. . . . I took a step back and considered the absurdity of it all. Four perfectly healthy candles singing to each other about light but refusing to come out of the closet. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

When was the last time you presented the gospel to someone? Are you scared to be the light-giver that God has created you to be? Pray today that God would bring you opportunities to share your faith and give you the courage to take them. Now step out in faith and keep your eyes open!

EXPLORATION

Evangelism—Matthew 5:13–16; 28:18–20; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 2:14–17; 1 Thessalonians 2:8; 1 Peter 3:15, 16.

Life LESSONS

Romans 16:1–27

SITUATION

Paul sent his warmest greetings to his fellow workers in the kingdom of God.

OBSERVATION

Though often overlooked, the behind-the-scenes service of faithful Christians forms a vital part of any ministry. Paul expressed his thanks to a wide variety of people, most of whom are noted for simple, everyday acts of service.

INSPIRATION

For an extraordinary pitcher he performed few

extraordinary feats. Though a veteran of twenty-one seasons, in only one did he win more than twenty games. He never pitched a no-hitter and only once did he lead the league in any category. . . .

Yet on June 21, 1986, Don Sutton rubbed pitching elbows with the true legends of baseball by becoming the thirtieth pitcher to win 300 games.

His analysis of his success is worth noting.

"A grinder and a mechanic" is what he calls himself. "I never considered myself flamboyant or exceptional. But all my life I've found a way to get the job done."

. . . He has been called the "family sedan" of baseball's men on the mound. The connotation is accurate. He certainly boasted none of the Ferrari style of a Denny McClane nor the Mercedes sparkle of a Sandy Koufax, but after they and their types were parked in museums or garages, Don Sutton was still there.

He reminds us of a quality that is a common denominator in any form of greatness—reliability.

It's the bread and butter characteristic of achievement. It's the shared ingredient behind retirement pens, Hall of Fame awards, and golden anniversaries. It is the quality that produces not momentary heroics but monumental lives.

The Bible has its share of family sedans. Consistent and predictable, these saints were spurred by a gut-level conviction that they had been called by no one less than God Himself. As a result, their work wasn't affected by moods, cloudy days, or rocky trails. Their performance graph didn't rise and fall with roller-coaster irregularity. They weren't addicted to accolades or applause nor deterred by grumpy bosses or empty wallets. Rather than strive to be spectacular, they aspired to be accountable and dependable. And since their loyalty was not determined by their comfort, they were just as faithful in dark prisons as they were in spotlighted pulpits.

Reliable servants. They're the binding of the Bible. Their acts are rarely recited and their names are seldom mentioned. Yet were it not for their loyal devotion to God, many great events never would have occurred. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you a sports car—flashy, fun, nice to look at, but expensive to keep up and not very practical for most of the daily jobs of life? Or are you a family sedan—maybe not always noticed at first, but reliable, and a dear friend of the family? Think through the attitudes you need to change to become more faithful and reliable. Start working on one attitude this week.

EXPLORATION

Faithfulness—Galatians 5:22, 23; 6:9; Philippians 2:19–30; Revelation 13:10.

THE BOOK OF

1 CORINTHIANS

INTRODUCTION

An Indian was walking up a mountain when he heard a voice.

"Carry me with you," it requested.

The Indian turned and saw a snake. He refused. "If I carry you up the mountain, you will bite me."

"I wouldn't do that," the snake assured. "All I need is some help. I am slow and you are fast; please be kind and carry me to the top of the mountain."

It was against his better judgment, but the Indian agreed. He picked up the snake, put him in his shirt, and resumed the journey. When they reached the top, he reached in his shirt to remove the snake and got bit.

He fell to the ground, and the snake slithered away.

"You lied!" the Indian cried, "You said you wouldn't bite me."

The snake stopped and looked back, "I didn't lie. You knew who I was when you picked me up."

We hear the legend and shake our heads. He should have known better, we bemoan. And we are right. He should have.

And so should we. But don't we do the same? Don't we believe the lies of the snake? Don't we pick up what we should leave alone?

The Corinthian Christians did. One snake after another had hissed his lies in their ears, and they had believed it. How many lies did they believe?

How much time do you have?

The list is long and ugly: sectarianism, disunity, sexual immorality. And that is only the first six chapters.

But 1 Corinthians is more than a list of sins; it is an epistle of patience. Paul initiates the letter by calling these Christians "saints." He could have called them heretics or hypocrites (and in so many words he does), but not before he calls them saints.

He patiently teaches them about worship, unity, the role of women, and the Lord's Supper. He writes as if he can see them face-to-face. He

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Paul

Date Written: c. A.D. 55

Key Themes:

- The church, as the body of Christ, should be unified in the same way a physical body is.
- God calls His people to sexual purity.
- We must honor God within our human relationships.
- Love is the greatest of all gifts.

Key Verse:

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1).

Contents:

I. Divisions Among the Church 1:1—4:21

II. Sexual Purity 5:1—6:20

III. Answers to Questions 7:1—14:40

IV. Jesus' Resurrection and Paul's Closing 15:1—16:24

is disturbed but not despondent. Angry but not desperate. His driving passion is love. And his treatise on love in chapter 13 remains the greatest essay ever penned.

The letter, however personal, is not just for Corinth. It is for all who have heard the whisper and felt the fangs.

We, like the Indian, should have known better. We, like the Corinthians, sometimes need a second chance.

Life LESSONS

1 Corinthians 1:1–31

SITUATION
In a constructive manner, Paul admonished Christians in Corinth for being divisive. Paul reminded them about the limits of human wisdom.

OBSERVATION
Christians must focus on Christ to understand God's will. Human wisdom won't do it.

INSPIRATION
One of my Boy Scout assignments was to build a kite. One of my blessings as a Boy Scout was a kite-building dad. He built a lot of things: scooters on skates, go-carts. Why, he even built our house. A kite to him was stick figures to Van Gogh. Could handle them in his sleep.

With wood glue, poles, and newspaper, we fashioned a sky-dancing masterpiece: red, white, and blue, and shaped like a box. We launched our creation on the back of a March wind. But after some minutes, my kite caught a downdraft and plunged. I tightened the string, raced in reverse, and did all I could to maintain elevation.

Greeting

Paul, called *to be* an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God,
and Sosthenes *our* brother,

2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Gifts at Corinth

4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, 5 that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, 7 so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God *is* faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sectarianism Is Sin

10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's *household,* that there are contentions among you. 12 Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. 16 Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

Christ the Power and Wisdom of God

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."[a]

20 Where *is* the wise? Where *is* the scribe? Where *is* the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks[a] foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Glory Only in the Lord

26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called.* 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence. 30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption— 31 that, as it is written, *"He who glories, let him glory in the* Lord."[a]

Christ Crucified

2 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony[a] of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. 4 And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of human[a] wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Spiritual Wisdom

6 However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory, 8 which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

1:19 [a]Isaiah 29:14 **1:23** [a]NU-Text reads *Gentiles.* **1:31** [a]Jeremiah 9:24
2:1 [a]NU-Text reads *mystery.* **2:4** [a]NU-Text omits *human.*

But it was too late. She Hindenburged earthward.

Envision a redheaded, heartsick twelve-year-old standing over his collapsed kite. That was me. Envision a square-bodied man with ruddy skin and coverall, placing his hand on the boy's shoulder. That was my kite-making dad. He surveyed the heap of sticks and paper and assured, "It's okay. We can fix this." I believed him. Why not? He spoke with authority.

So does Christ. To all whose lives feel like a crashed kite, He says, "We can fix this. Let Me teach you. Let Me teach you how to handle your money, long Mondays, and cranky in-laws. Let Me teach you why people fight, death comes, and forgiveness counts. But most of all, let Me teach you why on earth you are on this earth."

Don't we need to learn? We know so much, and yet we know so little. The age of information is the age of confusion: much know-how, hardly any know-why. We need answers. Jesus offers them.

But can we trust Him? Only one way to know. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Human wisdom tells us to get as much as we can, believe only what we can see, enjoy pleasure, and avoid pain. God's wisdom tells us to give all we can, believe what we can't see, enjoy service, and expect persecution. Trust makes all the difference.

EXPLORATION

Wisdom—Job 28:13; Proverbs 1:7; 9:1; Ecclesiastes 8:1.

Life Lessons

1 Corinthians 2:1–16

SITUATION
The world cannot understand God's wisdom, nor can it comprehend that God's Son had to die to bring sinners back to God.

OBSERVATION
God reveals the mystery of the gospel to us when the Holy Spirit opens our spiritual eyes.

INSPIRATION
"Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:15).

The simplicity troubles many people. We expect a more complicated cure, a more elaborate treatment. Moses and his followers [in Numbers 21] might have expected more as well. Manufacture an ointment. Invent a therapeutic lotion. Treat one another. Or at least fight back. Break out the sticks and stones and attack the snakes.

We, too, expect a more proactive assignment, to have to conjure up a remedy for our sin. Some mercy seekers have donned hair shirts, climbed cathedral steps on their knees, or traversed hot rocks on bare feet.

Others of us have written our own Bible verse: "God helps those who help themselves" (Popular Opinion 1:1). We'll fix ourselves, thank you. We'll make up for our mistakes with contributions, our guilt with busyness. We'll overcome failures with hard work. We'll find salvation the old-fashioned way: we'll earn it.

Christ, in contrast, says to us . . . : "Your part is to

9 But as it is written:

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."[a]

10 But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit
searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For what man
knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in
him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.
12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit
who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely
given to us by God.

13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom
teaches but which the Holy[a] Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things
with spiritual. 14 But the natural man does not receive the things of
the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know
them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 But he who is spiritual
judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one. 16 For
"who has known the mind of the Lord *that he may instruct Him?"*[a]
But we have the mind of Christ.

Sectarianism Is Carnal

3 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but
as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk and not
with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive it,* and even
now you are still not able; 3 for you are still carnal. For where *there are*
envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I
am of Apollos," are you not carnal?

Watering, Working, Warning

5 Who then is Paul, and who *is* Apollos, but ministers through
whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? 6 I planted, Apollos
watered, but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither he who plants is
anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. 8 Now
he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive
his own reward according to his own labor.

9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, *you are* God's
building. 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a
wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on
it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious
stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one's work will become clear; for the
Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will
test each one's work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone's work which he
has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work
is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as
through fire.

2:9 [a]Isaiah 64:4 **2:13** [a]NU-Text omits *Holy.* **2:16** [a]Isaiah 40:13

16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the
Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, God
will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you are.

Avoid Worldly Wisdom

18 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be
wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.
19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is writ-
ten, *"He catches the wise in their own craftiness"*;[a] 20 and again, *"The
Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."*[a] 21 There-
fore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: 22 whether Paul
or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present
or things to come—all are yours. 23 And you *are* Christ's, and Christ *is*
God's.

Stewards of the Mysteries of God

4 Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the
mysteries of God. 2 Moreover it is required in stewards that one
be found faithful. 3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should
be judged by you or by a human court.[a] In fact, I do not even judge
myself. 4 For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified
by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. 5 Therefore judge nothing
before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the
hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then
each one's praise will come from God.

Fools for Christ's Sake

6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to
myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to
think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up
on behalf of one against the other. 7 For who makes you differ *from
another?* And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you
did indeed receive *it,* why do you boast as if you had not received *it?*

8 You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings
without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might
reign with you! 9 For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles,
last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle
to the world, both to angels and to men. 10 We *are* fools for Christ's
sake, but you *are* wise in Christ! We *are* weak, but you *are* strong! You
are distinguished, but we *are* dishonored! 11 To the present hour we
both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and
homeless. 12 And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled,
we bless; being persecuted, we endure; 13 being defamed, we entreat.
We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all
things until now.

Paul's Paternal Care

14 I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved chil-
dren I warn *you.* 15 For though you might have ten thousand instruc-
tors in Christ, yet *you do* not *have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I

3:19 [a]Job 5:13 **3:20** [a]Psalm 94:11 **4:3** [a]Literally *day*

trust. Trust Me to do what you can't."

By the way, you take similar steps of trust daily, even hourly. You believe the chair will support you, so you set your weight on it. You believe water will hydrate you, so you swallow it. You trust the work of the light switch, so you flip it. You have faith the doorknob will work, so you turn it.

You regularly trust power you cannot see to do a work you cannot accomplish. Jesus invites you to do the same with Him. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Do you read God's Word faithfully? Create a notebook of Observations. Keep track of new discoveries and old truths. Let them strengthen your faith and share them in your conversations.

EXPLORATION
Renew Your Mind—Proverbs 15:14; Romans 12:2; Philippians 4:8.

Life Lessons

1 Corinthians 3:1–23

SITUATION
Paul wrote to a church that was young and immature. He corrected some misunderstandings in the Corinthian church and outlined how the people should act, live, and relate.

OBSERVATION
This chapter contains the most information on the subject of rewards.

INSPIRATION
Let's talk for a moment about rewards. Salvation is the result of grace. Without exception, no man or woman has ever done

have begotten you through the gospel. 16 Therefore I urge you, imitate me. 17 For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.

18 Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you. 19 But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power. 20 For the kingdom of God *is* not in word but in power. 21 What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?

Immorality Defiles the Church

5 It is actually reported *that there is* sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named[a] among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! 2 And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. 3 For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. 4 In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5 deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.[a]

6 Your glorying *is* not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.[a] 8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.

Immorality Must Be Judged

9 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. 10 Yet *I* certainly *did* not *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.

12 For what *have* I *to do* with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? 13 But those who are outside God judges. Therefore *"put away from yourselves the evil person."*[a]

Do Not Sue the Brethren

6 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? 2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? 3 Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? 4 If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to

5:1 [a]NU-Text omits *named.* **5:5** [a]NU-Text omits *Jesus.* **5:7** [a]NU-Text omits *for us.*
5:13 [a]Deuteronomy 17:7; 19:19; 22:21, 24; 24:7

one work to enhance the finished work of the Cross. Our service does not earn our salvation. Our service does, however, impact our rewards. As one writer stated, "We are accepted into heaven on the basis of faith alone, but we are adorned in heaven on the basis of the fruits of our faith."

If this strikes you as strange, you aren't alone. Scripture offers just enough teaching to convince us of rewards, but not enough to answer our questions about them. In what form do they come? How are they dispensed? We aren't told. We are simply assured they exist. In addition to the crowns of life, righteousness, and glory, Scripture indicates that there are other rewards.

Some of the clearest writing on the topic is found in 1 Corinthians 3:10–15. In these verses, Paul envisions two lives. Both are built on the foundation of Christ; that is to say, both are saved. One, however, adds to that foundation with valuable works of gold, silver, and jewels. The other is content to take the cheap route and makes no substantive contribution to the kingdom. His work is comprised of flammable wood, grass, and straw.

On the day of judgment, the nature of each work will be revealed. Paul writes: "Each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Corinthians 3:13–15).

this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? 5I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? 6But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!

7Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather *let yourselves* be cheated? 8No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and *you do* these things *to your* brethren! 9Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals,[a] nor sodomites, 10nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. 11And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

Glorify God in Body and Spirit

12All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. 13Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body *is* not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.

15Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make *them* members of a harlot? Certainly not! 16Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body *with her?* For *"the two,"* He says, *"shall become one flesh."*[a] 17But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit *with Him.*

18Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. 19Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body[a] and in your spirit, which are God's.

Principles of Marriage

7 Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me:

It is good for a man not to touch a woman. 2Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. 3Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 4The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does.* And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does.* 5Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment. 7For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But

6:9 [a]That is, catamites **6:16** [a]Genesis 2:24 **6:20** [a]NU-Text ends the verse at *body.*

Please note: Both builders will be saved, but only one will be rewarded. And that reward will be on the basis of works. Exactly what forms the rewards will take, we do not know. I was once counseled to maintain a "reverent agnosticism" on the question. Translated: be peacefully ignorant.

My feeling is that the rewards will come in the form of added responsibility, not added privilege. Such is the indication from Matthew 25:21: "'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord." The worker appears to be given more duty rather than more relaxation. But again, we don't know for sure.

What we do know is this: We are saved by grace, and we are rewarded according to deeds. Anything beyond that is speculation. In fact, any speculation beyond that is dangerous lest we grow competitive. (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

If the nature of your works is going to be revealed, how should that affect your daily behavior? Ask God to help you live a life that is pleasing to Him. Then thank Him that you are saved by grace alone.

EXPLORATION

Rewards in Heaven—Matthew 5:12; 16:27; 2 Timothy 4:8.

Life LESSONS

1 Corinthians 4:1–21

SITUATION

Paul hoped church leaders in Corinth would regard

him and other apostles as fellow servants of God. Paul sought to correct the church, not abandon or demean it.

OBSERVATION

Paul said that ministers were servants accountable to God. Their faithful service would bring praise from God.

INSPIRATION

The last thing you should worry about is being a nuisance to God. All you need to concentrate on is doing what He tells you to do. Note the sequence of events in [these verses from John 2]: "Jesus said to them, 'Fill the waterpots with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, 'Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast.' And they took it. When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew" (vv. 7–9).

Did you see the sequence? First the jars were filled with water. Then Jesus instructed the servants to take the water (not the wine) to the master.

Now, if I'm a servant, I don't want to do that. How is that going to solve the problem? And what is the master going to say when I give him a cup of water? But these servants either had enough naiveté or trust to do what Jesus said, and so the problem was solved. Note, the water became wine after they had obeyed, not before.

What if the servants had refused? What if they had said, "No way"? Or, to bring the point closer to home, what if *you* refuse? What if you identify the problem, take it to Jesus,

each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that.

8 But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; 9 but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn *with passion.*

Keep Your Marriage Vows

10 Now to the married I command, *yet* not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from *her* husband. 11 But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to *her* husband. And a husband is not to divorce *his* wife.

12 But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. 13 And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. 15 But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such *cases.* But God has called us to peace. 16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save *your* husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save *your* wife?

Live as You Are Called

17 But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. 18 Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. 19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God *is what matters.* 20 Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. 21 Were you called *while* a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use *it.* 22 For he who is called in the Lord *while* a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called *while* free is Christ's slave. 23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. 24 Brethren, let each one remain with God in that *state* in which he was called.

To the Unmarried and Widows

25 Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy. 26 I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress—that *it is* good for a man to remain as he is: 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. 28 But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you.

29 But this I say, brethren, the time *is* short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, 30 those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not

possess, [31] and those who use this world as not misusing *it.* For the form of this world is passing away.

[32] But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. [33] But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please *his* wife. [34] There is[a] a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world—how she may please *her* husband. [35] And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction.

[36] But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry. [37] Nevertheless he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin,[a] does well. [38] So then he who gives *her*[a] in marriage does well, but he who does not give *her* in marriage does better.

[39] A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. [40] But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment—and I think I also have the Spirit of God.

Be Sensitive to Conscience

8 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. [2] And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. [3] But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.

[4] Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol *is* nothing in the world, and that *there is* no other God but one. [5] For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), [6] yet for us *there is* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom *are* all things, and through whom we *live.*

[7] However, *there is* not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat *it* as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. [8] But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.

[9] But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. [10] For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? [11] And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? [12] But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. [13] Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

7:34 [a]M-Text adds *also.* **7:37** [a]Or *virgin daughter* **7:38** [a]NU-Text reads *his own virgin.*

and then refuse to do what He says?

That's possible. After all, God is asking you to take some pretty gutsy steps. Money is tight, but He still asks you to give. You've been offended, but He asks you to forgive your offender. Someone else blew the assignment, but He still asks you to be patient. You can't see God's face, but He still asks you to pray.

Not commands for the faint of faith. But then again, He wouldn't ask you to do it if He thought you couldn't. So go ahead. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Evaluate your service for God. Are you a faithful steward? Are you using your spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ? God's first call to you, no matter what you do, is to display faithfulness and obedience to Him.

EXPLORATION
Servants of God—Matthew 20:25–27; Luke 12:41–48; 16:1–13; James 1:22–25.

Life LESSONS

1 Corinthians 5:1—6:20

SITUATION
Paul never permitted sexually immoral behavior in the church. Yet he remained compassionate when dealing with people.

OBSERVATION
Immoral behavior in the church must be handled firmly but sensitively.

INSPIRATION
Your body is God's instrument, intended for His work and for His glory.

The Corinthian Christians

had serious trouble with this. When it came to the body, they insisted, "We can do anything we want to" (1 Corinthians 6:12 CEV). Their philosophy conveniently separated flesh from spirit. Have fun with the flesh. Honor God with the spirit. Wild Saturdays. Worshipful Sundays. You can have it all.

Paul disagreed. He dismissed the dichotomy. He reminded his readers that God interwove body with soul, elevating them to equal status. Your body is no toy. Quite the contrary. Your body is a tool. "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 6:15). . . .

What work is more important than God's? Doesn't it stand to reason that God's tools should be maintained?

Hold on there. I heard that sigh. Maintain my body? *I don't want to talk about my body.*

We've heard it all, haven't we? Eat balanced meals. Exercise regularly. Avoid fat. Eat protein. Get rest. We've heard it all. And we've blown it all. Each of us has. To one degree or another we have mismanaged our bodies. You're thinking, *Lucado is reaching for the guilt hammer.* I'm not. You don't need a reprimand. A reminder maybe, but a reprimand? No. Yes, your belly may be a bit soft, but so is your heart. Soft for Christ. Soft for others. . . . Stay that way. "Bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things" (1 Timothy 4:8). If forced to choose, take the soft heart over the hard body.

But I don't think a choice is required. Maintain God's instrument. Feed it. Rest it. When He needs a sturdy implement—a servant who is rested enough to serve,

A Pattern of Self-Denial

9 Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? 2 If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

3 My defense to those who examine me is this: 4 Do we have no right to eat and drink? 5 Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as *do* also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? 6 Or *is it* only Barnabas and I *who* have no right to refrain from working? 7 Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?

8 Do I say these things as a *mere* man? Or does not the law say the same also? 9 For it is written in the law of Moses, *"You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain."*[a] Is it oxen God is concerned about? 10 Or does He say *it* altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, *this* is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. 11 If we have sown spiritual things for you, *is it* a great thing if we reap your material things? 12 If others are partakers of *this* right over you, *are* we not even more?

Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. 13 Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat *of the things* of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of *the offerings of* the altar? 14 Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.

15 But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it *would be* better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void. 16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! 17 For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. 18 What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ[a] without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.

Serving All Men

19 For though I am free from all *men,* I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; 20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those *who are* under the law, as under the law,[a] that I might win those *who are* under the law; 21 to those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God,[a] but under law toward Christ[b]), that I might win those *who are* without law; 22 to the weak I became as[a] weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men,* that I might by all means save some. 23 Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with *you.*

9:9 [a]Deuteronomy 25:4 **9:18** [a]NU-Text omits *of Christ.* **9:20** [a]NU-Text adds *though not being myself under the law.* **9:21** [a]NU-Text reads *God's law.* [b]NU-Text reads *Christ's law.* **9:22** [a]NU-Text omits *as.*

Striving for a Crown

24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one
receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain *it.* 25 And
everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now
they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for* an imperishable
crown. 26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not
as *one who* beats the air. 27 But I discipline my body and bring *it* into
subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should
become disqualified.

Old Testament Examples

10 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all
our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea,
2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 all ate the
same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they
drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was
Christ. 5 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for *their
bodies* were scattered in the wilderness.

6 Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we
should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. 7 And do not
become idolaters as *were* some of them. As it is written, *"The people
sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play."*[a] 8 Nor let us commit
sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three
thousand fell; 9 nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted,
and were destroyed by serpents; 10 nor complain, as some of them
also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now all[a]
these things happened to them as examples, and they were written
for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.
13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to
man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond
what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of
escape, that you may be able to bear *it.*

Flee from Idolatry

14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak as to wise
men; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 The cup of blessing which
we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread
which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? 17 For
we, *though* many, are one bread *and* one body; for we all partake of
that one bread.

18 Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sac-
rifices partakers of the altar? 19 What am I saying then? That an idol
is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? 20 Rather, that the
things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not
to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. 21 You
cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot
partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. 22 Or do we pro-
voke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?

10:7 [a]Exodus 32:6 **10:11** [a]NU-Text omits *all.*

fueled enough to work, alert enough to think—let Him find one in you. He uses you.

Greater still, He lives in you. "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you?" (1 Corinthians 6:19). Paul wrote these words to counter the Corinthian sex obsession. "Flee sexual immorality," reads the prior sentence. "Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body" (v. 18).

What a salmon scripture! No message swims more upstream than this one. You know the sexual anthem of our day: "I'll do what I want. It's my body." God's firm response? "No, it's not. It's mine." (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Sexual desire must be directed and disciplined if we are to live as God intended. What is your strategy for curbing and controlling sexual appetite? Develop a strategy and stick to it. What is the cost of failure to control? Behave as Christ would on this sensitive subject.

EXPLORATION

Immorality—Judges 3:5–7; 18:31; Job 31:1; 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; Revelation 9:20, 21.

Life Lessons

1 Corinthians 7:1–40

SITUATION

Since the residents of Corinth were renowned for godlessness, Paul explained how to honor God in Christian relationships, specifically

sexual relations. Paul's teaching contrasted with the majority opinion in Corinth.

OBSERVATION

Whether single or married, we must live devoted to the Lord. God's design for marriage will glorify Him, but Paul also points out advantages of being unmarried.

INSPIRATION

I remember watching [my mother] care for [my father] in his final months. ALS had sucked life from every muscle in his body. She did for him what mothers do for infants. She bathed, fed, and dressed him. She placed a hospital bed in the den of our house and made him her mission. If she complained, I never heard it. If she frowned, I never saw it. What I heard and saw was a covenant keeper. "This is what love does," her actions announced as she powdered his body, shaved his face, and washed his sheets. She modeled the power of a promise kept.

God calls on you to do the same. Illustrate stubborn love. Incarnate fidelity. God is giving you a chance to show your children and your neighbors what real love does.

Embrace it. Who knows? Someone may tell your story of loyalty to illustrate the loyalty of God. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

To honor God in all of our relationships, we must know what the Bible teaches and then obey. Are you familiar with the Bible's teachings on marriage, singleness, and sexuality? How can you take a step closer to God in this vulnerable area? Begin with the verses below and then do a thorough study.

All to the Glory of God

23 All things are lawful for me,[a] but not all things are helpful; all
things are lawful for me,[b] but not all things edify. 24 Let no one seek his
own, but each one the other's *well-being*.
25 Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for
conscience' sake; 26 for *"the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness."*[a]
27 If any of those who do not believe invites you *to dinner,* and
you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question
for conscience' sake. 28 But if anyone says to you, "This was offered
to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for
conscience' sake;[a] for *"the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness."*[b]
29 "Conscience," I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is
my liberty judged by another *man's* conscience? 30 But if I partake with
thanks, why am I evil spoken of for *the food* over which I give thanks?
31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to
the glory of God. 32 Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks
or to the church of God, 33 just as I also please all *men* in all *things,* not
seeking my own profit, but the *profit* of many, that they may be saved.
11 Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.

Head Coverings

2 Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things
and keep the traditions just as I delivered *them* to you. 3 But I want you
to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman *is*
man, and the head of Christ *is* God. 4 Every man praying or prophesy-
ing, having *his* head covered, dishonors his head. 5 But every woman
who prays or prophesies with *her* head uncovered dishonors her
head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. 6 For if a
woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a
woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered. 7 For a man indeed
ought not to cover *his* head, since he is the image and glory of God;
but woman is the glory of man. 8 For man is not from woman, but
woman from man. 9 Nor was man created for the woman, but woman
for the man. 10 For this reason the woman ought to have *a symbol of*
authority on *her* head, because of the angels. 11 Nevertheless, neither
is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in
the Lord. 12 For as woman *came* from man, even so man also *comes*
through woman; but all things are from God.
13 Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God
with her head uncovered? 14 Does not even nature itself teach you that
if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? 15 But if a woman has
long hair, it is a glory to her; for *her* hair is given to her[a] for a covering.
16 But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom,
nor *do* the churches of God.

Conduct at the Lord's Supper

17 Now in giving these instructions I do not praise *you,* since you
come together not for the better but for the worse. 18 For first of all,

10:23 [a]NU-Text omits *for me.* [b]NU-Text omits *for me.* **10:26** [a]Psalm 24:1 **10:28** [a]NU-Text omits the rest of this verse. [b]Psalm 24:1 **11:15** [a]M-Text omits *to her.*

when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. 19 For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. 20 Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. 21 For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of *others;* and one is hungry and another is drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise *you.*

Institution of the Lord's Supper

23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat;[a] this is My body which is broken[b] for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it,* in remembrance of Me."

26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

Examine Yourself

27 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood[a] of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner[a] eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's[b] body. 30 For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep. 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

33 Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. 34 But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.

Spiritual Gifts: Unity in Diversity

12 Now concerning spiritual *gifts,* brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: 2 You know that[a] you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

4 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. 6 And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. 7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all:* 8 for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by

11:24 [a]NU-Text omits *Take, eat.* [b]NU-Text omits *broken.* **11:27** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *the blood.* **11:29** [a]NU-Text omits *in an unworthy manner.* [b]NU-Text omits *Lord's.* **12:2** [a]NU-Text and M-Text add *when.*

EXPLORATION
Marriage and Singleness—Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:3–12; Romans 12:10; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10, 18–20; Ephesians 5:21–31; Colossians 3:12, 13; 1 Timothy 5:5, 6; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Peter 3:1, 7.

1 Corinthians 8:1—9:27

SITUATION
Some believers questioned Paul's rights as an apostle. Paul responded by pointing out that the rights apostles claimed were very reasonable, yet he himself didn't claim them. To Paul, nothing was more important than spreading the gospel, so giving up his rights was a worthwhile sacrifice.

OBSERVATION
One of our top priorities should be enabling others to understand the gospel. Though God has given us many blessings and rights, we should be willing to give them up if it would help someone to know Christ.

INSPIRATION
You can protect your reputation or protect his. You have a choice. . . .

Jesus . . . "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:7, 8).

Christ abandoned His reputation. No one in Nazareth saluted Him as the Son of God. He did not stand out in His elementary-

Christ Through The Bible

We Are One in Christ

There was some dice-throwing that went on at the foot of the Cross. . . . I've wondered what that scene must have looked like to Jesus. As He looked downward past His bloody feet at the circle of gamblers, what did He think? What emotions did He feel? He must have been amazed. Here are common soldiers witnessing the world's most uncommon event and they don't know it. As far as they're concerned, it's just another Friday morning and He is just another criminal. "Come on, hurry up; it's my turn!"

"All right, all right—this throw is for the sandals."

Casting lots for the possessions of Christ. Heads ducked. Eyes downward. Cross forgotten.

The symbolism is striking. Do you see it?

It makes me think of us. The religious. Those who claim heritage at the Cross. I'm thinking of all of us. Every believer in the land. The stuffy. The loose. The strict. The simple. Upper church. Lower church. "Spirit-filled." Millenialists. Evangelical. Political. Mystical. Literal. Cynical. Robes. Collars. Three-piece suits. Born-againers. Ameners.

I'm thinking of us.

I'm thinking that we aren't so unlike those soldiers. (I'm sorry to say.)

We, too, play games at the foot of the Cross. We compete for members. We scramble for status. We deal out judgments and condemnations. Competition. Selfishness. Personal gain. It's all there. We don't like what the other did so we take the sandal we won and walk away in a huff.

So close to the timbers yet so far from the blood.

We are so close to the world's most uncommon event, but we act like common crapshooters huddled in bickering groups and fighting over silly opinions.

How many pulpit hours have been wasted on preaching the trivial? How many churches have tumbled at the throes of minuscuity? How many leaders have saddled their pet peeves, drawn their swords of bitterness and launched into battle against brethren over issues that are not worth discussing?

So close to the Cross but so far from the Christ.

We specialize in "I am right" rallies. We write books about what the other does wrong. We major in finding gossip and become experts in unveiling weaknesses. We split into little huddles and then, God forbid, we split again. . . .

Are our differences that divisive? Are our opinions that obtrusive? Are our walls that wide? Is it *that* impossible to find a common cause?

"May they all be one," Jesus prayed.

One. Not one in groups of two thousand. But one in One. *One* church. *One* faith. *One* Lord. Not Baptist, not Methodist, not Adventist. Just Christian. No denominations. No hierarchies. No traditions. Just Christ. (From *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1609.

the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same[a] Spirit, [10] to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. [11] But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

Unity and Diversity in One Body

[12] For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ. [13] For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into[a] one Spirit. [14] For in fact the body is not one member but many.

[15] If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? [16] And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? [17] If the whole body *were* an eye, where *would be* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *would be* the smelling? [18] But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. [19] And if they were all one member, where *would* the body *be?*

[20] But now indeed *there are* many members, yet one body. [21] And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." [22] No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. [23] And those *members* of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable *parts* have greater modesty, [24] but our presentable *parts* have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it, [25] that there should be no schism in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another. [26] And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *it;* or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with *it.*

[27] Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. [28] And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. [29] *Are* all apostles? *Are* all prophets? *Are* all teachers? *Are* all workers of miracles? [30] Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? [31] But earnestly desire the best[a] gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

The Greatest Gift

13 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. [2] And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. [3] And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor,* and though I give my body to be burned,[a] but have not love, it profits me nothing.

12:9 [a]NU-Text reads *one.* **12:13** [a]NU-Text omits *into.* **12:31** [a]NU-Text reads *greater.* **13:3** [a]NU-Text reads *so I may boast.*

classroom photograph, demanded no glossy page in His high-school annual. Friends knew Him as a woodworker, not a star hanger. His looks turned no heads; His position earned Him no credit. In the great stoop we call Christmas, Jesus abandoned heavenly privileges and aproned earthly pains. "He gave up his place with God and made himself nothing" (Philippians 2:7 NCV).

God hunts for those who will do likewise—[those] through whom He can deliver Christ into the world. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Our culture encourages us to stand up for ourselves and demand our rights, even at the expense of others. Yet Jesus and the New Testament writers repeatedly point to the joy we receive from humility and self-sacrifice. Why not give up your right for free time or watching a movie and use the time to share with a new Christian a lesson you have learned recently.

EXPLORATION

Self-Sacrifice—Micah 6:8; Matthew 16:24, 25; 18:4; Mark 10:28; Luke 14:33; 1 Corinthians 10:24, 33; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 2:4–8; 3:8.

Life LESSONS

1 Corinthians 10:1—11:1

SITUATION

Paul taught the Corinthians about the dangers of idol worship and petty arguments using lessons from history and faith.

OBSERVATION
In everything that we do, whether we relate to each other or worship, we ought to give glory to God. Though mindful not to offend other Christians, we should be focused on bringing praise to God.

4 Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not
parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek
its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity,
but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all
things, endures all things.
8 Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail;
whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in

New Life In Christ

Love . . . does not seek its own, is not provoked. —1 Corinthians 13:5

Don't Keep a List of Wrongs

Do you remember the story about the man who was bitten by the dog? When he learned the dog had rabies, he began making a list. The doctor told him there was no need to make a will, that rabies could be cured. "Oh, I'm not making a will," he replied. "I'm making a list of all the people I want to bite."

Couldn't we all make such a list? You've already learned, haven't you, that friends aren't always friendly? Neighbors aren't always neighborly? Some workers never work, and some bosses are always bossy?

You've already learned, haven't you, that a promise made is not always a promise kept? Just because someone is called your dad, that doesn't mean he will act like your dad. Even though they said "yes" on the altar, they may say "no" in the marriage.

You've already learned, haven't you, that we tend to fight back? To bite back? To keep lists and snarl lips and growl at people we don't like?

God wants your list. He inspired one servant to write, "Love does not count up wrongs that have been done" (1 Corinthians 13:5 NCV). He wants us to leave the list at the Cross.

Not easy.

"Just look what they did to me!" we defy and point to our hurts.

"Just look what I did for you," He reminds and points to the Cross.

Paul said it this way: "If someone does wrong to you, forgive that person because the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13).

You and I are commanded—not urged, *commanded*—to keep no list of wrongs.

Besides, do you really want to keep one? Do you really want to catalog all your mistreatments? Do you really want to growl and snap your way through life? God doesn't want you to either. Give up your sins before they infect you and your bitterness before it incites you, and give God your anxiety before it inhibits you. Give God your anxious moments. (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

Question: Who do you need to forgive before bitterness consumes you?

For more on "New Life in Christ," see page 1615.

part. 10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love.

Prophecy and Tongues

14 Pursue love, and desire spiritual *gifts,* but especially that you may prophesy. 2 For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands *him;* however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. 3 But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. 4 He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. 5 I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for[a] he who prophesies *is* greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.

Tongues Must Be Interpreted

6 But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching? 7 Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played? 8 For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle? 9 So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. 10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them *is* without significance. 11 Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks *will be* a foreigner to me. 12 Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual *gifts, let it be* for the edification of the church *that* you seek to excel.

13 Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. 15 What is *the conclusion* then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. 16 Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? 17 For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.

18 I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; 19 yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Tongues a Sign to Unbelievers

20 Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.

14:5 [a]NU-Text reads *and.*

INSPIRATION

Heaven knows you could use some inspiration. People can exhaust you. And there are times when all we can do is not enough. When a spouse chooses to leave, we cannot force him or her to stay. When a spouse abuses, we shouldn't stay. The best of love can go unrequited. I don't for a moment intend to minimize the challenges some of you face. You're tired. You're angry. You're disappointed. This isn't the marriage you expected or the life you wanted. But looming in your past is a promise you made. May I urge you to do all you can to keep it? To give it one more try?

Why should you? So you can understand the depth of God's love.

When you love the unloving, you get a glimpse of what God does for you. When you keep the porch light on for the prodigal child, when you do what is right even though you have been done wrong, when you love the weak and the sick, you do what God does every single moment. Covenant-keeping enrolls you in the post-graduate school of God's love.

Is this why God has given you this challenge? When you love liars, cheaters, and heartbreakers, are you not doing what God has done for us? Pay attention to and take notes on your struggles. God invites you to understand His love. (From *Facing Your Giants by* Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What is your motivation for your daily tasks? Who gets the glory—you or God? Even the smallest decisions and the briefest interpersonal encounters should be done so that God receives glory.

EXPLORATION
Bringing Glory to God—
Psalm 22:23; Matthew 5:16;
John 15:8; Romans 15:6;
1 Corinthians 6:20.

Life Lessons

1 Corinthians 11:2–34

SITUATION
The Corinthians allowed some parts of their worship services to become times of selfishness and bickering. Lack of respect and concern for others undermined their gathering for worship.

OBSERVATION
The Lord's Supper was to be a celebration marked by unity, not dissension.

INSPIRATION
You find no personal pronouns in the earliest description of the church: "All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy" (Acts 2:42–46 NLT)

The cameo contains only plural nouns and pronouns.

"All the *believers*."

"Devoted *themselves*."

"Awe came over *them* all."

"All the *believers* met together . . . and shared everything."

21 In the law it is written:

"With men of other tongues and other lips
I will speak to this people;
And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me,"[a]

says the Lord.

22 Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe. 23 Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those who are* uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? 24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. 25 And thus[a] the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.

Order in Church Meetings

26 How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let there be* two or at the most three, *each* in turn, and let one interpret. 28 But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. 30 But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. 32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. 33 For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

34 Let your[a] women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but *they are* to be submissive, as the law also says. 35 And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.

36 Or did the word of God come *originally* from you? Or *was it* you only that it reached? 37 If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. 38 But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. [a]

39 Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. 40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

The Risen Christ, Faith's Reality

15 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that

14:21 [a]Isaiah 28:11, 12 **14:25** [a]NU-Text omits *And thus.* **14:34** [a]NU-Text omits *your.* **14:38** [a]NU-Text reads *if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.*

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, [4] and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, [5] and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. [6] After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. [7] After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. [8] Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

[9] For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. [10] But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which was* with me. [11] Therefore, whether *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

The Risen Christ, Our Hope

[12] Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? [13] But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. [14] And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty. [15] Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. [16] For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. [17] And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! [18] Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. [19] If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

The Last Enemy Destroyed

[20] But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. [21] For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. [22] For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. [23] But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming. [24] Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. [25] For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. [26] The last enemy *that* will be destroyed *is* death. [27] For *"He has put all things under His feet."*[a] But when He says "all things are put under *Him,"* *it is* evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. [28] Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

Effects of Denying the Resurrection

[29] Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead? [30] And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? [31] I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. [32] If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage *is it* to me? If *the* dead do not rise, *"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"*[a]

15:27 [a]Psalm 8:6 **15:32** [a]Isaiah 22:13

"*They* sold *their* property and possessions and shared."

"*They* worshiped together . . . and shared *their* meals."

No *I* or *my* or *you*. We are in this together. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God knows what you are bringing to the table. You can't fool Him. Ask the leaders of your local church how you can increase your service. Worship the Lord in spirit and truth. Remember that you are a part of a body and the body needs you.

EXPLORATION

Worship—Exodus 34:14; Luke 4:8; John 4:20–24; Philippians 3:3.

Life Lessons

1 Corinthians 12:1–31a

SITUATION

The Corinthians struggled with petty disagreements and offenses. Once again, Paul emphasized the need for unity in the church.

OBSERVATION

Though the church is a universal body, the gifts and skills of each Christian are unique. We can achieve unity by appreciating different abilities in others and empathizing with each other's joys and sorrows.

INSPIRATION

Our Maker gives assignments to people, "each according to his own ability" (Matthew 25:15). As He calls, He equips. Look back over your life. What have you consistently done well? What have you loved to do? Stand at the intersection of your

affections and successes and find your uniqueness.

You have . . . an uncommon call to an uncommon life. "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all" (1 Corinthians 12:7). So much for the excuse "I don't have anything to offer." Did the apostle Paul say, "The Spirit has given *some* of us . . ."? Or, "The Spirit has given *a few* of us . . ."? No. "The Spirit has given *each of us* a special way of serving others." Enough of this self-deprecating "I can't do anything."

And enough of its arrogant opposite: "I have to do everything." No, you don't! You're not God's solution to society, but a solution in society. Imitate Paul, who said, "Our goal is to stay within the boundaries of God's plan for us" (2 Corinthians 10:13 NLT). Clarify your contribution.

Don't worry about skills you don't have. Don't covet strengths others do have. Just extract your uniqueness. "Stir up the gift of God which is in you" (2 Timothy 1:6). And do so to *make a big deal out of God.*

"For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever" (Romans 11:36). The breath you just took? God gave that. The blood that just pulsed through your heart? Credit God. The light by which you read and the brain with which you process? He gave both.

Everything comes from Him . . . and exists for Him. We exist to exhibit God, to display His glory. We serve as canvases for His brush stroke, papers for His pen, soil for His seeds, glimpses of His image. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

33 Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."
34 Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak *this* to your shame.

A Glorious Body

35 But someone will say, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?" 36 Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. 37 And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other *grain.* 38 But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body.

39 All flesh *is* not the same flesh, but *there is* one *kind of* flesh[a] of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, *and* another of birds.

40 *There are* also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial *is* one, and the *glory* of the terrestrial *is* another. 41 *There is* one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for *one* star differs from *another* star in glory.

42 So also *is* the resurrection of the dead. *The body* is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 44 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. 45 And so it is written, *"The first man Adam became a living being."*[a] The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit.

46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. 47 The first man *was* of the earth, *made* of dust; the second Man *is* the Lord[a] from heaven. 48 As *was* the *man* of dust, so also *are* those *who are* made of dust; and as *is* the heavenly *Man,* so also *are* those *who are* heavenly. 49 And as we have borne the image of the *man* of dust, we shall also bear[a] the image of the heavenly *Man.*

Our Final Victory

50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: *"Death is swallowed up in victory."*[a]

55 *"O Death, where is your sting?*[a]
O Hades, where is your victory?"[b]

56 The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law. 57 But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

15:39 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *of flesh.* **15:45** [a]Genesis 2:7 **15:47** [a]NU-Text omits *the Lord.* **15:49** [a]M-Text reads *let us also bear.* **15:54** [a]Isaiah 25:8 **15:55** [a]Hosea 13:14 [b]NU-Text reads *O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?*

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always
abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in
vain in the Lord.

Collection for the Saints

16 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given
orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: 2 On the
first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing
up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. 3 And
when I come, whomever you approve by *your* letters I will send to
bear your gift to Jerusalem. 4 But if it is fitting that I go also, they will
go with me.

Personal Plans

5 Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am
passing through Macedonia). 6 And it may be that I will remain, or
even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my jour-
ney, wherever I go. 7 For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but
I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits.
8 But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. 9 For a great and effec-
tive door has opened to me, and *there are* many adversaries.
10 And if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear;
for he does the work of the Lord, as I also *do.* 11 Therefore let no one
despise him. But send him on his journey in peace, that he may come
to me; for I am waiting for him with the brethren.
12 Now concerning *our* brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to
come to you with the brethren, but he was quite unwilling to come
at this time; however, he will come when he has a convenient time.

Final Exhortations

13 Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. 14 Let all *that*
you *do* be done with love.
15 I urge you, brethren—you know the household of Stephanas,
that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and *that* they have devoted them-
selves to the ministry of the saints— 16 that you also submit to such,
and to everyone who works and labors with *us.*
17 I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and
Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied. 18 For they
refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.

Greetings and a Solemn Farewell

19 The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you
heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. 20 All the
brethren greet you.
Greet one another with a holy kiss.
21 The salutation with my own hand—Paul's.
22 If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be
accursed.[a] O Lord, come![b]
23 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. 24 My love *be* with
you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

16:22 [a]Greek *anathema* [b]Aramaic *Maranatha*

APPLICATION
You are unique. God created you to show His glory. Do you sometimes feel that you have nothing to offer? Ask God to show you what He has equipped you to do.

EXPLORATION
Spiritual Gifts—Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12:1–11; Ephesians 4:7–13.

Life Lessons

1 Corinthians 12:31b—13:13

SITUATION
The Corinthians compared spiritual gifts and ministries. They rated a person's value to the church by that person's gifts.

OBSERVATION
All spiritual gifts are equally valuable to the church. But love is even greater than all of them combined.

INSPIRATION
I saw a shard of [agape] love between an elderly man and woman who have been married for fifty years. The last decade has been marred by her dementia. The husband did the best he could to care for his wife at home, but she grew sicker; he, older. So he admitted her to full-time care.

One day he asked me to visit her, so I did. Her room was spotless, thanks to his diligence. She, horizontal on the bed, was bathed and dressed, though going nowhere.

"I arrive at 6:15 a.m.," he beamed. "You'd think I was on the payroll. I feed her, bathe her, and stay with her. I will until one of us dies." Agape love.

I know a father who, out of love for his son, spends each night in a recliner,

never sleeping more than a couple of consecutive hours. A car accident paralyzed the teenager. To maintain the boy's circulation, therapists massage his limbs every few hours. At night the father takes the place of the therapists. Though he's worked all day and will work again the next, he sets the alarm to wake himself every other hour until sunrise. . . .

What is this love that endures decades, passes on sleep, and resists death to give one kiss? Call it agape love, a love that bears a semblance of God's. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Read aloud the description of love in chapter 13, stopping after each word that describes love and thinking about what it means. How would such love look if you were to share it with others in your daily life?

EXPLORATION

Harmony of Believers—Leviticus 19:18; Psalm 133:1; Romans 15:5–7; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 2:1, 2; 1 Peter 3:8.

1 Corinthians 14:1–40

SITUATION

The Corinthian believers were so impressed by the glitz and wonder of spiritual gifts that they lost their perspective and forgot the purpose of these gifts.

OBSERVATION

Spiritual gifts glorify God and build up the body of Christ. Gifts should never be misused, envied, or cause division.

INSPIRATION

How often do thousands of people billboard a singular, powerful message? God fashioned us to do so for Him. "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all" (1 Corinthians 12:7). He distributes, not shirts, but strengths. He sends people, not to bleacher seats, but to life assignments: "Go to your place. Dispatch your abilities, and unfurl my goodness."

Most refuse. Few cooperate. We accept the present, but neglect its purpose. We accept the gift, thank you, but ignore the Giver and promote self. Why, some of us have been known to parade up and down the aisles, shouting, "Hey, look at me!"

Need an explanation for the anarchy in the world? You just read it. When you center-stage your gifts and I pump my image and no one gives a lick about honoring God, dare we expect anything short of chaos?

God endows us with gifts so we can make Him known. Period. God endues the Olympian with speed, the salesman with savvy, the surgeon with skill. Why? For gold medals, closed sales, or healed bodies? Only partially.

The big answer is to make a big to-do out of God. Brandish Him. Herald Him. "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God . . . *that in all things God may be glorified*" (1 Peter 4:10, 11 emphasis mine). (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What is your priority: becoming like Christ or getting a chance to use your gifts? Your gifts, talents, and abilities should build up other believers and bring unity in the church. If they're not quite doing that, check your attitudes.

EXPLORATION

Spiritual Gifts and Unity—Romans 12:3–8; 14:19; 15:1–6; 2 Corinthians 12:19, 20; Galatians 5:22–26; Ephesians 4:3–7, 11–16.

1 Corinthians 15:1–58

SITUATION

Because of their culture, the Corinthians did not believe in the resurrection. Instead, they thought only the soul would rise from the dead, leaving behind the body.

OBSERVATION

Because Jesus rose from the dead, we have hope, salvation, victory, and purpose. We can be confident in faith and diligent in work for Him.

INSPIRATION

A sudden breeze, surprisingly warm, whistles through the leaves scattering dust from the lifeless form. And with the breath of fresh air comes the difference. Winging on the warm wind is his image. Laughter is laid in the sculpted cheeks. A reservoir of tears is stored in the soul. A sprinkling of twinkle for the eyes. Poetry for the spirit. Logic. Loyalty. Like leaves on an autumn breeze, they float and land and are absorbed. His gifts become a part of him.

His Majesty smiles at his image. "It is good."

The eyes open.

Oneness. Creator and created walking on the river bank. Laughter. Purity. Innocent joy. Life unending.

Then the tree.

The struggle. The snake. The lie. The enticement. Heart torn, lured. Soul drawn to pleasure, to independence, to importance. Inner agony. Whose will?

The choice. Death of innocence. Entrance of death. The fall.

Tearstains mingling with fruit-stains. . . .

[Then,] The Quest.

"Abram, you will father a nation! And Abram—tell the people I love them."

"Moses, you will deliver My people! And Moses—tell the people I love them."

"Joshua, you will lead the chosen ones! And Joshua—tell the people I love them."

"David, you will reign over the people! And David—tell the people I love them."

"Jeremiah, you will bear tidings of bondage! But Jeremiah, remind My children, remind My children that I love them." . . .

. . . God watching, never turning, ever loving, ever yearning for the Garden again. . . .

[Finally,] Empty throne. Spirit descending. Hushed angels.

A girl . . . a womb . . . an egg.

The same Divine Artist again forms a body. This time his own. Fleshly divinity. Skin layered on spirit. Omnipotence with hair. Toenails. Knuckles. Molars. Kneecaps. Once again he walks with man. Yet the Garden is now thorny. Thorns that cut, thorns that poison, thorns that remain lodged, leaving bitter wounds. Disharmony. Sickness. Betrayal. Fear. Guilt. . . .

And once again, a tree.

Once again the struggle. The snake. The enticement. Heart torn, lured. Once again the question, "Whose will?"

Then the choice. Tearstains mingle with bloodstains. Relationship restored. Bridge erected.

Once again He smiles. "It is good."

"For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:21, 22). (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Be confident today in your faith because of what Jesus has done. He broke the power of death so that you might have eternal life with Him.

EXPLORATION

Confidence—John 6:40; 11:25; Romans 1:16; Galatians 5:1; 6:9; Philippians 1:6; 2 Timothy 1:8–10; Hebrews 4:16; 11:1; 1 John 2:28.

Life LESSONS

1 Corinthians 16:1–24

SITUATION

Paul arranged for a collection to be taken among churches he had founded for poor believers in Jerusalem. By telling the Corinthians of this need, Paul gave them opportunity to give willingly.

OBSERVATION

Paul encouraged the Corinthians to give joyfully—through finances, hospitality, and helping Believers who diligently work for the Lord. Giving builds up the body of Christ and refreshes us.

INSPIRATION

Denalyn called as I was driving home the other day.

"Can you stop at the grocery store and pick up some bread?"

"Of course."

"Do I need to tell you where to find it?"

"Are you kidding? I was born with a bread-aisle tracking system."

"Just stay focused, Max."

She was nervous. Rightly so. I am the *Exxon Valdez* of grocery shopping. My mom once sent me to buy butter and milk; I bought buttermilk. I mistook a tube of hair cream for toothpaste. I thought the express aisle was a place to express your opinion. I am a charter member of the Clueless Husband Shopping Squad. I can relate to the fellow who came home from the grocery store with one carton of eggs, two sacks of flour, three boxes of cake mix, four sacks of sugar, and five cans of cake frosting. His wife looked at the sacks of groceries and lamented, "I never should have numbered the list."

So, knowing that Denalyn was counting on me, I parked the car at the market and entered the door. En route to the bread aisle, I spotted my favorite cereal, so I picked up a box, which made me wonder if we needed milk. I found a gallon in the dairy section. The cold milk stirred images of one of God's great gifts to humanity: Oreo cookies. The heavenly banquet will consist of tables and tables of Oreo cookies and milk. We will spend eternity dipping and slurping our way through . . . Okay, enough of that.

I grabbed a pack of cookies, which happened to occupy the same half of the store as barbecue potato chips. What a wonderful world this is—cookies and barbecue chips under the same roof! On the way to the checkout counter, I spotted some ice cream. Within a few minutes I'd filled the basket with every essential item for a happy and fulfilled life. I checked out and drove home.

Denalyn looked at my purchases, then at me. Can you guess her question? All together now: "Where's the bread?"

I went back to the grocery store.

I forgot the big item. The one thing I went to get. The one essential product. I forgot the bread.

Might we make the same mistake in a more critical arena? In an effort to do good, we can get distracted. We feed people. We encourage, heal, help, and serve. We address racial issues and poverty. Yet there is one duty we must fulfill. We can't forget the bread. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How do you give to help other believers? Through time, money, hospitality, or physical help? Surprise someone this week with a unique offer of help.

EXPLORATION

Joy in Giving—Deuteronomy 16:17; Luke 12:33; Acts 11:27–30; 2 Corinthians 8:1–15; 9:1–7; Galatians 6:10; 1 Peter 4:9.

THE BOOK OF

2 CORINTHIANS

INTRODUCTION

Once there was a school in a village. Atop the school was a bell, which was rung every morning to call the children to class. The boys and girls arrived reluctantly and precisely at the hour. Never a minute early. The bell would ring again in the afternoon, liberating the children to their play. The children bolted out the door at the ringing of the bell. Never lingering a minute late. This is how it was with each child.

Except one.

There was a girl who came early. She helped the teacher prepare the room for the day. The same girl would stay late—cleaning the board and dusting the erasers. During class she was attentive. She sat close to the teacher, absorbing the lessons.

One day when the other children were unruly and inattentive, the teacher used the girl as an example. "Why can't you be like her? She listens. She works. She comes early. She stays late."

"It isn't fair to ask us to be like her," a boy blurted out from the rear of the room.

"Why?" asked the teacher.

The boy was uncomfortable, wishing he hadn't spoken. "She has an advantage," he shrugged.

"And what's that?"

"She is an orphan," he almost whispered as he sat down.

The boy was right. The girl had an advantage. An advantage of knowing that school, as tedious as it was, was better than the orphanage. Since she knew that, she appreciated what the others took for granted.

We, too, were orphans.

Alone.

No name. No future. No hope.

Were it not for our adoption as his children, we would have no place to belong. We sometimes forget that.

The Corinthians forgot.

They had grown puffy in their achievements and divisive in their fellowship. They argued

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Paul

Date Written: c. A.D. 56

Key Themes:

- Faith in Christ brings new life.
- God's people should give of their income to support God's work in the world.
- God can work through us no matter who we are.

Key Verse:

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Contents:

I. Paul's Work and Ministry 1:1—7:16

II. Christian Giving and Tithing 8:1—9:15

III. Paul's Defense of His Authority 10:1—13:14

over the correct leader, the greater gifts. They rebelled against Paul's leadership. They were indifferent to sin and insensitive in worship.

Paul defends his ministry and admonishes the Christians to remember to whom they belong. "Examine yourselves," Paul says (13:5). His words are clear. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (5:17).

Good reminder.

Not just for them but for us as well. For if we forget, we, too, will be like the students who did just enough to pass the grade and never enough to show their thanks.

Greeting

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy *our* brother,

To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia:

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Comfort in Suffering

3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. 6 Now if we are afflicted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation. 7 And our hope for you *is* steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also *you will partake* of the consolation.

Delivered from Suffering

8 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, 10 who delivered us from so great a death, and does[a] deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver *us,* 11 you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our[a] behalf for the gift *granted* to us through many.

1:10 [a]NU-Text reads *shall.* **1:11** [a]M-Text reads *your behalf.*

Life LESSONS

2 Corinthians 1:1—2:4

SITUATION
Second Corinthians was written less than a year after 1 Corinthians. Paul wrote because he was delayed in his visit to Corinth. Paul began explaining his actions among the Corinthians by reviewing his relationship with them.

OBSERVATION
God's comfort and deliverance are certainties, even in the middle of difficult trials. We can confidently rely upon Him as we make our plans.

INSPIRATION
Grief fogs in the heart like a Maine-coast morning. The mourner hears the waves but sees no water. Detects voices but no faces. . . .

Martha sat in a damp world, cloudy, tearful. And Jesus sat in it with her. "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (John 11:25). Hear those words in a Superman tone, if you like. Clark Kent descending from nowhere, ripping shirt and

popping buttons to reveal the *S* beneath. "I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE!!!" Do you see a Savior with Terminator tenderness bypassing the tears of Martha and Mary and, in doing so, telling them and all grievers to buck up and trust?

I don't. I don't because of what Jesus does next. He weeps. He sits on the pew between Mary and Martha, puts an arm around each, and sobs. Among the three, a tsunami of sorrow is stirred; a monsoon of tears is released. Tears that reduce to streaks the watercolor conceptions of a cavalier Christ. Jesus weeps.

He weeps with them.
He weeps for them.
He weeps with you.
He weeps for you.

He weeps so we will know. Mourning is not disbelieving. Flooded eyes don't represent a faithless heart. A person can enter a cemetery certain of life after death and still have a Twin Tower crater in the heart. Christ did. He wept, and He knew He was ten minutes from seeing a living Lazarus!

And His tears give you permission to shed your own. Grief does not mean you don't trust; it simply means you can't stand the thought of another day without the Jacob or Lazarus of your life. If Jesus gave the love, He understands the tears. So grieve, but don't grieve like those who don't know the rest of this story. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What season of suffering have you known? What helped you move through it? Use the experience to help others whose hearts grieve. Write or call a friend today with encouragement.

Paul's Sincerity

12 For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we
conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity,
not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abun-
dantly toward you. 13 For we are not writing any other things to you
than what you read or understand. Now I trust you will understand,
even to the end 14 (as also you have understood us in part), that we are
your boast as you also *are* ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Sparing the Church

15 And in this confidence I intended to come to you before, that you
might have a second benefit— 16 to pass by way of you to Macedonia,
to come again from Macedonia to you, and be helped by you on my
way to Judea. 17 Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly?
Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me
there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No? 18 But *as* God *is* faithful, our word
to you was not Yes and No. 19 For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who
was preached among you by us—by me, Silvanus, and Timothy—was
not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes. 20 For all the promises of God in
Him *are* Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. 21 Now
He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us *is* God,
22 who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a
guarantee.

23 Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you
I came no more to Corinth. 24 Not that we have dominion over your
faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.
2 But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again
to you in sorrow. 2 For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who
makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me?

Forgive the Offender

3 And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have
sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence
in you all that my joy is *the joy* of you all. 4 For out of much affliction
and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you
should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so
abundantly for you.

5 But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of
you to some extent—not to be too severe. 6 This punishment which
was inflicted by the majority *is* sufficient for such a man, 7 so that, on
the contrary, you *ought* rather to forgive and comfort *him,* lest per-
haps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. 8 Therefore
I urge you to reaffirm *your* love to him. 9 For to this end I also wrote,
that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.
10 Now whom you forgive anything, I also *forgive.* For if indeed I have
forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one[a] for your sakes in the pres-
ence of Christ, 11 lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not
ignorant of his devices.

2:10 [a]NU-Text reads *For indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it.*

Triumph in Christ

12 Furthermore, when I came to Troas to *preach* Christ's gospel,
and a door was opened to me by the Lord, 13 I had no rest in my spirit,
because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them,
I departed for Macedonia.

14 Now thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ,
and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.
15 For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are
being saved and among those who are perishing. 16 To the one *we are*
the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life
leading to life. And who *is* sufficient for these things? 17 For we are not,
as so many,[a] peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from
God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.

Christ's Epistle

3 Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as
some *others,* epistles of commendation to you or *letters* of com-
mendation from you? 2 You are our epistle written in our hearts,
known and read by all men; 3 clearly you are an epistle of Christ, min-
istered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God,
not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, *that is,* of the heart.

The Spirit, Not the Letter

4 And we have such trust through Christ toward God. 5 Not that
we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from our-
selves, but our sufficiency *is* from God, 6 who also made us sufficient
as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit;[a]
for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Glory of the New Covenant

7 But if the ministry of death, written *and* engraved on stones, was
glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the
face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which *glory*
was passing away, 8 how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more
glorious? 9 For if the ministry of condemnation *had* glory, the ministry
of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. 10 For even what was
made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that
excels. 11 For if what is passing away *was* glorious, what remains *is*
much more glorious.

12 Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of
speech— 13 unlike Moses, *who* put a veil over his face so that the chil-
dren of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing
away. 14 But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil
remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the *veil*
is taken away in Christ. 15 But even to this day, when Moses is read, a
veil lies on their heart. 16 Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the
veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of
the Lord *is,* there *is* liberty. 18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding
as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the
same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

2:17 [a]M-Text reads *the rest.* **3:6** [a]Or *spirit*

EXPLORATION
God's Comfort—Psalm 23:1–4; 119:50, 52; John 14:16, 17; 2 Corinthians 1:3–5; Philippians 2:1, 2.

Life LESSONS

2 Corinthians 2:5–17

SITUATION
In his previous letter, Paul urged the Corinthians to put a particular unrepentant sinner out of the church (1 Corinthians 5). Perhaps this man repented and was the individual mentioned in this letter.

OBSERVATION
God eagerly forgives a repentant sinner. God puts forgiven sins out of His view.

INSPIRATION
You long for one true friend? You have one. And because you do, you have a choice. You can focus . . . ponder the malice of your monster or the kindness of your Christ.

Beverly [not her real name] chooses to maximize Christ. Isn't easy. How can you shift your focus away from the man who raped you? He entered Beverly's home under the guise of official business. She had every reason to trust him: personal acquaintance and professional associate. He worked for the state and requested an audience with Beverly. But he took more than her time.

He denied and successfully covered up the deed. As he continues to move up the political ladder, Beverly spots him on the evening news, encounters him at parties. While he feigns innocence, she churns within.

But not like she used to. Two years after the rape

she met . . . a friend [who] told her about Christ—His protection, His provision, and His invitation. She accepted it. Memories of the rape still dog her, but they don't control her. She isn't left alone . . . anymore. She seeks Christ rather than revenge; she measures choices against His mercy, not her violator's cruelty. Beverly ponders and praises the living presence of Jesus. Doing so heals her soul.

Major in your evil emperor, if you choose. Paint horns on his picture. Throw darts at her portrait. Make and memorize a list of everything the Spam-brain took: your childhood, career, marriage, health. . . . Wallow in the sludge of pain. You'll feel better, won't you?

Or will you? (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Are you holding on to a grudge? Pray, then go and make peace.

EXPLORATION
Victory—John 15:5; 1 Corinthians 1:7, 8; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 3:16, 17.

Life LESSONS

2 Corinthians 3:1—4:15

SITUATION
Smooth-talking, slick-operating teachers impressed the Corinthians. Paul contrasted these teachers with humble and honest ones who gave credit to God.

OBSERVATION
People who minister in Christ's name must be honest and have a good reputation among believers

The Light of Christ's Gospel

4 Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy,
we do not lose heart. [2]But we have renounced the hidden things
of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God
deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves
to every man's conscience in the sight of God. [3]But even if our gospel
is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, [4]whose minds the
god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the
gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine
on them. [5]For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord,
and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. [6]For it is the God
who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in
our hearts to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the
face of Jesus Christ.

Cast Down but Unconquered

[7]But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence
of the power may be of God and not of us. [8]*We are* hard-pressed on
every side, yet not crushed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; [9]per-
secuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— [10]always
carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life
of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. [11]For we who live are
always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may
be manifested in our mortal flesh. [12]So then death is working in us,
but life in you.

[13]And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is
written, *"I believed and therefore I spoke,"*[a] we also believe and there-
fore speak, [14]knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also
raise us up with Jesus, and will present *us* with you. [15]For all things *are*
for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause
thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

Seeing the Invisible

[16]Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man
is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day. [17]For
our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far
more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, [18]while we do not look at
the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For
the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not
seen *are* eternal.

Assurance of the Resurrection

5 For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we
have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal
in the heavens. [2]For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed
with our habitation which is from heaven, [3]if indeed, having been
clothed, we shall not be found naked. [4]For we who are in *this* tent
groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but
further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. [5]Now He

4:13 [a]Psalm 116:10

who has prepared us for this very thing *is* God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

6 So *we are* always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. 7 For we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

Christ Through The Bible

Christ Became Our Sin

Why is the Cross the symbol of our faith? To find the answer look no farther than the Cross itself. Its design couldn't be simpler. One beam horizontal—the other vertical. One reaches out—like God's love. The other reaches up—as does God's holiness. One represents the width of His love; the other reflects the height of His holiness. The Cross is the intersection. The Cross is where God forgave His children without lowering His standards.

How could He do this? In a sentence: God put our sin on His Son and punished it there.

"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Envision the moment. God on His throne. You on the earth. And between you and God, suspended between you and heaven, is Christ on His Cross. Your sins have been placed on Jesus. God, who punishes sin, releases His rightful wrath on your mistakes. Jesus receives the blow. Since Christ is between you and God, you don't. The sin is punished, but you are safe—safe in the shadow of the Cross.

This is what God did, but why, why would He do it? Moral duty? Heavenly obligation? Paternal requirement? No. God is required to do nothing.

Besides, consider what He did. He gave His Son. His only Son. Would you do that? Would you offer the life of your child for someone else? I wouldn't. There are those for whom I would give my life. But ask me to make a list of those for whom I would kill my daughter? The sheet will be blank. I don't need a pencil. The list has no names.

But God's list contains the name of every person who ever lived. For this is the scope of His love. And this is the reason for the Cross. He loves the world. . . . (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1667.

and nonbelievers. Paul highlighted these qualities that he found in his young follower, Timothy.

INSPIRATION

The reward of Christianity is Christ.

Do you journey to the Grand Canyon for the souvenir T-shirt or the snow globe with the snowflakes that fall when you shake it? No. The reward of the Grand Canyon is the Grand Canyon. The wide-eyed realization that you are part of something ancient, splendid, powerful, and greater than you.

The cache of Christianity is Christ. Not money in the bank or a car in the garage or a healthy body or a better self-image. Secondary and tertiary fruits perhaps. But the Fort Knox of faith is Christ. Fellowship with Him. Walking with him. Pondering Him. Exploring him. The heart-stopping realization that in Him you are part of something ancient, endless, unstoppable, and unfathomable. And that He, who can dig the Grand Canyon with His pinkie, thinks you're worth His death on Roman timber. Christ is the reward of Christianity. Why else would Paul make Him his supreme desire? "I want to know Christ" (Philippians 3:10 NCV).

Do you desire the same? My idea is simple. Let's look at some places He went and some people He touched. Join me on a quest for His "God-manness." You may be amazed.

More important, you may be changed. "We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18). (From

Next Door Savior by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
The qualities Paul shared about Timothy are good goals for every Christian. How do you measure up? What would you say is your reputation among your friends and others? Focus on one area and pray for specific ways you can improve.

EXPLORATION
Leadership—Numbers 8:14–18; John 13:13–17; 1 Timothy 3:1—4:16; 2 Timothy 2:1–7, 15.

Life Lessons

2 Corinthians 4:16—5:15

SITUATION
Paul stressed that the Corinthians could have confidence in the bodily resurrection and afterlife. This contrasted with contemporary ideas that some Corinthians held—that bodily resurrection would not happen and that the soul was separate from the body.

OBSERVATION
Jesus' followers know that God reserves bodily resurrection and a heavenly dwelling place for them.

INSPIRATION
It's not easy for us to see a City we've never seen, either, especially when the road is bumpy . . . the hour is late . . . and companions are wanting to cancel the trip and take up residence in a motel. It's not easy to fix our eyes on what is unseen. But it is necessary. . . .

For some of you, the journey has been long. Very long and stormy. In no way do I wish to minimize the

The Judgment Seat of Christ

9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be
well pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment
seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body,
according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 11 Knowing,
therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well
known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.

Be Reconciled to God

12 For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you
opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have *an answer* for
those who boast in appearance and not in heart. 13 For if we are beside
ourselves, *it is* for God; or if we are of sound mind, *it is* for you. 14 For the
love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for
all, then all died; 15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no
longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.
16 Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh.
Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now
we know *Him thus* no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is*
a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have
become new. 18 Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to
Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of recon-
ciliation, 19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to
Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed
to us the word of reconciliation.
20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were
pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled
to God. 21 For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we
might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Marks of the Ministry

6 We then, *as* workers together *with Him* also plead with *you* not to
receive the grace of God in vain. 2 For He says:

> *"In an acceptable time I have heard you,*
> *And in the day of salvation I have helped you."*[a]

Behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation.
3 We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be
blamed. 4 But in all *things* we commend ourselves as ministers of
God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, 5 in
stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in
fastings; 6 by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by
the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, 7 by the word of truth, by the power of
God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,
8 by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers,
and *yet* true; 9 as unknown, and *yet* well known; as dying, and behold
we live; as chastened, and *yet* not killed; 10 as sorrowful, yet always
rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and *yet*
possessing all things.

6:2 [a] Isaiah 49:8

Be Holy

11 O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide
open. 12 You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your
own affections. 13 Now in return for the same (I speak as to children),
you also be open.

14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what
fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what commu-
nion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with
Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what
agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you[a] are the temple
of the living God. As God has said:

"I will dwell in them
And walk among them.
I will be their God,
And they shall be My people."[b]

17 Therefore

"Come out from among them
And be separate, says the Lord.
Do not touch what is unclean,
And I will receive you."[a]
18 *"I will be a Father to you,*
And you shall be My sons and daughters,
Says the Lord Almighty."[a]

7 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse our-
selves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness
in the fear of God.

The Corinthians' Repentance

2 Open *your hearts* to us. We have wronged no one, we have cor-
rupted no one, we have cheated no one. 3 I do not say *this* to con-
demn; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together
and to live together. 4 Great *is* my boldness of speech toward you, great
is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort. I am exceed-
ingly joyful in all our tribulation.

5 For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest,
but we were troubled on every side. Outside *were* conflicts, inside
were fears. 6 Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, com-
forted us by the coming of Titus, 7 and not only by his coming, but also
by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told
us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I
rejoiced even more.

8 For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it;
though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you
sorry, though only for a while. 9 Now I rejoice, not that you were made
sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry

6:16 [a]NU-Text reads *we.* [b]Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 32:38; Ezekiel 37:27 **6:17** [a]Isaiah 52:11; Ezekiel 20:34, 41 **6:18** [a]2 Samuel 7:14

difficulties that you have had to face along the way. . . .

And you are tired.

It's hard for you to see the City in the midst of the storms. The desire to pull over to the side of the road and get out entices you. You want to go on, but some days the road seems so long.

Let me encourage you . . . *It's worth it.* (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
You may be tempted to throw in the towel and walk away when life gets hard. When this impulse hits you: stop, relax, pray, and take that next step. Discover new faith and hope.

EXPLORATION
Hope of Heaven—
Job 19:25–27; Psalm 73:24–26; John 15:1–4; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; Revelation 21:27; 22:14.

Life LESSONS

2 Corinthians 5:16—7:16

SITUATION
Paul warned Christians that intimate relationships with unbelievers are dangerous. He was glad that the Corinthians would apply his advice.

OBSERVATION
Christians should not marry unbelievers. Spiritually incompatible relationships weaken faith.

INSPIRATION
The most notorious road in the world is the Via Dolorosa, "the Way of Sorrows." According to tradition, it is the route Jesus took from Pilate's hall to Calvary. The path is marked

by stations frequently used by Christians for their devotions. One station marks the passing of Pilate's verdict. Another, the appearance of Simon to carry the Cross. Three stations commemorate the stumbles of Christ, another the words of Christ. There are fourteen stations in all, each one a reminder of the events of Christ's final journey.

Is the route accurate? Probably not. When Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70 and again in A.D. 135, the streets of the city were destroyed. As a result, no one knows the exact route Christ followed that Friday.

But we do know where the path actually began.

The path began, not in the court of Pilate, but in the halls of heaven. Jesus began His journey when He left His home in search of us. Armed with nothing more than a passion to win your heart, He came looking. His desire was singular—to bring God's children home. The Bible has a word for this quest: *reconciliation.*

"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). . . . Reconciliation restitches the unraveled, reverses the rebellion, rekindles the cold passion.

Reconciliation touches the shoulder of the wayward and woos Him homeward.

The path to the Cross tells us exactly how far God will go to call us back. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you in a relationship that shifts your loyalty away from God? Do you ever compromise God's desire in order to keep the relationship? What does God expect from you?

in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. 10 For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. 11 For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, *what* clearing *of yourselves, what* indignation, *what* fear, *what* vehement desire, *what* zeal, *what* vindication! In all *things* you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter. 12 Therefore, although I wrote to you, *I did* not *do it* for the sake of him who had done the wrong, nor for the sake of him who suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you.

The Joy of Titus

13 Therefore we have been comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. 14 For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I am not ashamed. But as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so our boasting to Titus was found true. 15 And his affections are greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him. 16 Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything.

Excel in Giving

8 Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: 2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 3 For I bear witness that according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability, *they were* freely willing, 4 imploring us with much urgency that we would receive[a] the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. 5 And not *only* as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and *then* to us by the will of God. 6 So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. 7 But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—*see* that you abound in this grace also.

Christ Our Pattern

8 I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

10 And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; 11 but now you also must complete the doing *of it;* that as *there was* a readiness to desire *it,* so *there* also *may be* a completion out of what *you* have. 12 For if there is first a willing mind, *it is* accepted according to what one has, *and* not according to what he does not have.

13 For *I do* not *mean* that others should be eased and you burdened; 14 but by an equality, *that* now at this time your abundance *may supply* their lack, that their abundance also may *supply* your lack—that

8:4 [a] NU-Text and M-Text omit *that we would receive,* thus changing text to *urgency for the favor and fellowship. . . .*

there may be equality. 15 As it is written, *"He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack."*[a]

Collection for the Judean Saints

16 But thanks *be* to God who puts[a] the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. 17 For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord. 18 And we have sent with him the brother whose praise *is* in the gospel throughout all the churches, 19 and not only *that,* but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and *to show* your ready mind, 20 avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us— 21 providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.

22 And we have sent with them our brother whom we have often proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, because of the great confidence which *we have* in you. 23 If *anyone inquires* about Titus, *he is* my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren *are inquired about, they are* messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. 24 Therefore show to them, and[a] before the churches, the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf.

Administering the Gift

9 Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; 2 for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority. 3 Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; 4 lest if *some* Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting.[a] 5 Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which *you had* previously promised, that it may be ready as *a matter of* generosity and not as a grudging obligation.

The Cheerful Giver

6 But this *I say:* He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 *So let* each one *give* as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all *things,* may have an abundance for every good work. 9 As it is written:

> *"He has dispersed abroad,*
> *He has given to the poor;*
> *His righteousness endures forever."*[a]

10 Now may[a] He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have *sown* and increase the

8:15 [a]Exodus 16:18 **8:16** [a]NU-Text reads *has put.* **8:24** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *and.* **9:4** [a]NU-Text reads *this confidence.* **9:9** [a]Psalm 112:9 **9:10** [a]NU-Text reads *Now He who supplies . . . will supply. . . .*

EXPLORATION
Spiritually Compatible Relationships—Hosea 1—3; 1 Corinthians 5:9–13; 7:12–16; Ephesians 4:2–6; 5:3–11; Colossians 3:11–17.

Life LESSONS

2 Corinthians 8:1—10:6

SITUATION
Paul expressed confidence in the Corinthian church. He asked them to complete their collection for the Jerusalem church, which they had promised a year before.

OBSERVATION
Paul gave the Corinthians two examples of generous giving: the Macedonian churches and Christ. We should give according to our abilities, voluntarily and generously. God gives to us so that we can share with others. Paul encourages the believers that the power they have in God is stronger than Satan's power.

INSPIRATION
Most of us struggle with prayer. We forget to pray, and when we remember, we hurry through prayers with hollow words. Our minds drift; our thoughts scatter like a covey of quail. Why is this? Prayer requires minimal effort. No location is prescribed. No particular clothing is required. No title or office is stipulated. Yet you'd think we were wrestling a greased pig.

Speaking of pigs, Satan seeks to interrupt our prayers. Our battle with prayer is not entirely our fault. The devil knows the stories; he witnessed the angel in Peter's cell and the revival in Jerusalem. He knows what happens when

we pray. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4).

Satan is not troubled when Max writes books or prepares sermons, but his knobby knees tremble when Max prays. Satan does not stutter or stumble when you walk through church doors or attend committee meetings. Demons aren't flustered when you read this book. But the walls of hell shake when one person with an honest heart and faithful confession says, "Oh, God, how great thou art."

Satan keeps you and me from prayer. He tries to position himself between us and God. But he scampers like a spooked dog when we move forward. So let's do. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you know where your ultimate power lies? The power to give, the power to pray, the power to trust—all of these come from God.

EXPLORATION

Giving—Deuteronomy 15:10, 11; Isaiah 1:13; Malachi 3:8; Matthew 10:8; Luke 6:38; Acts 20:35; Romans 12:8.

Life LESSONS

2 Corinthians 10:7—11:15

SITUATION

Paul learned that certain rival preachers had succeeded in their attempt to discredit him before a few Corinthian Christians. Paul responded to the charges and accusations raised by them; he warned that he would exercise strict

fruits of your righteousness, 11 while *you are* enriched in everything
for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. 12 For
the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the
saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God,
13 while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the
obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for *your* lib-
eral sharing with them and all *men,* 14 and by their prayer for you, who
long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you. 15 Thanks
be to God for His indescribable gift!

The Spiritual War

10 Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and
gentleness of Christ—who in presence *am* lowly among you,
but being absent am bold toward you. 2 But I beg *you* that when I am
present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to
be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the
flesh. 3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to
the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty
in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and
every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bring-
ing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, 6 and being
ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

Reality of Paul's Authority

7 Do you look at things according to the outward appearance? If
anyone is convinced in himself that he is Christ's, let him again con-
sider this in himself, that just as he *is* Christ's, even so we *are* Christ's.[a]
8 For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority,
which the Lord gave us[a] for edification and not for your destruction, I
shall not be ashamed— 9 lest I seem to terrify you by letters. 10 "For *his*
letters," they say, "*are* weighty and powerful, but *his* bodily presence
is weak, and *his* speech contemptible." 11 Let such a person consider
this, that what we are in word by letters when we are absent, such *we*
will also *be* in deed when we are present.

Limits of Paul's Authority

12 For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those
who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by them-
selves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.
13 We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits
of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially
includes you. 14 For we are not overextending ourselves (as though *our*
authority did not extend to you), for it was to you that we came with
the gospel of Christ; 15 not boasting of things beyond measure, *that is,*
in other men's labors, but having hope, *that* as your faith is increased,
we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, 16 to preach the
gospel in the *regions* beyond you, *and* not to boast in another man's
sphere of accomplishment.

17 But *"he who glories, let him glory in the Lord."*[a] 18 For not he who
commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.

10:7 [a]NU-Text reads *even as we are.* **10:8** [a]NU-Text omits *us.* **10:17** [a]Jeremiah 9:24

Concern for Their Faithfulness

11 Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. [2]For I am jealous for you with godly discipline, if that became necessary.

New Life In Christ

Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. —2 Corinthians 10:5

Your Thoughts Run Your Life

To listen to our vocabulary you'd think we are the victims of our thoughts. "Don't talk to me," we say. "I'm in a bad mood." As if a mood were a place to which we were assigned ("I can't call you. I'm in Bosnia.") rather than an emotion we permit.

Or we say, "Don't mess with her. She has a bad disposition." Is a disposition something we "have"? Like a cold or the flu? Are we the victims of the emotional bacteria of the season? Or do we have a choice?

Paul says we do: "We capture every thought and make it give up and obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5 NCV).

Do you hear some battlefield jargon in that passage—"capture every thought," "make it give up" and "obey Christ"? You get the impression that we are the soldiers and the thoughts are the enemies. Our assignment is to protect the boat and refuse entrance to trashy thoughts. The minute they appear on the dock we go into action. "This heart belongs to God," we declare, "and you aren't getting on board until you change your allegiance."

Selfishness, step back! Envy, get lost! Find another boat, Anger! You aren't allowed on this ship. Capturing thoughts is serious business.

It was for Jesus. Remember the thoughts that came His way courtesy of the mouth of Peter? Jesus had just prophesied His death, burial, and resurrection, but Peter couldn't bear the thought of it. "Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. . . . But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men'" (Matthew 16:22, 23).

See the decisiveness of Jesus? A trashy thought comes His way. He is tempted to entertain it. A cross-less life would be nice. But what does He do? He stands at the gangplank of the dock and says, "Get away from Me." As if to say, "You are not allowed to enter My mind."

What if you did that? What if you took every thought captive? What if you refused to let any trash enter your mind? What if you took the counsel of Solomon: "Be careful what you think, because your thoughts run your life" (Proverbs 4:23 NCV). (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

Question: If you were to take every thought captive to Christ, how would that change your life?

For more on "New Life in Christ," see page 1720.

OBSERVATION
God gives spiritual leaders to provide order and direction. Be sure to uphold and respect these leaders.

INSPIRATION
They aren't exactly what you'd call a list of "Who's Who in Purity and Sainthood." In fact, some of their antics and attitudes would make you think of the Saturday night crowd at the county jail. What few halos there are among this befuddled bunch could probably use a bit of straightening and polish. Yet, strange as it may seem, it is this very humanness that makes these people refreshing. They are so refreshing that should you ever need a reminder of God's tolerance, you'd find it in these people. If you ever wonder how in the world God could use you to change the world, look at these people. . . .

What people? The people God used to change history. A ragbag of ne'er-do-wells and has-beens who found hope, not in their performance, but in God's proverbially open arms.

What can you say about a fellow whose lust got so lusty that he got a woman pregnant, tried to blame it on her husband, had her husband killed, and then went on living like nothing ever happened? Well, you could say he was a man after God's own heart. David's track record left little to be desired, but his repentant spirit was unquestionable.

Then comes Jonah. God's ambassador to Nineveh. Jonah, however, had other ideas. He had no desire to go to that heathen city. So he hopped on another boat while God wasn't looking (or at least that's what Jonah thought). God put him in a whale's belly

jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ. 3 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity[a] that is in Christ. 4 For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or *if* you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!

Paul and False Apostles

5 For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles. 6 Even though *I am* untrained in speech, yet *I am* not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested[a] among you in all things.

7 Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? 8 I robbed other churches, taking wages *from them* to minister to you. 9 And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep *myself.* 10 As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia. 11 Why? Because I do not love you? God knows!

12 But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. 13 For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. 15 Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

Reluctant Boasting

16 I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little. 17 What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. 18 Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast. 19 For you put up with fools gladly, since you *yourselves* are wise! 20 For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours *you,* if one takes *from you,* if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face. 21 To *our* shame I say that we were too weak for that! But in whatever anyone is bold—I speak foolishly—I am bold also.

Suffering for Christ

22 Are they Hebrews? So *am* I. Are they Israelites? So *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So *am* I. 23 Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I *am* more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. 24 From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 *in* journeys often, *in* perils of

11:3 [a]NU-Text adds *and purity.* **11:6** [a]NU-Text omits *been.*

waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— 28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn *with indignation*?

30 If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. 31 The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. 32 In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; 33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

The Vision of Paradise

12 It is doubtless[a] not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: 2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. 3 And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— 4 how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. 5 Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities. 6 For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me *to be* or hears from me.

The Thorn in the Flesh

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Signs of an Apostle

11 I have become a fool in boasting;[a] you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing. 12 Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds. 13 For what is it in which you were inferior to other churches, except that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong!

12:1 [a]NU-Text reads *necessary, though not profitable, to boast.* **12:11** [a]NU-Text omits *in boasting.*

to bring him back to his senses. But even the whale couldn't stomach this missionary for too long. A good burp and Jonah went flying over the surf and landed big-eyed and repentant on the beach. (Which just goes to show that you can't keep a good man down.)

And on and on the stories go: Elijah, the prophet who pouted; Solomon, the king who knew too much; Jacob, the wheeler-dealer; Gomer, the prostitute; Sarah, the woman who giggled at God. One story after another of God using man's best and overcoming man's worst.

Even the genealogy of Jesus is salted with a dubious character or two—Tamar the adulteress, Rahab the harlot, and Bathsheba . . .

The reassuring lesson is clear. God used (and uses!) people to change the world. People! Not saints or superhumans or geniuses, but people. Crooks, creeps, lovers, and liars—He uses them all. And what they may lack in perfection, God makes up for in love. (From *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Participate in conversations that encourage and build up leaders rather than criticize or demean them. If you have a legitimate complaint, go directly to the leader before you complain to others.

EXPLORATION

Authority—Genesis 1:26, 27; Romans 13:1; 2 Corinthians 13:10.

Life LESSONS

2 Corinthians 11:16—12:21

SITUATION
Paul promised to come to the Corinthians with the love of a father, but he feared that he might have to deal with troublemakers harshly.

OBSERVATION
God does not spare us trials, but He helps us overcome them. God works in our weakness, because when we are weak His strength accomplishes the task.

INSPIRATION
Remember the story of the eagle who was raised by chickens? From the floor of the barnyard she spots an eagle in the clouds, and her heart stirs. "I can do that!" she whispers. The other chickens laugh, but she knows better. She was born different. Born with a belief.

You were too. Your world extends beyond the barnyard of time. A foreverness woos you. Your heavenly life Everests the pebbles of your earthly life. If grains of sand measured the two, how would they stack up? Heaven would be every grain of sand on every beach on earth, plus more. Earthly life, by contrast, would be one hundredth of one grain of sand. . . .

"Our light affliction, which is *but for a moment*, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17, emphasis mine).

What if we had a glimpse of the apostle as he wrote those words? By this time he had been "near death many times. Five times," he writes, "the Jews have

Love for the Church

14 Now *for* the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will
not be burdensome to you; for I do not seek yours, but you. For the
children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the
children. 15 And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls;
though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved.
16 But be that *as it may,* I did not burden you. Nevertheless, being
crafty, I caught you by cunning! 17 Did I take advantage of you by any
of those whom I sent to you? 18 I urged Titus, and sent our brother with
him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same
spirit? Did *we* not *walk* in the same steps?
19 Again, do you think[a] that we excuse ourselves to you? We speak
before God in Christ. But *we do* all things, beloved, for your edifica-
tion. 20 For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish,
and *that* I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest *there be*
contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, back-
bitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; 21 lest, when I come again,
my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who
have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, forni-
cation, and lewdness which they have practiced.

Coming with Authority

13 This *will be* the third *time* I am coming to you. *"By the mouth
of two or three witnesses every word shall be established."*[a] 2 I
have told you before, and foretell as if I were present the second time,
and now being absent I write[a] to those who have sinned before, and
to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare— 3 since you seek
a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but
mighty in you. 4 For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives
by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live
with Him by the power of God toward you.
5 Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. Test your-
selves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—
unless indeed you are disqualified. 6 But I trust that you will know that
we are not disqualified.

Paul Prefers Gentleness

7 Now I[a] pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear
approved, but that you should do what is honorable, though we may
seem disqualified. 8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for
the truth. 9 For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. And
this also we pray, that you may be made complete. 10 Therefore I write
these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness,
according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification
and not for destruction.

12:19 [a]NU-Text reads *You have been thinking for a long time. . . .*
13:1 [a]Deuteronomy 19:15 **13:2** [a]NU-Text omits *I write.*
13:7 [a]NU-Text reads *we.*

Greetings and Benediction

11 Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

12 Greet one another with a holy kiss.

13 All the saints greet you.

14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit *be* with you all. Amen.

given me their punishment of thirty-nine lashes with a whip. Three different times I was beaten with rods. One time I was almost stoned to death. Three times I was in ships that wrecked, and one of those times I spent a night and a day in the sea" (2 Corinthians 11:23–25). He goes on to refer to life-threatening river trips, wilderness wanderings, and exposure to cold, attacks, hunger, and thirst. These, in Paul's words, are light afflictions to be endured for just a moment.

What if we took the same attitude toward life? What if we saw our tough times as a grain of sand scarcely worthy of contrast with the forever dunes? (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

When your weakness surfaces, remember that God still uses you. Volunteer for a form of service that requires you to depend on God's strength. Depend on Him every step of the way.

EXPLORATION

Strength in Weakness—Psalm 82:3; Romans 8:26; 1 Corinthians 1:25–31; 9:22; 15:43; 2 Corinthians 12:9, 10; 13:4; Hebrews 5:2; 11:34.

2 Corinthians 13:1–14

SITUATION

In closing, Paul asked the Corinthians to examine themselves to see if they were growing in Christian understanding. Since gross sin or sin that affects the whole congregation cannot be tolerated in the church, members who refuse to give up their sinful ways should leave.

OBSERVATION

We should examine our lives regularly to see if there are sins we need to discard or practices we need to strengthen.

INSPIRATION

When you go to church, don't select a seat just to be seen or sing just to be heard. If you raise your hands in worship, raise holy ones, not showy ones. When you talk, don't doctor your vocabulary with trendy religious terms. Nothing nauseates more than a fake "Praise the Lord" or a shallow "Hallelujah" or an insincere "Glory be to God."

Bottom line: don't make a theater production out of your faith. "Watch me! Watch me!" is a call used on the playground, not in God's kingdom. Silence the trumpets. Cancel the parade. Enough with the name-dropping. If accolades come, politely deflect them before you believe them. Slay the desire to be noticed. Stir the desire to serve God.

Heed the counsel of Christ: "First cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also" (Matthew 23:26). Focus on the inside, and the outside will take care of itself. Lay your motives before God daily, hourly. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23, 24).

Do good things. Just don't do them to be noticed. You can be too good for your own good, you know. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Examine your life. Are you walking with Jesus? Is how you live reflective of your faith? Ask God to show you anything that needs to be changed.

EXPLORATION

Lifestyle—Judges 1:1; 17:6; Proverbs 4:23; Daniel 1:8–19; Matthew 11:16–19; 1 Corinthians 9:24–27.

THE BOOK OF

GALATIANS

INTRODUCTION

The Emancipation Proclamation was ready to be signed. The papers were complete. All that was lacking was the signature of the president. But Abraham Lincoln was not ready. He had spent the morning at a reception and his hand was swollen from greeting visitors.

"Let me wait until my hand is better," he reportedly requested. "I don't want my signature to be shaky. I want people to know I set the slaves free in confidence."

Galatians states that Christ did the same for us. "He set the slaves free in confidence." No hesitation. No reservation. No reluctance. No exceptions.

The Book of Galatians is the Emancipation Proclamation for the church. Written by the confident hand of one who had known slavery, it declares and defines Christian liberty. Paul wrote it to combat those in the church who were insisting that it was necessary to follow a law or code in order to be saved.

Many of the early Christians were Jewish Christians who were accustomed to following a law. Though they had accepted the gift of grace offered by Christ on the cross, some were falling away—substituting God's gift for man's works. Paul recognized this for what it was—legalism.

Legalism is not unique to the Galatians. Any time the gospel has been preached, there have been those who contend it is too good to be true. It's not enough to be saved by faith, argues the legalist, we must earn God's approval. Some teach that we earn God's favor by what we know (intellectualism). Others insist we are saved by what we do (moralism). Still others claim that salvation is determined by what we feel (emotionalism).

However you package it, Paul contests, legalism is heresy. Any gospel other than the pure gospel is *anathema.* Salvation comes only through the cross—no additions, no alterations.

We are free in Christ. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage" (5:1). Galatians is a document of freedom. As you read, note the confidence of the writer. His hand doesn't shake, his conviction doesn't waver, his belief doesn't falter.

And so neither should ours.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Paul

Date Written: c. A.D. 50

Key Themes:

- Salvation comes by grace, not works.
- We should bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
- We will reap in life what we have sown in life.

Key Verse:

"Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3).

Contents:

I. The Gospel of Grace 1:1—2:21

II. What to Believe About Grace 3:1—4:31

III. How to Live in Grace 5:1—6:18

Greeting

Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead), 2 and all the brethren who are with me,

To the churches of Galatia:

3 Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

Only One Gospel

6 I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, 7 which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

10 For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

Call to Apostleship

11 But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught *it,* but *it came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

13 For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and *tried to* destroy it. 14 And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called *me* through His grace, 16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

Contacts at Jerusalem

18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter,[a] and remained with him fifteen days. 19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. 20 (Now *concerning* the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.)

21 Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. 22 And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which *were* in Christ. 23 But they were hearing only, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once *tried to* destroy." 24 And they glorified God in me.

1:18 [a] NU-Text reads *Cephas.*

Life LESSONS

Galatians 1:1–24

SITUATION

Paul and Barnabas established churches in several cities in the Roman province of Galatia (in the south-central part of modern Turkey). These churches began to grow but needed to be reminded of certain lessons.

OBSERVATION

Paul formed his thinking not by consulting with others but by spending time alone with the Lord. Paul spent three years in Arabia in personal study and meditation. He taught in no uncertain terms that salvation is found in Jesus alone.

INSPIRATION

Paul proclaimed a pure grace: no mixtures, no additives, no alterations. The work of Christ is the bungee cord for the soul. Trust it and take the plunge.

We quickly side with Paul on the circumcision controversy. The whole discussion sounds odd to our Western ears. But is it so strange? We may not teach Jesus + circumcision, but how about:

Jesus + evangelism: *How many people have you led to Christ this year?* Or:

Jesus + contribution: *Are you giving all you can to the church?* Or:

Jesus + mysticism: *You do offer penance and pray to the Virgin Mary, don't you?* Or:

Jesus + heritage: *Were you raised in "the church"?* Or:

Jesus + doctrine: *When you were baptized, was the water running or still? Deep or shallow? Hot or cold?*

Legalism. The theology of "Jesus +." Legalists don't dismiss Christ. They trust in Christ a lot. But they don't trust in Christ alone.

We're tempted to dismiss legalism as harmless. After all, legalists look good. They act religious. They promote morality and decency and good living. Is there any harm to their teaching?

Paul responds with a resounding "yes!" He reserves a biting tone for the legalist. "Watch out for those who do evil, who are like dogs, who demand to cut the body" (Philippians 3:2 NCV). Ouch! Can you hear the intolerance in those terms? "Evil." "Dogs." Those "who demand to cut the body" or, as one paraphrase renders it, "knife-happy circumcisers" (MSG).

Why the bared fangs? Why the hot ink? Paul didn't go bare fisted with others this way. Though anti-adultery, he didn't call two-timers names. He was intolerant of homosexuality, but he didn't blast the gay crowd with a verbal blowtorch. He preached against drunkenness, but did he ever call drunks "dogs"?

And if you think he's ticked off in this passage, read his wish for the legalists of Galatia. "I wish the people who are bothering you would castrate themselves" (Galatians 5:12 NCV).

Why the intensity? Why so strident against legalists? Simple. Self-salvation makes light of our problem.

On our own, we're spiritually sunk, my friend. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you feel that maybe your salvation in Christ isn't quite enough—that it needs a "plus" like those

Defending the Gospel

2 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with *me.* [2]And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain. [3]Yet not even Titus who *was* with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. [4]And *this occurred* because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), [5]to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

[6]But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed *to be something* added nothing to me. [7]But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as *the gospel* for the circumcised *was* to Peter [8](for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), [9]and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we *should go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. [10]*They desired* only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.

No Return to the Law

[11]Now when Peter[a] had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; [12]for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. [13]And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

[14]But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before *them* all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you[a] compel Gentiles to live as Jews?[b] [15]We *who are* Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, [16]knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

[17]"But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, *is* Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! [18]For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. [19]For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. [20]I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. [21]I

2:11 [a]NU-Text reads *Cephas.* **2:14** [a]NU-Text reads *how can you.* [b]Some interpreters stop the quotation here.

do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness *comes* through the law, then Christ died in vain."

Justification by Faith

3 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth,[a] before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you[b] as crucified? 2 This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? 4 Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed *it was* in vain?

5 Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, *does He do it* by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?— 6 just as Abraham *"believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."*[a] 7 Therefore know that *only* those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, *saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed."*[a] 9 So then those who *are* of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

The Law Brings a Curse

10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, *"Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."*[a] 11 But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God *is* evident, for *"the just shall live by faith."*[a] 12 Yet the law is not of faith, but *"the man who does them shall live by them."*[a]

13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, *"Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"*[a]), 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

The Changeless Promise

15 Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though *it is* only a man's covenant, yet *if it is* confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. 16 Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, *"And to your Seed,"*[a] who is Christ. 17 And this I say, *that* the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ,[a] that it should make the promise of no effect. 18 For if the inheritance *is* of the law, *it is* no longer of promise; but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise.

Purpose of the Law

19 What purpose then *does* the law *serve?* It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was

3:1 [a]NU-Text omits *that you should not obey the truth.* [b]NU-Text omits *among you.* **3:6** [a]Genesis 15:6 **3:8** [a]Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14 **3:10** [a]Deuteronomy 27:26 **3:11** [a]Habakkuk 2:4 **3:12** [a]Leviticus 18:5 **3:13** [a]Deuteronomy 21:23 **3:16** [a]Genesis 12:7; 13:15; 24:7 **3:17** [a]NU-Text omits *in Christ.*

mentioned above? You have been saved and set free. You serve not *in order to be* saved but *because* you have been saved. See the difference? Don't get caught up in legalism.

EXPLORATION
Jesus' Solitude—Matthew 12:15; Mark 1:35; Luke 4:42; 5:16; 6:12.

Life Lessons

Galatians 2:1–21

SITUATION
When Paul visited Jerusalem he explained that God saves Gentiles, too. Later, when Peter showed favoritism to Jews, Paul corrected him.

OBSERVATION
Keeping thousands of laws does not save us. Because of this, God sent Jesus. Jesus paid the price that our actions never could. His power within helps us accomplish anything.

INSPIRATION
[Christ] is *in* you. You are a modern-day Mary. Even more so. He was a fetus in her, but He is a force in you. He will do what you cannot. Imagine a million dollars being deposited into your checking account. To any observer you look the same, except for the goofy smile, but are you? Not at all! With God *in* you, you have a million resources that you did not have before!

Can't stop drinking? Christ can. And He lives within you.

Can't stop worrying? Christ can. And He lives within you.

Can't forgive the jerk, forget the past, or forsake your bad habits? Christ can! And He lives within you.

Paul knew this. "To this end I also labor, striving

made; *and it was* appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. 20 Now a mediator does not *mediate* for one *only,* but God is one.

21 *Is* the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. 22 But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. 23 But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Sons and Heirs

26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

4 Now I say *that* the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, 2 but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. 3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. 4 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born[a] of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of[a] God through Christ.

Fears for the Church

8 But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. 9 But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how *is it that* you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? 10 You observe days and months and seasons and years. 11 I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

12 Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I *became* like you. You have not injured me at all. 13 You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. 14 And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, *even* as Christ Jesus. 15 What[a] then was the blessing you *enjoyed?* For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. 16 Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?

17 They zealously court you, *but* for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them. 18 But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you. 19 My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ

4:4 [a]Or *made* **4:7** [a]NU-Text reads *through God* and omits *through Christ.*
4:15 [a]NU-Text reads *Where.*

according to His working which works *in me* mightily" (Colossians 1:29, emphasis mine).

Like Mary, you and I are indwelt by Christ.

Find that hard to believe? How much more did Mary? The line beneath her picture in the high-school annual did not read, "Aspires to be the mother of God." No. No one was more surprised by this miracle than she was.

And no one was more passive than she was. God did everything. Mary didn't volunteer to help. What did she have to offer? Advice? "From my perspective, a heavenly choir would add a nice touch." Yeah, right. She offered no assistance.

And she offered no resistance. She could have. "Who am I to have God in my womb? I'm not good enough," she could have said. Or, "I've got other plans. I don't have time for God in my life."

But Mary didn't say such words. Instead, she said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). If Mary is our measure, God seems less interested in talent and more interested in trust.

Unlike her, we tend to assist God, assuming our part is as important as His. Or we resist, thinking we are too bad or too busy. Yet when we assist or resist, we miss God's great grace. We miss out on the reason we were placed on earth—to be so pregnant with heaven's child that He lives through us. To be so full of Him that we could say with Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you wonder if God

is formed in you, 20 I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.

Two Covenants

21 Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he *who was* of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, 24 which things are symbolic. For these are the[a] two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar— 25 for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children— 26 but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. 27 For it is written:

"Rejoice, O barren,
You who do not bear!
Break forth and shout,
You who are not in labor!
For the desolate has many more children
Than she who has a husband."[a]

28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac *was,* are children of promise. 29 But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him *who was born* according to the Spirit, even so *it is* now. 30 Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? *"Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman."*[a] 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.

Christian Liberty

5 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free,[a] and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. 2 Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. 3 And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. 4 You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. 5 For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

Love Fulfills the Law

7 You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion does not *come* from Him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump. 10 I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is.

11 And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer

4:24 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *the.* **4:27** [a]Isaiah 54:1 **4:30** [a]Genesis 21:10
5:1 [a]NU-Text reads *For freedom Christ has made us free; stand fast therefore.*

approves of you? If Jesus reigns in your life, then God looks on you with favor. Rejoice! But, if you are trying to call the shots in your life, then you have disregarded His claim on your life. Surrender the remaining areas in your life to God. Let Him *in* you make all the difference!

EXPLORATION
Grace—Psalm 130:3; Romans 3:19–24; Ephesians 1:3–14.

Galatians 3:1—4:7

SITUATION
Some Galatian believers were in Jerusalem on Pentecost (Acts 2). They already knew that God freely gave the Holy Spirit.

OBSERVATION
Paul used Abraham's example (Genesis 15) to prove that Old Testament believers were also saved by faith.

INSPIRATION
In baptism we identify with Christ. We go from tire kicker to car buyer. We step out of the shadows, point in His direction, and announce, "I'm with him."

I used to do this at the drive-in movie theater.

Remember drive-in movies? (Kids, ask a grownup.) The one in Andrews, Texas, had a Friday night special—a carload for the price of the driver. Whether the car carried one passenger or a dozen, the price was the same. We often opted for the dozen route. The law would not allow us to do today what we did then. Shoulders squished. Little guy on the big guy's lap. The ride was miserable, but

the price was right. When the person at the ticket window looked in, we pointed to the driver and said, "We're with him."

God doesn't tell you to climb into Christ's car; He tells you to climb into Christ! "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). He is your vehicle! Baptism celebrates your decision to take a seat. "For as many of you as were baptized *into* Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27, emphasis mine). We are not saved by the act, but the act demonstrates the way we are saved. We are given credit for a perfect life we did not lead—indeed, a life we could never lead. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Paul warned: Don't be tricked. Don't let anyone think that you must win God's approval. Rejoice that if you are God's child His love toward you is endless.

EXPLORATION
Law's Inferiority—Romans 3:19, 20; 4:13–25; 8:3; Galatians 5:4–6; Hebrews 3:1–6; 8:7–13.

Life LESSONS

Galatians 4:8–31

SITUATION
Judaizers taught that Gentile believers had to obey Jewish laws in order to be saved. Paul wrote to correct this false teaching.

OBSERVATION
As a result of God's promise, Christians are children of God. As adopted children, believers can enjoy all the benefits of being in

persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased. 12 I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!

13 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*[a] 15 But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

Walking in the Spirit

16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery,[a] fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders,[a] drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. 24 And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Bear and Share the Burdens

6 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. 5 For each one shall bear his own load.

Be Generous and Do Good

6 Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.

7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Glory Only in the Cross

11 See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand! 12 As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these *would* compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer

5:14 [a]Leviticus 19:18 **5:19** [a]NU-Text omits *adultery.* **5:21** [a]NU-Text omits *murders.*

Fruit of the Spirit

For the next twelve hours I will be exposed to the day's demands. It is now that I must make a choice. Because of Calvary, I'm free to choose. And so I choose.

I choose love

No occasion justifies hatred; no injustice warrants bitterness. I choose love. Today I will love God and what God loves.

I choose joy

I will invite my God to be the God of circumstance.

I choose peace

I will live forgiven. I will forgive so that I may live.

I choose patience

I will overlook the inconveniences of the world. Instead of cursing the one who takes my place, I'll invite him to do so.

I choose kindness

I will be kind to the poor, for they are alone. Kind to the rich, for they are afraid. And kind to the unkind, for such is how God has treated me.

I choose goodness

I will go without a dollar before I take a dishonest one.

I choose faithfulness

Today I will keep my promises.

I choose gentleness

Nothing is won by force. I choose to be gentle.

I choose self-control

I refuse to let what will rot, rule the eternal

I will be drunk only by joy.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. To these I commit my day. If I succeed, I will give thanks. If I fail, I will seek his grace. And then, when this day is done, I will place my head on my pillow and rest.

Study Guide

Read Galatians 5:19–25.

- On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being easy and 10 being difficult), how hard is it for you to maintain a positive attitude on a daily basis?
- What three choices would make the world a better place if every person made those choices each morning?
- When did someone else's attitude make all the difference for you?
- How did Jesus exemplify the attitudes described in this Scripture?
- What attitudes often stand in the way of living a life filled with the fruit of the Spirit?
- What words would you use to describe Christ's attitude while He lived on earth?
- How does your choice of attitude at the beginning of the day affect the remainder of it?
- In your own words, what does it mean to have a servant attitude?
- What spiritual attitudes are the most difficult for you to maintain?
- To live the kind of life described above, what kind of choices would you have to make every day?

persecution for the cross of Christ. 13 For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. 14 But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom[a] the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.

Blessing and a Plea

16 And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy *be* upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

17 From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

18 Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with your spirit. Amen.

6:14 [a]Or *by which* (the cross)

God's family. One of those benefits is freedom from the bondage of legalism.

INSPIRATION

Do you think your baptism and Sunday attendance will be enough to save you?

Legalists do. They miss the gravity of the problem. By offering to help, they not only make light of sin, they mock God.

Who would look at the cross of Christ and say, "Great work, Jesus. Sorry You couldn't finish it, but I'll take up the slack"?

Dare we question the crowning work of God? Dare we think heaven needs our help in saving us? We're stuck on the bottom of the ocean. We can't see the light of day! Legalism discounts God and in the process makes a mess out of us.

To anyone attempting to earn heaven, Paul asks, "How is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? . . . What then was the blessing you enjoyed?" (Galatians 4:9, 15).

Legalism is joyless because legalism is endless. There is always another class to attend, person to teach, mouth to feed. Inmates incarcerated in self-salvation find work but never joy. How could they? They never know when they are finished. Legalism leaches joy.

Grace, however, dispenses peace. The Christian trusts a finished work. . . .

Can you add anything to this salvation? No. The work is finished.

Can you earn this salvation? No. Don't dishonor God by trying.

Dare we boast about this salvation? By no means. The giver of bread, not the beggar, deserves praise. "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:31).

It's not about what we do; it's all about what He does. (From *It's Not About Me* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you see yourself from God's perspective? Do you truly comprehend the freedom you have in Christ? Ask God to reveal to you all the benefits of adoption. If you know young or struggling believers, go out of your way to help them see their benefits in Christ.

EXPLORATION

Adoption—Romans 8:15–25; 9:8, 9; Ephesians 1:5, 6; 2:13–19.

Galatians 5:1–26

SITUATION

Christians in Galatia faced a problem. Should they embrace the Jewish law? Paul emphasized the importance of faith and warned about the danger of emphasizing law above faith.

OBSERVATION

Paul taught that if you begin to keep the law, you are obligated to keep all of it. Instead, Christians ought to trust Jesus who makes them righteous.

INSPIRATION

When my niece bore her first child, she invited her brother and mother to stand in the delivery room. After witnessing three hours of pushing, when the baby finally crowned, my nephew turned to his mom and said, "I'm sorry for every time I talked back to you."

The mother pays the price of birth. She doesn't enlist the child's assistance or solicit his or her advice. Why would she? The baby can't even take a breath without umbilical help, much less navigate a path into new life. Nor, Jesus is saying, can we. Spiritual rebirthing requires a capable parent, not an able infant.

Who is this parent? Check the strategically selected word *again [in the phrase "born again"].* The Greek language offers two choices for *again:*

1. *Palin,* which means a repetition. . . .

2. *Anothen,* which also depicts a repeated action, but requires the original source to repeat it. . . . In other words, the one who did the work the first time does it again. This is the word Jesus chose.

The difference between the two terms is the difference between a painting by da Vinci and one by me. Suppose you and I are standing in the Louvre, admiring the famous *Mona Lisa.* Inspired by the work, I

produce an easel and canvas and announce, "I'm going to paint this beautiful portrait again."

And I do! Right there in the Salle des Etats, I brandish my palette and flurry my brush and recreate the *Mona Lisa.* Alas, Lucado is no Leonardo. Ms. Lisa has a Picassoesque imbalance to her—crooked nose and one eye higher than the other. Technically, however, I keep my pledge and paint the *Mona Lisa again.*

Jesus means something else. He employs the second Greek term, calling for the action of the original source. He uses the word *anothen,* which, if honored in the Paris gallery, would require da Vinci's presence. *Anothen* excludes:

Latter-day replicas.

Second-generation attempts.

Well-meaning imitations.

He who did it first must do it again. The original creator recreates his creation. This is the act that Jesus describes.

Born: God exerts the effort.

Again: God restores the beauty.

We don't *try* again. We need, not the muscle of self, but a miracle of God. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How do you exhibit your faith? Do you hurry out the door after church on Sundays? Or, do you take the time to greet and listen to the concerns of others? Next Sunday, stay and listen. Remember that listening begins to help those in need. Remember that you have been born again—and that makes all the difference.

EXPLORATION

Faith—Romans 8; 1 Corinthians 13:2; James 2:14.

Life LESSONS

Galatians 6:1–18

SITUATION

Paul warned the Galatians not to compare themselves with others. Rather, they had to be concerned with their own responsibility before God.

OBSERVATION

God transformed you into a new person. Live like it!

INSPIRATION

Suppose you, for most of your life, have had a heart condition. Your frail pumper restricts your activities. Each morning at work when the healthy employees take the stairs, you wait for the elevator.

But then comes the transplant. A healthy heart is placed within you. After recovery, you return to work and encounter the flight of stairs—the same flight of stairs you earlier avoided. By habit, you start for the elevator. But then you remember. You aren't the same person. You have a new heart. Within you dwells a new power.

Do you live like the old person or the new? Do you count yourself as having a new heart or old? You have a choice to make.

You might say, "I can't climb stairs; I'm too weak." Does your choice negate the presence of a new heart? Dismiss the work of the surgeon? No. Choosing the elevator would suggest only one fact—you haven't learned to trust your new power.

It takes time. But at some point you've got to try those stairs. You've got to test the new ticker. You've got to experiment with the new you. For if you don't, you will run out of steam.

Religious rule keeping can sap your strength. It's endless. There is always another class to attend, Sabbath to obey, Ramadan to observe. No prison is as endless as the prison of perfection. Her inmates find work but never find peace. How could they? They never know when they are finished.

Christ, however, gifts you with a finished work. He fulfilled the law for you. Bid farewell to the burden of religion. Gone is the fear that having done everything, you might not have done enough. You climb the stairs, not by your strength, but His. God pledges to help those who stop trying to help themselves.

"He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). God will . . . change you from the inside out. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Both legalism and sin end in frustration. But your freedom from sin and your desire to please God frees you to do your best before Him. You can help others. You can do good. Remember, you have a new heart!

EXPLORATION

Paul's Suffering—Acts 14:19; 16:22; 2 Corinthians 11:23–29; 12:7; Galatians 4:13, 14.

THE BOOK OF

EPHESIANS

INTRODUCTION

I just witnessed a beautiful wedding. The most beautiful I've ever seen. That says a lot since I've seen a lot. Ministers see many weddings. It's a perk of the profession.

Is there anything more elegant than a wedding? Candles bathe a chapel in gold. Families fill the pews in love. Groomsmen and bridesmaids descend the aisles with bouquets of newness and rings of promise. What an occasion.

And nothing quite compares with that moment when the bride stands at the top of the aisle. Arm entwined with her father's, she takes those final steps with him and steps toward a new life with *him*.

Ahhh, the glory of a wedding. So to say I just saw the most beautiful one is no small thing. What made these nuptials so unforgettable? The groom. Usually the groom is not the star of the wedding. The fellow is typically upstaged by the girl. But this wedding was made special by the groom.

It was enhanced by something he did.

And who he was made what he did even more startling. You see, he's a cowboy: a stocky fellow who went to college on a rodeo scholarship. But what stood by me was not a macho calf roper, but a pinch-me-I'm-dreaming boy who'd never seen a bride so gorgeous.

He was composed as he walked down the aisle. He was fine as he took his place at the altar.

But when he saw the bride, he wept.

It was the moment he'd dreamed of. It was as if he'd been given life's greatest gift—a bride in all her beauty. By the way, those are the very words Paul uses to describe the church: a bride in all her beauty.

Jesus died for the church so "that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (5:27).

Ponder that verse. Jesus died for a bride. He died so He could be married. This passage

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Paul

Date Written: c. A.D. 60

Key Themes:

- We have many spiritual blessings through Christ.
- Each believer is gifted through the Spirit of God.
- Our faith should work its way into all of our relationships.
- Our spiritual strength comes from God through his Word and our faith.

Key Verse:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

Contents:

I. Spiritual Blessings 1:1—3:21
II. Unity and the Christian Lifestyle 4:1—6:24

anticipates the day when the groom will see His bride—when Christ will receive His church. Jesus' fondest longing will be fulfilled. His bride will arrive.

The letter to the Ephesians celebrates the beauty of the church—the Bride of Christ. From our perspective, the church isn't so pretty. We see the backbiting, the squabbling, the divisions. Heaven sees that, as well. But heaven sees more. Heaven sees the church as cleansed and made holy by Christ.

Heaven sees the church ascending to heaven. Heaven sees the Bride wearing the spotless gown of Jesus Christ.

It's enough to make one weep.

Greeting

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,

To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus:

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Redemption in Christ

3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both[a] which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. 11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

13 In Him you also *trusted,* after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who[a] is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

1:10 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *both.* **1:14** [a]NU-Text reads *which.*

Life LESSONS

Ephesians 1:1–23

SITUATION
In a city with many sinful distractions, Paul wrote so that Christians would know what God thought of His people.

OBSERVATION
God cherishes us. The more we know Him, the more we will understand His love toward us.

INSPIRATION
When you believe in Christ, Christ works a miracle in you. "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). You are permanently purified and empowered by God Himself. The message of Jesus to the religious person is simple: It's not what you do. It's what I do. I have moved in. And in time you can say with Paul, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). You are no

longer a clunker, not even a clean clunker. You are a sleek Indianapolis Motor Speedway racing machine.

If that is true, Max, why do I still sputter? If I'm born again, why do I fall so often?

Why did you fall so often after your first birth? Did you exit the womb wearing cross-trainers? Did you do the two-step on the day of your delivery? Of course not. And when you started to walk, you fell more than you stood. Should we expect anything different from our spiritual walk?

But I fall so often, I question my salvation. Again, we return to your first birth. Didn't you stumble as you were learning to walk? And when you stumbled, did you question the validity of your physical birth? Did you, as a one-year-old fresh flopped on the floor, shake your head and think, *I have fallen again. I must not be human*?

Of course not. The stumbles of a toddler do not invalidate the act of birth. And the stumbles of a Christian do not annul his spiritual birth.

Do you understand what God has done? He has deposited a Christ seed in you. As it grows, you will change. It's not that sin has no more presence in your life, but rather that sin has no more power over your life. Temptation will pester you, but temptation will not master you. What hope this brings! (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Tell someone what you've learned about who you are in Christ. Write a note, make a phone call, go to lunch, or share together on a walk.

Prayer for Spiritual Wisdom

15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and
your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease to give thanks for you,
making mention of you in my prayers: 17 that the God of our Lord
Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom
and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18 the eyes of your under-
standing[a] being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of
His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the
saints, 19 and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us
who believe, according to the working of His mighty power 20 which
He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated
Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places,* 21 far above all princi-
pality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is
named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.
22 And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head
over all *things* to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him
who fills all in all.

By Grace Through Faith

2 And you *He made alive,* who were dead in trespasses and sins,
2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world,
according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now
works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once
conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of
the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just
as the others.
4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with
which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us
alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised
us up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in
Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding
riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by
grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves;
it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we
are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which
God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Brought Near by His Blood

11 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who
are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made
in the flesh by hands— 12 that at that time you were without Christ,
being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from
the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the
world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been
brought near by the blood of Christ.

Christ Our Peace

14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has
broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in
His flesh the enmity, *that is,* the law of commandments *contained*

1:18 [a] NU-Text and M-Text read *hearts.*

in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. 18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

Christ Our Cornerstone

19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner*stone,* 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

The Mystery Revealed

3 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— 2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, 3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: 6 that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, 7 of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

Purpose of the Mystery

8 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make all see what *is* the fellowship[a] of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;[b] 10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places,* 11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. 13 Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

Appreciation of the Mystery

14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,[a] 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the

3:9 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *stewardship* (dispensation). [b]NU-Text omits *through Jesus Christ.* **3:14** [a]NU-Text omits *of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

EXPLORATION
Adopted by God—Isaiah 43:6; 63:8; John 1:12; Romans 8:15; 2 Corinthians 6:16–18; Galatians 3:26, 27; 4:6; Ephesians 2:19; 5:1; Hebrews 12:9.

Ephesians 2:1–22

SITUATION
The Ephesians forgot what God did to save them and to make them a part of His body.

OBSERVATION
God's mercy plucks us from the destruction of our countless sins and places us in Jesus Christ's righteousness.

INSPIRATION
Alan and Penny McIlroy . . . have two adopted children [which] is commendable but not uncommon. The fact that they have adopted special needs children is significant but not unique. It's the severity of the health problems that sets this story apart.

Saleena is a cocaine baby. Her birth mother's overdose left Saleena unable to hear, see, speak, or move. Penny and Alan adopted her at seven weeks. The doctor gave her a year. She's lived for six.

As Penny introduced me to Saleena, she ruffled her hair and squeezed her cheeks, but Saleena didn't respond. She never does. Barring a miracle, she never will. Neither will her sister. "This is Destiny," Penny told me. In the adjacent bed one-year-old Destiny lay, motionless and vegetative. Penny will never hear Destiny's voice. Alan will never know Saleena's kiss. They'll never hear their

daughters sing in a choir, never see them walk across the stage. They'll bathe them, change them, adjust their feeding tubes, and rub their limp limbs, but barring God's intervention, this mom and dad will never hear more than we heard that afternoon—gurgled breathing. "I need to suction Saleena's nose," Penny said to me. "You might want to leave."

I did, and as I did, I wondered, what kind of love is this? What kind of love adopts disaster? What kind of love looks into the face of children, knowing full well the weight of their calamity, and says, "I'll take them"? (Destiny has since gone to heaven.)

When you come up with a word for such a love, give it to Christ. For the day He left Nazareth is the day He declared His devotion for you and me.

We were just as helpless, in a spiritually vegetative state from sin. According to Peter, our lives were "dead-end, empty-headed" (1 Peter 1:18 MSG). But God, "who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Ephesians 2:4, 5).

Jesus left Nazareth in pursuit of the spiritual Saleenas and Destinys of the world and brought us to life. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are there some people around you who slip through the cracks unnoticed? Is there a lonely widow? An insecure junior-high student? A struggling single mother? Pay these people a visit—bring flowers or another gift; invest some time in their lives.

saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Walk in Unity

4 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you[a] all.

Spiritual Gifts

7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore He says:

"When He ascended on high,
He led captivity captive,
And gave gifts to men."[a]

9 (Now this, *"He ascended"*—what does it mean but that He also first[a] descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

11 And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

The New Man

17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of[a] the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of

4:6 [a]NU-Text omits *you;* M-Text reads *us.* **4:8** [a]Psalm 68:18 **4:9** [a]NU-Text omits *first.* **4:17** [a]NU-Text omits *the rest of.*

Unity

Grace makes three proclamations.

First, only God can forgive my godlessness. . . .

Second, only God can judge my neighbor. . . .

Third, I must accept who God accepts. . . .

Easier said than done.

God has enlisted us in his navy and placed us on his ship. The boat has one purpose—to carry us safely to the other shore.

This is no cruise ship; it's a battleship. We aren't called to a life of leisure; we are called to a life of service. Each of us has a different task. Some, concerned with those who are drowning, are snatching people from the water. Others are occupied with the enemy, so they man the cannons of prayer and worship. Still others devote themselves to the crew, feeding and training the crew members.

Though different, we are the same. Each can tell of a personal encounter with the captain, for each has received a personal call. He found us among the shanties of the seaport and invited us to follow him. . . .

Though the battle is fierce, the boat is safe, for our captain is God. The ship will not sink. For that, there is no concern.

There is concern, however, regarding the disharmony of the crew.

Unity creates belief. Disunity fosters disbelief. Who wants to board a ship of bickering sailors? Life on the ocean may be rough, but at least the waves don't call us names. . . . Could it be that unity is the key to reaching the world for Christ?

Study Guide

Read Ephesians 4:2–32.

- List some things that cause tension and disharmony among Christians.
- How has your personal encounter with God changed the way you relate to others?
- What kinds of disagreements cause people to give up on their relationships?
- Describe in practical terms what it means for Christians to live in unity.
- How does receiving God's grace enable us to practice Christian unity and love?
- Why is it often more challenging to love the people closest to us?
- What can people outside of the church learn from the way believers get along?
- If we are the army of Christ, what does division among the ranks cost us?

EXPLORATION
Mercy—Matthew 5:7; Luke 6:36; 2 Peter 3:9.

Life LESSONS

Ephesians 3:1–21

SITUATION
Paul told the Ephesians his goals for them. He shared his prayer for their growth in insight and strength.

OBSERVATION
Although God's love for us cannot be measured by any comprehensible standards, God wants us to know this ocean of love.

INSPIRATION
Proliferating throughout Scripture is a preposition that leaves no doubt—the preposition *in*. Jesus lives *in* his children.

To His apostles, Christ declared, "You *in* Me, and I *in* you" (John 14:20, emphasis mine).

Paul's prayer for the Ephesians was "that Christ may dwell *in* your hearts through faith" (Ephesians 3:17, emphasis mine).

What is the mystery of the gospel? "Christ *in* you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27, emphasis mine).

John was clear, "He who keeps His commandments abides *in* Him, and He *in* him" (1 John 3:24, emphasis mine).

And the sweetest invitation from Christ? "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come *in* to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20, emphasis mine).

Christ grew in Mary until He had to come out. Christ will grow in you until the same occurs. He will come

the blindness of their heart; [19] who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

[20] But you have not so learned Christ, [21] if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: [22] that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, [23] and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, [24] and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Do Not Grieve the Spirit

[25] Therefore, putting away lying, *"Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,"* [a] for we are members of one another. [26] *"Be angry, and do not sin"*: [a] do not let the sun go down on your wrath, [27] nor give place to the devil. [28] Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. [29] Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. [30] And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. [31] Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. [32] And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Walk in Love

5 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. [2] And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

[3] But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; [4] neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. [5] For this you know, [a] that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. [6] Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. [7] Therefore do not be partakers with them.

Walk in Light

[8] For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light [9] (for the fruit of the Spirit [a] *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), [10] finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. [11] And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*. [12] For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. [13] But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. [14] Therefore He says:

"Awake, you who sleep,
Arise from the dead,
And Christ will give you light."

4:25 [a] Zechariah 8:16 **4:26** [a] Psalm 4:4 **5:5** [a] NU-Text reads *For know this.*
5:9 [a] NU-Text reads *light.*

Walk in Wisdom

15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,
16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil.
17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the
Lord *is*. 18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation;
but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and
hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart
to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in
the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the
fear of God.[a]

Marriage—Christ and the Church

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the
husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and
He is the Savior of the body. 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject
to Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in everything.
25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church
and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her
with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present
her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any
such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. 28 So
husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who
loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but
nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church. 30 For we
are members of His body,[a] of His flesh and of His bones. 31 *"For this
reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his
wife, and the two shall become one flesh."*[a] 32 This is a great mystery,
but I speak concerning Christ and the church. 33 Nevertheless let each
one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the
wife *see* that she respects *her* husband.

Children and Parents

6 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 *"Honor
your father and mother,"* which is the first commandment with
promise: 3 *"that it may be well with you and you may live long on the
earth."*[a]
4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring
them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Bondservants and Masters

5 Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters accord-
ing to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to
Christ; 6 not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants
of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 with goodwill doing
service, as to the Lord, and not to men, 8 knowing that whatever good
anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether *he is* a
slave or free.
9 And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threaten-

5:21 [a]NU-Text reads *Christ.* **5:30** [a]NU-Text omits the rest of this verse.
5:31 [a]Genesis 2:24 **6:3** [a]Deuteronomy 5:16

out in your speech, in your actions, in your decisions. Every place you live will be a Bethlehem, and every day you live will be a Christmas. You, like Mary, will deliver Christ into the world. God *in* us! Have we sounded the depth of this promise?

God was *with* Adam and Eve, walking with them in the cool of the evening.

God was *with* Abraham, even calling the patriarch His friend.

God was *with* Moses and the children of Israel. Parents could point their children to the fire by night and cloud by day; *God is with us,* they could assure.

Between the cherubim of the ark, in the glory of the temple, God was *with* His people. He was *with* the apostles. Peter could touch God's beard. John could watch God sleep. Multitudes could hear His voice. God was *with* them!

But He is *in* you. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Learn to see God's love for you in the details of daily life. Read 1 John and get a firmer grasp on understanding God's love.

EXPLORATION
God's Love—Psalm 6:4; John 3:16; 15:12; Romans 5:8; 8:35–37; 1 John 3:1.

Life Lessons

Ephesians 4:1—5:20

SITUATION
Paul labored to bring unity between Gentiles and Jews. He urgently defended the need for a unified and God-honoring lifestyle.

OBSERVATION
Attitudes of humility, gentleness, and patience

ing, knowing that your own Master also[a] is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

The Whole Armor of God

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age,[a] against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; 18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— 19 and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

A Gracious Greeting

21 But that you also may know my affairs *and* how I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make all things known to you; 22 whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that you may know our affairs, and *that* he may comfort your hearts.

23 Peace to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace *be* with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.

6:9 [a]NU-Text reads *He who is both their Master and yours.*

6:12 [a]NU-Text reads *rulers of this darkness.*

should characterize Christians. We are told to accept each other in love.

INSPIRATION

Let's take inventory of our hearts. Am I living in the overflow of God's love? How well do I love the people in my life? Does the way I treat people reflect the way God has treated me?

Loving people isn't always easy. In fact, this book has been a challenging one for some of you. You've been forced to think again about some of the people in your life whom you find hard to love. This is serious business. It's not easy to love those who have been the source of heartache, abuse, rejection, or loneliness. Some of you wonder how you could ever love the people who have caused you such pain. So what can you do?

Conventional wisdom says that a lack of love implies a lack of effort, so we try harder, dig deeper, strain more.

But could a lack of love imply something else? Could we be skipping a step? An essential step? Could it be that we are trying to give what we don't have? Are we forgetting to receive first?

The woman in Capernaum didn't forget. [Read Luke 7:36–50.] Remember how she lavished love on Christ? Bathing His feet with tears. Drying His feet with her hair. If love were a waterfall, she'd be a Niagara.

And Simon, well, Simon was a Sahara. Dry. Parched. Hard. His arid heart surprises us. He was the churchgoer, the pastor, the seminarian. She, on the other hand, was the town slut. He'd forgotten more Bible than she ever knew. But she'd discovered one truth Simon had somehow missed: God's love has no limits.

God's love meets the standard of our final passage. "Love," Paul says, "never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:8).

How could God have a love like this? No one has unfailing love. No person can love with perfection. You're right. No person can. But God is not a person. Unlike our love, His never fails. His love is immensely different from ours. (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Is your attitude toward other believers marked by love, humility, patience, and gentleness? Paul encouraged us to display unity in the body of Christ and accept one another in love. If you're not doing that, check your attitudes. Your spiritual gifts and talents should help bring the body of Christ together.

EXPLORATION

Unity—John 17:11, 20–23; Romans 12:9–21; Philippians 2:1, 2.

Life Lessons

Ephesians 5:21—6:24

SITUATION
To fight effectively in their spiritual battle, the Ephesians must know Christ, obey His standards, and be prepared to fight.

OBSERVATION
Each Christian has a responsibility to love, honor, and respect. If faithful to these duties, Christians will find themselves united against the spiritual power of evil.

INSPIRATION
We are urged to "take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Ephesians 6:13).

Well we should, for they are organized. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). Jesus spoke of the "gates of hell" (Matthew 16:18 KJV), a phrase that suggests the "council of hell." Our enemy has a complex and conniving spiritual army. Dismiss any image of a red-suited Satan with pitchfork and pointy tail. The devil is a strong devil. . . .

For a toothless ol' varmint, Satan sure has some bite! He spooks our work, disrupts our activities, and leaves us thinking twice about where we step. Which we need to do. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Alertness is needed. Panic is not. The serpent still wiggles and intimidates, but he has no poison. He is defeated, and he knows it! "He knows that he has a short time" (Revelation 12:12).

"He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Believe it. Trust the work of your Savior. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). In the meantime, the best he can do is squirm. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
We are in a spiritual battle against the powers of the evil world. Read about each piece of God's armor as recorded in Ephesians 6, then mentally "put on" each piece of armor. Think about how that piece will help you in your battle.

EXPLORATION
Obedience to Parents—Proverbs 1:8; 6:20; Colossians 3:20. Parental Duties—Deuteronomy 6:7; Proverbs 22:6; 2 Corinthians 12:14; 1 Timothy 3:4; Titus 2:4, 5.

THE BOOK OF

PHILIPPIANS

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the symbol of this generation is the exercise bike.

It represents what most have—excess weight.

It represents what most want—to be different.

It represents what most people spend most their time doing—pedaling furiously and getting nowhere. High activity but low achievement. Car pools, diapers, bills, time clocks. Office walls painted gray with routine. Houses framed with wooden humdrum. For many, life is lived on the exercise bicycle. Day after day in the same seat, doing the same thing but seeing the same scenery. Is there any end to this tunnel of grayness?

There is.

Go with me back in history a couple of thousand years. Let's go to the city of Rome. The thrilling metropolis of gladiators, chariots, and empires. But don't stop at the coliseum or palace. Go rather to a drab little room, surrounded by high walls. Let's imagine that we can peek into the room and look. Inside we see a man seated on the floor. He's an older fellow, shoulders stooped and balding. Chains are on his hands and feet. And chained to him is a guard from the Roman army.

It is the apostle Paul. The apostle who has traveled all over the world. The apostle who has liberated people in every port. The apostle who was bound only by the will of God is now in chains—stuck in a dingy house—attached to a Roman officer.

Here is a fellow who has every reason to be in a slump!

He is restricted by walls. He is afflicted by friends (1:15). He is conflicted by danger (1:21).

He is writing a letter. No doubt it is a complaint letter to God. No doubt it is a list of grievances. No doubt he is writing the New Testament version of Lamentations. He has every reason to be bitter and complain. But he doesn't. Instead, he writes a letter that two thousand years later is still known as the treatise on joy.

Sound interesting? Of course it does. Who couldn't use a guide to joy in this world? Why don't you spend some time with it? Dismount the bicycle to nowhere and follow Paul as he guides you down the trail to peace.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Paul

Date Written: c. A.D. 60

Key Themes:

- By faith we have Christ in us because of the Spirit of God.
- Only Christ can bring salvation.
- Christian unity encourages our faith.

Key Verses:

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God" (Philippians 2:5, 6).

Contents:

I. Paul's Circumstances 1:1–30

II. Christ's Example 2:1–30

III. Living for Christ 3:1—4:23

Greeting

Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops[a] and deacons:

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thankfulness and Prayer

3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ; 7 just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. 8 For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, 10 that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, 11 being filled with the fruits of righteousness which *are* by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Christ Is Preached

12 But I want you to know, brethren, that the things *which happened* to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, 13 so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; 14 and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

15 Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: 16 The former[a] preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; 17 but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. 18 What then? Only *that* in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.

To Live Is Christ

19 For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, 20 according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. 22 But if *I* live on in the flesh, this *will mean* fruit from *my* labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 For[a] I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better. 24 Nevertheless to remain in the flesh *is* more needful for

1:1 [a]Literally *overseers* **1:16** [a]NU-Text reverses the contents of verses 16 and 17. **1:23** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *But.*

Life Lessons

Philippians 1:1—2:30

SITUATION
Paul pointed to Jesus as the ultimate example of servanthood and selflessness.

OBSERVATION
Imitate Jesus Christ, the humble servant of God. Jesus gave up His rights so that we could be saved.

INSPIRATION
We love to be with the ones we love.

The four-year-old running up the sidewalk into the arms of Grandpa.

The cup of coffee with Mom before the rest of the house awakes.

That moment when, for a moment, everyone is quiet as we hold hands around the table and thank God for family and friends and pumpkin pie.

We love to be with the ones we love.

May I remind you? So does God. He loves to be with the ones He loves. How else do you explain what He did? Between Him and us there was a distance—a great span. And He couldn't bear it. He couldn't stand it. So He did something about it.

Before coming to the earth, [Christ] "being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:6, 7). Why? Why did Jesus travel so far?

I was asking myself that question when I spotted the squirrels outside my window. A family of black-tailed squirrels has made

its home amid the roots of the tree north of my office. We've been neighbors for three years now. They watch me peck the keyboard. I watch them store their nuts and climb the trunk. We're mutually amused. I could watch them all day. Sometimes I do.

But I've never considered becoming one of them. The squirrel world holds no appeal to me. Who wants to sleep next to a hairy rodent with beady eyes? (No comments from you wives who feel you already do.) Give up the Rocky Mountains, bass fishing, weddings, and laughter for a hole in the ground and a diet of dirty nuts? Count me out.

But count Jesus in. What a world He left. Our classiest mansion would be a tree trunk to Him. Earth's finest cuisine would be walnuts on heaven's table. And the idea of becoming a squirrel with claws and tiny teeth and a furry tail? It's nothing compared to God becoming a one-celled embryo and entering the womb of Mary.

But He did. The God of the universe kicked against the wall of a womb, was born into the poverty of a peasant, and spent His first night in the feed trough of a cow. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). The God of the universe left the glory of heaven and moved into the neighborhood. Our neighborhood! Who could have imagined He would do such a thing.

Why? He loves to be with the ones He loves. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God views service and humility as strengths, not weaknesses. What steps in your relationships can you take to show greater

you. 25 And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, 26 that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.

Striving and Suffering for Christ

27 Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation,[a] and that from God. 29 For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, 30 having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear *is* in me.

Unity Through Humility

2 Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. 3 *Let* nothing *be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

The Humbled and Exalted Christ

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross. 9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Light Bearers

12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

14 Do all things without complaining and disputing, 15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

17 Yes, and if I am being poured out *as a drink offering* on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18 For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

1:28 [a] NU-Text reads *of your salvation.*

Timothy Commended

19 But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that
I also may be encouraged when I know your state. 20 For I have no
one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. 21 For all seek
their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. 22 But you know
his proven character, that as a son with *his* father he served with me
in the gospel. 23 Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see
how it goes with me. 24 But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also
come shortly.

Epaphroditus Praised

25 Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my
brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and
the one who ministered to my need; 26 since he was longing for you
all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. 27 For
indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him,
and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon
sorrow. 28 Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see
him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. 29 Receive him
therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem;
30 because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding
his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.

All for Christ

3 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same
things to you *is* not tedious, but for you *it is* safe.

2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!
3 For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit,[a] rejoice
in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, 4 though I also
might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have
confidence in the flesh, I more so: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the
stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews;
concerning the law, a Pharisee; 6 concerning zeal, persecuting the
church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for
Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the
knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss
of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and
be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the
law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which
is from God by faith; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His
resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed
to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from
the dead.

Pressing Toward the Goal

12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I
press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid
hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended;
but one thing *I do,* forgetting those things which are behind and

3:3 [a] NU-Text and M-Text read *who worship in the Spirit of God.*

humility? How can you expand your service to others?

EXPLORATION
Humility of Jesus—Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 11:29; John 13:5; 2 Corinthians 8:9.

Life Lessons

Philippians 3:1–21

SITUATION
Paul reminded the Philippians that Christ guaranteed their position through faith alone.

OBSERVATION
As we know Christ more, we discover the insignificance of worldly treasures. Our true goal should be to know Christ and His power.

INSPIRATION
I was glad to see the plastic ball pit. . . . It's a large, covered, shady, cool, soothing pavilion. . . . But rather than being filled with water, it is loaded with balls—thousands and thousands of plastic, colorful, light-weight balls.

Three-year-old Andrea, however, had a few difficulties. As soon as she took one step into the pit, she filled her arms with balls. . . .

Andrea took a step and fell. . . . She began to cry. I walked over to the edge of the pit. "Andrea," I said gently, "let go of the balls, and you can walk."

"No!" she screamed, wiggling and submerging herself beneath the balls. I reached in and pulled her up. She was still clutching her armful of treasures. . . .

Andrea's determination to hold those balls is nothing compared to the vise-grips we put on life. . . . Try prying our fingers away

reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

15 Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. 16 Nevertheless, to *the degree* that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule,[a] let us be of the same mind.

Our Citizenship in Heaven

17 Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. 18 For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 whose end *is* destruction, whose god *is their* belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things. 20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

4 Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.

Be United, Joyful, and in Prayer

2 I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 And[a] I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names *are* in the Book of Life.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord *is* at hand.

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Meditate on These Things

8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. 9 The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

Philippian Generosity

10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. 11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ[a] who strengthens me.

3:16 [a]NU-Text omits *rule* and the rest of the verse. **4:3** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *Yes*. **4:13** [a]NU-Text reads *Him who*.

from our earthly treasures. . . . The way we clutch our possessions and our pennies, you'd think we couldn't live without them.

Ouch.

Jesus' promise is comprehensive: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" [Matthew 5:6]. . . .

Blessed are those, then, who hold their earthly possessions in open palms. . . . Blessed are those who are totally dependent upon Jesus for their joy. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you find yourself taking pride in your friends, career, talents, abilities, or position? Tell God today that you treasure him most of all.

EXPLORATION

Treasures on Earth—Matthew 6:21; 13:44; Luke 14:33; 2 Corinthians 4:18.

Life Lessons

Philippians 4:1–23

SITUATION

Paul expressed joy and thanked the Philippians for their support. In addition to earlier gifts, they willingly sent financial support with Epaphroditus for Paul during his imprisonment.

OBSERVATION

God knows our needs and promises to provide for them. We are to trust Him with an attitude of thanksgiving and find contentment in what we are given.

INSPIRATION

There are times when the one thing you want is the one thing you never get. You're not being picky or demanding; you're only

Heaven (Part 1)

The only ultimate disaster that can befall us, I have come to realize, is to feel ourselves to be home on earth. As long as we are aliens, we cannot forget our true homeland.

Unhappiness on earth cultivates a hunger for heaven. By gracing us with a deep dissatisfaction, God holds our attention. The only tragedy, then, is to be satisfied prematurely. To settle for earth. To be content in a strange land. . . .

We are not happy here because we are not at home here. We are not happy here because we are not supposed to be happy here. We are "like foreigners and strangers in this world" (1 Peter 2:11).

Take a fish and place him on the beach. Watch his gills gasp and scales dry. Is he happy? No! How do you make him happy? Do you cover him with a mountain of cash? Do you get a beach chair and sunglasses? Do you bring him a *Playfish* magazine and martini? Do you wardrobe him in double breasted fins and people-skinned shoes?

Of course not. Then how do you make him happy? You put him back in his element. You put him back in the water. He will never be happy on the beach simply because he was not made for the beach. And you will never be completely happy on earth simply because you were not made for earth. Oh, you will have moments of joy. You will catch glimpses of light. You will know moments or even days of peace. But they simply do not compare with the happiness that lies ahead.

Study Guide

Read Philippians 3:17–21.

- What is your favorite hobby or activity? Why do you enjoy it?
- What do you consider the greatest source of pain in life?
- Where do people look for satisfaction?
- What happens to us when we depend on people or objects to make us happy?
- When are you most likely to feel "at home" on earth?
- How is the happiness that God gives different from what the world offers?
- What is your greatest hope of heaven?
- How does your confidence in God help you face life's challenges?

14 Nevertheless you have done well that you
shared in my distress. 15 Now you Philippians
know also that in the beginning of the gospel,
when I departed from Macedonia, no church
shared with me concerning giving and receiv-
ing but you only. 16 For even in Thessalonica
you sent *aid* once and again for my necessi-
ties. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the
fruit that abounds to your account. 18 Indeed I
have all and abound. I am full, having received
from Epaphroditus the things *sent* from you,
a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacri-
fice, well pleasing to God. 19 And my God shall
supply all your need according to His riches
in glory by Christ Jesus. 20 Now to our God and
Father *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

Greeting and Blessing

21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The
brethren who are with me greet you. 22 All the
saints greet you, but especially those who are
of Caesar's household.

23 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with
you all.[a] Amen.

4:23 [a]NU-Text reads *your spirit.*

obeying his command to "let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6). All you want is an open door or an extra day or an answered prayer, for which you will be thankful.

And so you pray and wait.

No answer.

You pray and wait.

No answer.

You pray and wait.

May I ask a very important question? What if God says no?

What if the request is delayed or even denied? When God says no to you, how will you respond? If God says, "I've given you my grace, and that is enough," will you be content?

Content. That's the word. A state of heart in which you would be at peace if God gave you nothing more than He already has. Test yourself with this question: What if God's only gift to you were His grace to save you? Would you be content? You beg Him to save the life of your child. You plead with Him to keep your business afloat. You implore Him to remove the cancer from your body. What if His answer is, "My grace is enough"? Would you be content?

You see, from heaven's perspective, grace is enough. If God did nothing more than save us from hell, could anyone complain? If God saved our souls and then left us to spend our lives leprosy-struck on a deserted island, would He be unjust? Having been given eternal life, dare we grumble at an aching body? Having been given heavenly riches, dare we bemoan earthly poverty?

Let me be quick to add, God has not left you with "just salvation." If you have eyes to read these words, hands to hold this book, the means to own this volume, He has already given you grace upon grace. The vast majority of us have been saved and then blessed even more!

But there are those times when God, having given us His grace, hears our appeals and says, "My grace is sufficient for you." Is He being unfair?

In *God Came Near* I've told how our oldest daughter fell into a swimming pool when she was two years old. A friend saw her and pulled her to safety. What I didn't tell was what happened the next morning in my prayer time. I made a special effort to record my gratitude in my journal. I told God how wonderful He was for saving her. As clearly as if God Himself were speaking, this question came to mind: *Would I be less wonderful had I let her drown? Would I be any less a good God for calling her home? Would I still be receiving your praise this morning had I not saved her?*

Is God still a good God when He says no? (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Make a mental list of how God has provided for you in the past. Use that as the basis for recognizing how He will provide for your needs in the future. Instead of complaining or worrying, take your requests directly to the Lord.

EXPLORATION

Contentment—Psalm 23:1; Matthew 6:25–34; 1 Timothy 6:6–8.

THE BOOK OF

COLOSSIANS

INTRODUCTION

To qualify for welfare, you have to admit you're poor.

To qualify for bankruptcy, you have to admit you are broke.

To be admitted to a hospital, you have to admit you're sick.

And to go to heaven, you have to admit you are hellbound.

We're willing to do the first three, but the fourth? That's a tough one. That's enough to trip up a fellow. Not easy for a decent guy to admit he's a sinner. Hard for a pretty good girl to confess spiritual destitution.

Oh, it isn't at first. When we first meet Christ. When life is a mess and the future is bleak. When we don't have anything to lose because we've lost it all. It's not hard to admit it at first.

But then, by God's grace, things get better. Bills get paid. The dog comes home. The pantry gets full. The face we see in the morning mirror has a smile on it. And with time, the person in the mirror grows a bit proud. A bit puffy. A bit, shall we say . . . cocky?

We forget where we were. We forget what God gave. We gradually begin to think that God is lucky to have us on His side. We begin to see salvation not as a toss of the life preserver to the sinking but as a journey in a rowboat: God's grace handling one oar and our good deeds handling the other. It's not that Jesus isn't necessary, it's just that Jesus isn't enough.

Slowly, deftly, we begin believing in the doctrine of *salvation by Jesus plus.* Jesus plus good deeds. Jesus plus the right doctrine. Jesus plus the right Bible translation. Jesus plus the right charitable activities.

Or in the case of the church in Colosse, Jesus plus the right religious feast, New Moon Festival, and Sabbath Day. To the Christians in Colosse, the right ritual was just as important as the right Savior.

Paul would have none of this. He denounced the philosophy as heretical and stated in no uncertain terms that if we are saved it is because God rescued us and not because we learned to swim. God is the verb and we are the noun. God does the saving and we do the receiving.

All we do is accept it. We might as well admit it.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Paul

Date Written: c. A.D. 60

Key Themes:

- Faith, love, and hope are key to following Christ.
- In Christ Jesus, we have been offered freedom.
- Because of Jesus, Christians can be as in touch with the next world as this one.

Key Verse:

"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1).

Contents:

I. Christ Is Superior 1:1—2:3
II. Freedom in Christ 2:4–23
III. Lifestyle of Faith 3:1—4:6
IV. Closing Greetings 4:7–18

Life Lessons

Colossians 1:1—2:5

SITUATION
Paul's letter gave tribute to the power and glory of Christ. While commending the Colossians for their actions, he reminded them that Christ's power comes not from what we know, but who we know—Jesus Christ.

OBSERVATION
God provides salvation for anyone who will take it. God doesn't require that we know hidden secrets or certain inside information to accept Christ's message and enjoy eternal life.

INSPIRATION
When God chose to reveal Himself, He did so (surprise of surprises) through a human body. The tongue that called forth the dead was a human one. The hand that touched the leper had dirt under its nails. The feet upon which the woman wept were calloused and dusty. And His tears . . . oh, don't miss the tears . . . they came from a heart as broken as yours or mine ever has been.

So, people came to Him. My, how they came to Him! They came at night; they touched Him as He walked down the street; they followed Him around the sea; they invited Him into their homes and placed their children at His feet. Why? Because He refused to be a statue in a cathedral or a priest in an elevated pulpit. He chose instead to be Jesus.

. . . There were those who revered Him. But there was not one person who considered Him too holy, too divine, or too celestial

Greeting

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ *who are* in Colosse:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.[a]

Their Faith in Christ

3 We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; 5 because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as *it has* also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit,[a] as *it is* also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; 7 as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, 8 who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.

Preeminence of Christ

9 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; 10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him,* being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. 13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14 in whom we have redemption through His blood,[a] the forgiveness of sins.

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

Reconciled in Christ

19 For it pleased *the Father that* in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

21 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and

1:2 [a]NU-Text omits *and the Lord Jesus Christ.* **1:6** [a]NU-Text and M-Text add *and growing.* **1:14** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *through His blood.*

above reproach in His sight— [23]if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Sacrificial Service for Christ

[24]I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, [25]of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, [26]the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. [27]To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which[a] is Christ in you, the hope of glory. [28]Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. [29]To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

Not Philosophy but Christ

2 For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, [2]that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and *attaining* to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and[a] of Christ, [3]in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

[4]Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. [5]For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your *good* order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

[6]As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, [7]rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it[a] with thanksgiving.

[8]Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. [9]For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; [10]and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

Not Legalism but Christ

[11]In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins[a] of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, [12]buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with *Him* through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. [13]And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, [14]having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us.

1:27 [a]M-Text reads *who.* **2:2** [a]NU-Text omits *both of the Father and.* **2:7** [a]NU-Text omits *in it.* **2:11** [a]NU-Text omits *of the sins.*

to touch. There was not one person who was reluctant to approach Him for fear of being rejected.

Remember. It is man who creates the distance. It is Jesus who builds the bridge. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Pray this week that God will spark new love for Him in your heart. Don't let this next week pass without finding a way of telling someone else about the Good News of God's love.

EXPLORATION

Love—John 3:16; 13:34; Ephesians 3:15–18; 1 John 4:9, 10.

Life Lessons

Colossians 2:6–23

SITUATION

Many distractions surround us, even religious ones or church-centered activities. The center of our faith, however, should always be Jesus Christ.

OBSERVATION

Followers of Christ do not become sidetracked by the insights of religious cults or modern philosophies. Only one person warrants our allegiance and trust—Jesus.

INSPIRATION

"For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9). Jesus was not a godlike man, nor a manlike God. He was God-man.

Midwifed by a carpenter.

Bathed by a peasant girl.

The maker of the world with a bellybutton.

The author of the Torah being taught the Torah.

Heaven's human. And because He was, we are left with scratch-your-head, double-blink, what's-wrong-

with-this-picture? moments like these: Bordeaux instead of H2O.

A cripple sponsoring the town dance.

A sack lunch satisfying five thousand tummies.

And, most of all, a grave: guarded by soldiers, sealed by a rock, yet vacated by a three-days-dead man.

What do we do with such moments?

What do we do with such a *person?* We applaud men for doing good things. We enshrine God for doing great things. But when a man does God things?

One thing is certain, we can't ignore Him. Why would we want to? If these moments are factual, if the claim of Christ is actual, then He was, at once, man and God.

There He was, the single most significant person who ever lived. Forget MVP; He is the entire league. The head of the parade? Hardly. No one else shares the street. Who comes close? Humanity's best and brightest fade like dime-store rubies next to Him.

Dismiss Him? We can't.

Resist Him? Equally difficult. Don't we need a God-man Savior? A just-God Jesus could make us but not understand us. A just-man Jesus could love us but never save us. But a God-man Jesus? Near enough to touch. Strong enough to trust. A next door Savior.

A Savior found by millions to be irresistible. Nothing compares to "the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8). (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

If unusual religious rituals have made you feel uneasy, or scholars have put your mind in a maze, don't be troubled. Keep your focus

And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

16 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. 18 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in *false* humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not[a] seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase *that is* from God.

20 Therefore,[a] if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as *though* living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations— 21 "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," 22 which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, *false* humility, and neglect of the body, *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

Not Carnality but Christ

3 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, 7 in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, 10 and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, 11 where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free, but Christ *is* all and in all.

Character of the New Man

12 Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do.* 14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. 15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. 17 And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in

2:18 [a]NU-Text omits *not.* **2:20** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *Therefore.*

Change

Where did we get the idea we can't change? From whence come statements such as, "It's just my nature to worry," or "I'll always be pessimistic. I'm just that way," or "I have a bad temper. I can't help the way I react"? Who says? Would we make similar statements about our bodies? "It's just my nature to have a broken leg. I can't do anything about it." Of course not. If our bodies malfunction, we seek help. Shouldn't we do the same with our hearts? Shouldn't we seek aid for our sour attitudes? Can't we request treatment for our selfish tirades? Of course we can. Jesus can change our hearts. He wants us to have a heart like His.

Can you imagine a better offer?

The heart of Jesus was pure. . . .

Jesus' heart was peaceful. . . .

His heart was purposeful. . . .

His heart was spiritual. . . .

God's plan for you is nothing short of a new heart. If you were a car, God would want control of your engine. If you were a computer, God would claim the software and the hard drive. If you were an airplane, He'd take His seat in the cockpit. But you are a person, so God wants to change your heart.

Study Guide

Read Colossians 3:12–17.

- List several excuses people typically give for not changing.
- To what extent are we able to fix or change ourselves apart from God?
- What kinds of tools does God use to make our hearts more like Jesus' heart?
- How does Christ's death on the cross enable us to change?
- List some practical benefits of living good and holy lives.
- How can a person figure out what he or she is holding back from God?
- What is one specific change you can make in your daily routine to become more like Christ?
- What happens to us when we surrender our hearts to God?
- What motivates you to continue striving to imitate Jesus?

on Christ through prayer, Bible reading, and Christian fellowship.

EXPLORATION
Obedience—Luke 17:7–10; 1 John 2:6.

Life LESSONS

Colossians 3:1—4:1

SITUATION
Paul provided the Colossian church with guidelines for proper conduct. Paul needed to remind the Colossians whom they served.

OBSERVATION
A deep personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ will transform every area of our lives.

INSPIRATION
God . . . changes the man by changing the mind. And how does it happen? By doing what you are doing right now. Considering the glory of Christ. "We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

To behold Him is to become like Him. As Christ dominates your thoughts, He changes you from one degree of glory to another until—hang on!—you are ready to live with Him.

Heaven is the land of sinless minds. Virus-free thinking. Absolute trust. No fear or anger. Shame and second-guessing are practices of a prior life. Heaven will be wonderful, not because the streets are gold, but because our thoughts will be pure.

So what are you waiting on? Apply God's antivirus. "Set your mind on things

the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

The Christian Home

18 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.
20 Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.
21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.
22 Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. 23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for[a] you serve the Lord Christ. 25 But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.

4 Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Christian Graces

2 Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; 3 meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, 4 that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

5 Walk in wisdom toward those *who are* outside, redeeming the time. 6 *Let* your speech always *be* with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

Final Greetings

7 Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. 8 I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he[a] may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts, 9 with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is *one* of you. They will make known to you all things which *are happening* here.

10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), 11 and Jesus who is called Justus. These *are my* only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me.

12 Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete[a] in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal[a] for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis. 14 Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you. 15 Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that *is* in his[a] house.

3:24 [a]NU-Text omits *for.* **4:8** [a]NU-Text reads *you may know our circumstances and he may.* **4:12** [a]NU-Text reads *fully assured.* **4:13** [a]NU-Text reads *concern.* **4:15** [a]NU-Text reads *Nympha . . . her house.*

Closing Exhortations and Blessing

16 Now when this epistle is read among you,
see that it is read also in the church of the
Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the
epistle from Laodicea. 17 And say to Archippus,
"Take heed to the ministry which you have
received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."
18 This salutation by my own hand—Paul.
Remember my chains. Grace *be* with you.
Amen.

above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2). Give Him your best thoughts, and see if He doesn't change your mind. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Is your relationship with Jesus noticeable by your words? Ask God for a vocabulary that reflects love for others without any bitterness or hate.

EXPLORATION
Becoming Like Christ—Acts 3:19; Romans 5:1–5; 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; 2 Corinthians 1:21, 22; 1 Peter 3:8.

Colossians 4:2–18

SITUATION
Paul concluded his letter with some final practical advice and greetings.

OBSERVATION
Christians who desire to share their faith must pray and watch for opportunities.

INSPIRATION
If people love you at 6:30 in the morning, one thing is sure: They love *you*. They don't love your title. They don't love your style. They don't love your accomplishments. They just love you. . . .

Sounds like God's love.

"He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified," wrote another [Hebrews 10:14].

Underline the word "perfected." Note that the phrase is not "made better." Not "improving." Not "on the upswing." God doesn't improve; He perfects. He doesn't enhance; He completes. What does the perfect person lack?

Now I realize that there's a sense in which we're imperfect. We still err. We still stumble. We still do exactly what we don't want to do. And that part of us is, according to the verse, "being made holy."

But when it comes to our position before God, we're perfect. When He sees each of us, He sees one who has been made perfect through the One who is perfect—Jesus Christ. . . .

You are absolute perfection. Flawless. Without defects or mistakes. Unsullied. Unrivaled. Unmarred. Peerless. Virgin pure. Undeserved yet unreserved perfection.

No wonder heaven applauds when you wake up. A masterpiece has stirred. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Do you share the message of the Lord Jesus with others? Pray and ask God to give you opportunities to tell others about Jesus, especially those you encounter regularly. Be sure that nothing in your daily conversation contradicts the message you proclaim. Be set apart from non-Christians by what you say.

EXPLORATION
Making the Most of Opportunity—John 9:4; Acts 21:37—22:1; Ephesians 5:15, 16.

THE BOOK OF

1 THESSALONIANS

INTRODUCTION

In the third century, St. Cyprian wrote to a friend named Donatus:

This seems a cheerful world, Donatus, when I view it from this fair garden under the shadow of these vines. But if I climbed some great mountain and looked out over the wide lands, you know very well what I would see; brigands on the high road, pirates on the seas, in the amphitheaters men murdered to please the applauding crowds, under all roofs misery and selfishness. It really is a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world.

Yet, in the midst of it, I have found a quiet and holy people. They have discovered a joy which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of this sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are Christians . . . and I am one of them (Gordon MacDonald, *Forging a Realworld Faith*).

What a compliment! *A quiet and holy people.* Is there any phrase that captures the essence of the faith any better? *A quiet and holy people.*

Quiet.

Not obnoxious. Not boastful. Not demanding. Just quiet. Contagiously quiet.

Holy.

Set apart. Pure. Decent. Honest. Wholesome. Holy. A quiet and holy people.

Paul urges the same from us.

"Aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing" (4:11, 12).

A quiet and holy people. That describes the church in Thessalonica. May that describe the church today.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Paul

Date Written: c. A.D. 50

Key Themes:

- We should live in preparation for Christ's return.
- God wants holy and pure worship.
- The time of Christ's return will be unpredictable.
- How we live our everyday lives, matters.

Key Verses:

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18).

Contents:

I. Paul's Reflections 1:1—3:13

II. Paul's Instructions 4:1—5:28

Greeting

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.[a]

Their Good Example

[2]We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, [3]remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, [4]knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. [5]For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

[6]And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, [7]so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. [8]For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. [9]For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, [10]and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Paul's Conduct

2 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. [2]But even[a] after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. [3]For our exhortation *did* not *come* from error or uncleanness, nor *was it* in deceit.

[4]But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. [5]For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God *is* witness. [6]Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. [7]But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing *mother* cherishes her own children. [8]So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. [9]For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.

[10]You *are* witnesses, and God *also,* how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; [11]as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged[a] every one of

1:1 [a]NU-Text omits *from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* **2:2** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *even.* **2:11** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *implored.*

Life Lessons

1 Thessalonians 1:1–10

SITUATION

Paul and Silas preached in Thessalonica and helped many new Christians. They left quickly because of persecution from the Jews (Acts 17) and could not return. The church in Thessalonica faced persecution. Paul wrote with encouragement and instructions for proper living.

OBSERVATION

The Thessalonians were commended for their faith and good works. They became an example of faith and love to all believers.

INSPIRATION

You came home cranky because a deadline got moved up. She came home grumpy because the day care forgot to give your five-year-old her throat medicine. Each of you was wanting a little sympathy from the other, but neither got any. So there you sit at the dinner table—cranky and grumpy—with little Emily. Emily folds her hands to pray (as she has been taught), and the two of you bow your heads (but not your hearts) and listen. From where this prayer comes, God only knows.

"God, it's Emily. How are you? I'm fine, thank you. Mom and Dad are mad. I don't know why. We've got birds and toys and mash potatoes and each other. Maybe you can get them to stop being mad? Please do, or it's just gonna be you and me having any fun tonight. Amen."

The prayer is answered before it's finished, you both look up in the middle and

laugh at the end and shake your heads and say you're sorry. And you both thank God for the little voice who reminded you about what matters.

That's what "lovebursts" do . . . Lovebursts. Spontaneous affection. Tender moments of radiant love. Ignited devotion. Explosions of tenderness . . . They remind you about what matters. A telegram delivered to the back door of the familiar, telling you to treasure the treasure you've got while you've got it. A whisper from an angel, or someone who sounds like one, reminding you that what you have is greater than what you want and that what is urgent is not always what matters. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you an example of faith and love to the people around you? Do you have a reputation for being faithful? What attitudes are typical of people whose faith you respect?

EXPLORATION

Being an Example—Acts 17:1–9; 1 Corinthians 11:1; 2 Corinthians 2:14–17; 4:1–3; 1 Timothy 4:12.

Life LESSONS

1 Thessalonians 2:1—3:13

SITUATION

Paul encouraged Believers to be dedicated to God despite trying circumstances.

OBSERVATION

Dedicate your life to God. Speak with empathy, give with generosity, treat others gently.

you, as a father *does* his own children, 12 that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

Their Conversion

13 For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. 14 For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they *did* from the Judeans, 15 who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, 16 forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up *the measure of* their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

Longing to See Them

17 But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. 18 Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us. 19 For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy.

Concern for Their Faith

3 Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, 2 and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, 3 that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. 4 For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. 5 For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.

Encouraged by Timothy

6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also *to see* you— 7 therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. 8 For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.

9 For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, 10 night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?

Prayer for the Church

11 Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. 12 And may the Lord make you increase and

abound in love to one another and to all, just as we *do* to you, 13 so that
He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God
and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

Plea for Purity

4 Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that
you should abound more and more, just as you received from us
how you ought to walk and to please God; 2 for you know what com-
mandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should
abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should know how
to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in passion
of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 that no one should
take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the
Lord *is* the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testi-
fied. 7 For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. 8 There-
fore he who rejects *this* does not reject man, but God, who has also
given[a] us His Holy Spirit.

A Brotherly and Orderly Life

9 But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should
write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one
another; 10 and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in
all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more
and more; 11 that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own
business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you,
12 that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and *that*
you may lack nothing.

The Comfort of Christ's Coming

13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those
who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.
14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will
bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.[a]

15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are
alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means pre-
cede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from
heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the
trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who
are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the
clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with
the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

The Day of the Lord

5 But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no
need that I should write to you. 2 For you yourselves know per-
fectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3 For
when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes
upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall
not escape. 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day

4:8 [a]NU-Text reads *who also gives.* **4:14** [a]Or *those who through Jesus sleep*

INSPIRATION

Each of us should lead a life stirring enough to start a movement. We should yearn to change the world. We should love unquenchably, dream unfalteringly, and work unceasingly.

We should close our ears to the manifold voices of compromise and perch ourselves on the branch of truth. We should champion the value of people, proclaim the forgiveness of God, and claim the promise of heaven.

Will we see a movement occur? Perhaps and perhaps not. Movements never run their course in one generation. The great revivals and reformations that dot the history of humanity were never the work of just one person. Every movement is the sum of visionaries who have gone before, generations of uncompromised lives and non-negotiated truths. Let's live lives stirring and forceful enough to cause a movement. A true mark of a visionary is his willingness to lay down his life for those whom he'll never see. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What gets you excited: your team winning the World Series? Your country winning the Olympic gold? Getting elected to the PTA presidency? Do you get as excited about seeing others take steps in their Christian journey? Pray that God would direct your natural passions to rejoice in His successes.

EXPLORATION

Right Living—Colossians 2:6, 7; 3:2; 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 3:8.

Grief

We don't like to say good-bye to those we love.

But we have to. Try as we might to avoid it, as reluctant as we are to discuss it, death is a very real part of life. Each one of us must release the hand of one we love into the hand of one we have not seen.

Scripture is surprisingly quiet about this phase of our lives. When speaking about the period between the death of the body and the resurrection of the body, the Bible doesn't shout; it just whispers. But at the confluence of these whispers, a firm voice is heard. This authoritative voice assures us that, at death, the Christian immediately enters into the presence of God and enjoys conscious fellowship with the Father and with those who have gone before.

Where do I get such ideas?

"For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better" (Philippians 1:23).

The language here suggests an immediate departure of the soul after death.

Isn't this the promise that Jesus gave the thief on the Cross? "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).

If you'll celebrate a marriage anniversary alone this year, He speaks to you. If your child made it to heaven before making it to kindergarten, He speaks to you. If you lost a loved one in violence, if you learned more than you want to know about disease, if your dreams were buried as they lowered the casket, God speaks to you. He speaks to all of us who have stood or will stand in the soft dirt near an open grave. God transforms our hopeless grief into hope-filled grief. How? By telling us that we will see our loved ones again.

Study Guide

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:3.

- Describe someone you are looking forward to seeing when you get to heaven.
- Describe the experience of someone who has been with a dying person when they passed from this life to the next.
- What do you imagine you will experience when you take your last breath here on earth?
- How do you respond to the fact that when Jesus comes back for you He'll bring with Him the Christians you have lost through death?
- How do you feel about the fact that earthly marriages won't have the same meaning in heaven as they do on earth?
- What other relationships, besides marriages, do you think will be different in heaven?
- How does the promise of seeing our deceased loved ones again affect our grieving for them?
- What was the best comfort someone gave you at a time of loss?
- Why is it so difficult to say good-bye to those we love, even knowing we'll be reunited one day in heaven?
- What are you most looking forward to about heaven?

should overtake you as a thief. [5]You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. [6]Therefore let us not sleep, as others *do,* but let us watch and be sober. [7]For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. [8]But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and *as* a helmet the hope of salvation. [9]For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, [10]who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

[11]Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

Various Exhortations

[12]And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, [13]and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

[14]Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. [15]See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

[16]Rejoice always, [17]pray without ceasing, [18]in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

[19]Do not quench the Spirit. [20]Do not despise prophecies. [21]Test all things; hold fast what is good. [22]Abstain from every form of evil.

Blessing and Admonition

[23]Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. [24]He who calls you *is* faithful, who also will do *it.*

[25]Brethren, pray for us.

[26]Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.

[27]I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy[a] brethren.

[28]The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. Amen.

5:27 [a]NU-Text omits *holy.*

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1 Thessalonians 4:1—5:28

SITUATION

Paul expressed to the Thessalonians that their lives should remain pure as they watched for the second coming of Jesus.

OBSERVATION

Be pure in all that you do. We are commanded to keep ourselves busy. By doing this, we can keep ourselves from evil.

INSPIRATION

An intriguing verse is found in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel."

Have you ever wondered what that command will be? It will be the inaugural word of heaven. It will be the first audible message most have heard from God. It will be the word which closes one age and opens a new one.

I think I know what the command will be. I could very well be wrong, but I think the command which puts an end to the pains of the earth and initiates the joys of heaven will be two words:

"No more."

The King of kings will raise His pierced hand and proclaim, "No more."

The angels will stand and the Father will speak, "No more."

Every person who lives and who ever lived will turn toward the sky and hear God announce, "No more."

No more loneliness. No more tears. No more death. No more sadness. No more crying. No more pain.

As John sat on the Island of Patmos surrounded by sea and separated from friends he dreamt of the day when God would say, "No more."

This same disciple who had heard Jesus speak these words of assurance over a half a century before now knew what they meant. I wonder if he could hear the voice of Jesus in his memory.

"The end will come."

For those who live for this world, that's bad news. But for those who live for the world to come, it's an encouraging promise.

You're on a land mine, my friend, and it's only a matter of time: "For in this world you will have trouble. . . ." Next time you are tossed into a river as you ride the rapids of life, remember His words of assurance.

Those who endure will be saved. The gospel will be preached. The end will come.

You can count on it. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What are the extras in your life? A little extra money? A little extra time? Please God by using your money to help further his kingdom. Spend your extra time building lasting friendships that honor him.

EXPLORATION
Flee Sin—1 Corinthians 6:18. Strength—Ephesians 4:28; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:10–12.

THE BOOK OF

2 THESSALONIANS

INTRODUCTION

I'm seated on an airplane. A grounded airplane.

I'm surrounded by kids. Restless kids.

The kids are mine. The plane is not. The plane is late, however, and my kids are restless. I took them with me on a trip so we'd have a bit of time together. This is more than I had in mind.

They ask the questions you'd expect of a five- and eight-year-old. "Are they bringing drinks yet?"

"When are we going to leave?"

"How much more time?"

"Are we nearly home?"

"Why is it taking so long?"

Questions. Lots of questions. The kind of questions that were circulating through the church at Thessalonica. They, too, were restless. Somewhere they got the idea that Jesus was returning tomorrow so they got ready. Some were selling their homes, others were quitting their work, and all were twiddling their thumbs while awaiting the return of Christ.

Paul gets wind of their assumption and writes them this letter. He urges them not to buy into the reports that the final days have already begun (2:1, 2). Several things still need to occur first (2:3–12); and until they do, their task is to be patient and alert.

No easy task. Human nature tends to one or the other. We tend to be so patient we aren't alert, or so alert we aren't patient. The church becomes a hybrid of the restless and the resting. The result can be squabbling kids. Just like mine. They've done their best to be patient, but after a while a person can only take so much.

"Hang in there," I say.

"We'll be home soon," I urge.

"Try to get along," I exhort.

(I'm starting to sound a lot like Paul.)

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Paul

Date Written: c. A.D. 51

Key Themes:

- With Jesus' return will come accountability.
- We should stay busy with obedient lives until Christ returns.
- We must keep our beliefs, our doctrines, pure.

Key Verse:

"We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

Contents:

I. Encouragement in Persecution 1:1–12

II. Jesus' Return 2:1–17

III. Living in Light of Jesus' Return 3:1–18

Life Lessons

2 Thessalonians 1:1–12

SITUATION
Paul wrote a second letter to the Thessalonians less than a year after the first. The Thessalonians continued to grow in their new faith, but Paul needed to correct misunderstandings that resulted from his teaching on Christ's second coming.

OBSERVATION
Paul thanked God for the Thessalonians' spiritual growth, and he also urged them to persevere through persecution while they awaited Jesus' return.

INSPIRATION
Ah, there it is. There is the question. The Amazon River out of which a thousand fears flow: do we matter? We fear we don't. We fear nothingness, insignificance. We fear evaporation. We fear that in the last tabulation we make no contribution to the final sum. We fear coming and going and no one knowing.

That's why it bothers us when a friend forgets to call or the teacher forgets our name or a colleague takes credit for something we've done or the airline loads us like cattle onto the next flight. They are affirming our deepest trepidation: no one cares, because we aren't worth caring about. For that reason we crave the attention of our spouse or the affirmation of our boss, drop names of important people in conversations, wear college rings on our fingers, and put silicone in our breasts, flashy hubcaps on our cars, grids on our teeth, and silk ties around our necks. . . .

Fear of insignificance

Greeting

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's Final Judgment and Glory

3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, 4 so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, 5 *which is* manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; 6 since *it is* a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, 7 and to *give* you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, 8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 10 when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe,[a] because our testimony among you was believed.

11 Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of *this* calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of *His* goodness and the work of faith with power, 12 that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Great Apostasy

2 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ[a] had come. 3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin[a] is revealed, the son of perdition, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God[a] in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 6 And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He[a] who now restrains *will do so* until He[b] is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. 9 The coming of the *lawless one* is accord-

1:10 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *have believed.* **2:2** [a]NU-Text reads *the Lord.* **2:3** [a]NU-Text reads *lawlessness.* **2:4** [a]NU-Text omits *as God.* **2:7** [a]Or *he* [b]Or *he*

ing to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, 12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Stand Fast

13 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, 14 to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.

16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given *us* everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, 17 comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

Pray for Us

3 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run *swiftly* and be glorified, just as *it is* with you, 2 and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith.

3 But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard *you* from the evil one. 4 And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you.

5 Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

Warning Against Idleness

6 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he[a] received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; 8 nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, 9 not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. 11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. 12 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

13 But *as for* you, brethren, do not grow weary *in* doing good. 14 And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. 15 Yet do not count *him* as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother.

3:6 [a] NU-Text and M-Text read *they.*

creates the result it dreads, arrives at the destination it tries to avoid, facilitates the scenario it disdains. If a basketball player stands at the foul line repeating, "I'll never make the shot, I'll never make the shot," guess what? He'll never make the shot. If you pass your days mumbling, "I'll never make a difference; I'm not worth anything," guess what? You will be sentencing yourself to a life of gloom without parole.

Even more, you are disagreeing with God. Questioning His judgment. Second-guessing His taste. According to Him you were "skillfully wrought" (Psalm 139:15). You were "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). He can't stop thinking about you! If you could count His thoughts of you, "they would be more in number than the sand" (Psalm 139:18).

Why does He love you so much? The same reason the artist loves his paintings or the boat builder loves his vessels. You are His idea. And God has only good ideas. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How would you feel if someone sent a letter to you thanking God for you, boasting of you, and telling you that they were praying for you? We could all use this kind of mail. Write a letter of encouragement to someone this week.

EXPLORATION

Encouragement—Ezra 5:1, 2; Acts 11:23, 24; 14:21, 22; 1 Corinthians 14:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:9–11.

Benediction

16 Now may the Lord of peace Himself give
you peace always in every way. The Lord *be*
with you all.

17 The salutation of Paul with my own hand,
which is a sign in every epistle; so I write.

18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with
you all. Amen.

Life Lessons

2 Thessalonians 2:1—3:18

SITUATION

The term "day of the Lord" means the future, final judgment day. False teachers had told the Thessalonians that this day had already come. Many, therefore, had quit their jobs and were waiting for God to rescue them from suffering and persecution.

OBSERVATION

Paul asked God to encourage and strengthen the Thessalonians. God also gives us hope for the future, and that hope is good and beneficial.

INSPIRATION

How could He [Jesus] get by with such words [John 11:25–27]? Who was He to make such a claim? What qualified Him to offer grace to one woman and a promise of resurrection to another? Simple. He had done what the dove did. He'd crossed the shoreline of the future land and journeyed among the trees. And from the grove of grace He plucked a leaf for the woman. And from the tree of life He pulled a sprig for Martha.

And from both He brings leaves to you. Grace and life. Forgiveness of sin. The defeat of death. This is the hope He gives. This is the hope we need.

In his book *The Grand Essentials,* Ben Patterson tells of an S-4 submarine that sank off the coast of Massachusetts. The entire crew was trapped. Every effort was made to rescue the sailors, but every effort failed. Near the end of the ordeal, a deep-sea diver heard tapping on the steel wall of the sunken sub. As he placed his helmet against the vessel, he realized he was hearing a sailor tap out this question in Morse code: "Is there any hope?"

To the guilty that ask that question, Jesus says, "Yes!"

To the death-struck that ask that question, Jesus answers, "Yes!"

To all the Noahs of the world, to all who search the horizon for a fleck of hope, He proclaims, "Yes!" And He comes. He comes as a dove. He comes bearing fruit from a distant land, from our future home. He comes with a leaf of hope.

Have you received yours? Don't think your ark is too isolated. Don't think your flood is too wide. Your toughest challenge is nothing more than bobby pins and rubber bands to God. *Bobby pins and rubber bands?*

My older sister used to give them to me when I was a child. I would ride my tricycle up and down the sidewalk, pretending that the bobby pins were keys and my trike was a truck. But one day I lost the "keys." Crisis! What was I going to do? My search yielded nothing but tears and fear. But when I confessed my mistake to my sister, she just smiled. Being a decade older, she had a better perspective.

God has a better perspective as well. With all due respect, our severest struggles are, in His view, nothing worse than lost bobby pins and rubber bands. He is not confounded, confused, or discouraged.

Receive His hope, won't you? Receive it because you need it. Receive it so you can share it.

What do you suppose Noah did with his? What do you think he did with the leaf? Did he throw it overboard and forget about it? Do you suppose he stuck it in his pocket and saved it for a scrapbook? Or do you think he let out a whoop and assembled the troops and passed it around like the Hope Diamond it was?

Certainly he whooped. That's what you do with hope. What do you do with olive leaves? You pass them around. You don't stick them in your pocket. You give them to the ones you love. Love always hopes. "Love . . . bears all things, believes all things, *hopes* all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:4–7, emphasis mine).

Love has hope in you. (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you ever find yourself losing hope in this life? Recognize that your hope is based on what God has done for you in Christ. The world provides no hope. Reach out in love and compassion to the lost and let them know of your future hope.

EXPLORATION

Hope—Romans 5:3–5; 8:24, 25; Colossians 1:5; Hebrews 6:18; 1 Peter 1:13.

THE BOOK OF

1 TIMOTHY

INTRODUCTION

Watch a small boy follow his dad through the snow. He stretches to step where his dad stepped. Not an easy task. His small legs extend as far as they can so his feet can fall in his father's prints.

The father, seeing what the son is doing, smiles and begins taking shorter steps, so the son can follow.

It's a picture of discipleship.

In our faith we follow in someone's steps. A parent, a teacher, a hero—none of us are the first to walk the trail. All of us have someone we follow.

In our faith we leave footprints to guide others. A child, a friend, a recent convert. None should be left to walk the trail alone.

It's the principle of discipleship.

Timothy didn't walk the trail alone. He followed in the steps of Paul, his father in the faith. Paul knew he was following. He also knew the snow was getting deep. So he slowed his pace to help. He penned a letter to Timothy, giving him practical advice on how to lead a church.

As a young minister, Timothy was faced with all sorts of challenges. Step by step, Paul patiently instructs him, and in doing so, he instructs us.

A few questions to consider as you read. Who are you following? When you get where you are going, will it be where you intended? Also, what kind of trail are you leaving? If someone follows your steps, will they arrive at the right place?

The message of 1 Timothy urges you: Watch your step.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Paul

Date Written: c. A.D. 62

Key Themes:

- Jesus Christ is the center of the gospel.
- The faith held by the church should be manifested in the behavior of the church.
- Church leaders are expected to live above reproach.
- There is accountability among the church body.

Key Verse:

"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Timothy 6:12).

Contents:

I. Instructions on Right Belief 1:1–20

II. Instructions on Public Worship 2:1—3:16

III. Instructions for Church Leaders 4:1—6:21

Life Lessons

1 Timothy 1:1—2:15

SITUATION
Paul laid down guidelines for proper worship. He emphasized the importance of prayer and orderly worship.

OBSERVATION
Prayer is an important part of public worship.

INSPIRATION
One of our Brazilian church leaders taught me something about earnest prayer. He met Christ during a yearlong stay in a drug-rehab center. His therapy included three one-hour sessions of prayer a day. Patients weren't required to pray, but they were required to attend the prayer meeting. Dozens of recovering drug addicts spent sixty uninterrupted minutes on their knees.

I expressed amazement and confessed that my prayers were short and formal. He invited (dared?) me to meet him for prayer. I did the next day. We knelt on the concrete floor of our small church auditorium and began to talk to God. Change that. I talked; he cried, wailed, begged, cajoled, and pleaded. He pounded his fists on the floor, shook a fist toward heaven, confessed, and reconfessed every sin. He recited every promise in the Bible as if God needed a reminder. He prayed like Moses.

When God determined to destroy the Israelites for their golden calf stunt, "Then Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, and said: 'Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have

Greeting

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our
Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope,

2 To Timothy, a true son in the faith:

Grace, mercy, *and* peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

No Other Doctrine

3 As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus
that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, 4 nor give
heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather
than godly edification which is in faith. 5 Now the purpose of the com-
mandment is love from a pure heart, *from* a good conscience, and
from sincere faith, 6 from which some, having strayed, have turned
aside to idle talk, 7 desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding
neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.

8 But we know that the law *is* good if one uses it lawfully, 9 knowing
this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for *the* law-
less and insubordinate, for *the* ungodly and for sinners, for *the* unholy
and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for
manslayers, 10 for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars,
for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound
doctrine, 11 according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which
was committed to my trust.

Glory to God for His Grace

12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because
He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry, 13 although I
was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but
I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief. 14 And the
grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love
which are in Christ Jesus. 15 This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all
acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of
whom I am chief. 16 However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that
in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to
those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. 17 Now to
the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise,[a] *be*
honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Fight the Good Fight

18 This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the
prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may
wage the good warfare, 19 having faith and a good conscience, which
some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck,
20 of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan
that they may learn not to blaspheme.

1:17 [a] NU-Text reads *to the only God.*

Pray for All Men

2 Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. 3 For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight

brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, "He brought them out to harm them, to kill

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: The Final Payment

"By one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14). No more sacrifice needs to be made. No more deposits are necessary. So complete was the payment that Jesus used a banking term to proclaim your salvation. "It is finished" (John 19:30). *Tetelestai* was a financial term used to announce the final installment, the ultimate payment.

Now, if the task is finished, is anything else required of you? Of course not. If the account is full, what more could you add? Even saying the phrase "forgive our debts" does not earn grace. We repeat the words to remind us of the forgiveness we have, not to attain a forgiveness we need. . . .

For some of you these thoughts about bounced checks and God's grace aren't new, but aren't they precious? Honestly, have you ever been given a gift which compares to God's grace? Finding this treasure of mercy makes the poorest beggar a prince. Missing this gift makes the wealthiest man a pauper.

Again, many of you knew that. I pray the reminder encourages you.

But for others, this is more than good news . . . it is *new* news. You never knew there was a roof of grace. And what a grand roof it is. The tiles are thick and the beams are sturdy. Under it you are shielded from the storms of guilt and shame. Beneath the covering of Christ, no accuser can touch you and no act can condemn you.

Isn't it good to know you don't have to stand outside in the storm anymore?

"But is it big enough for me?" you ask. Well, it was big enough for one who denied Christ (Peter). One who mocked Christ (the thief on the cross). One who persecuted Christ (Paul). Yes, it's big enough for you. Though you've spent a lifetime writing insufficient checks, God has stamped these words on your statement: MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU.

Picture, if you will, a blank check. The amount of the check is "sufficient grace." The signer of the check is Jesus. The only blank line is for the payee. That part is for you. May I urge you to spend a few moments with your Savior receiving this check? Reflect on the work of His grace. Look toward the roof. Its beams are from Calvary and the nails once held a Savior to the Cross. His sacrifice was for you.

Express your thanks for His grace. Whether for the first time or the thousandth, let Him hear you whisper, "Forgive us our debts." And let Him answer your prayer as you imagine writing your name on the check.

Perhaps I best slip out now and leave the two of you to talk. I'll be waiting in the hallway of the Great House of God. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1676.

them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth"? . . . Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self'" (Exodus 32:11–13).

Moses on Mount Sinai is not calm and quiet, with folded hands and a serene expression. He's on his face one minute, in God's the next. He's on his knees, pointing his finger, lifting his hands. Shedding tears. Shredding his cloak. Wrestling like Jacob at Jabbok for the lives of his people.

And God heard him! "So the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people" (v. 14).

Our passionate prayers move the heart of God. "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16). Prayer does not change God's nature; who He is will never be altered. Prayer does, however, impact the flow of history. God has wired His world for power, but He calls on us to flip the switch. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Worship God today and join with other Christians this Sunday in public prayer, singing, and Bible teaching. Let corporate worship become a first priority to you.

EXPLORATION

Worship—1 Chronicles 16:29; Nehemiah 9:2, 3; Psalm 100:2; Jeremiah 7:2, 3; John 4:24.

of God our Savior, 4who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5For *there is* one God and one Mediator between God and men, *the* Man Christ Jesus, 6who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time, 7for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ[a] *and* not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

Men and Women in the Church

8I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; 9in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, 10but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. 11Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. 12And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. 13For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. 15Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

Qualifications of Overseers

3 This *is* a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop,[a] he desires a good work. 2A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; 3not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money,[a] but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; 4one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence 5(for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); 6not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil. 7Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Qualifications of Deacons

8Likewise deacons *must be* reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, 9holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. 10But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being *found* blameless. 11Likewise, *their* wives *must be* reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. 12Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling *their* children and their own houses well. 13For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

The Great Mystery

14These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; 15but if I am delayed, *I write* so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the liv-

2:7 [a]NU-Text omits *in Christ.* **3:1** [a]Literally *overseer* **3:3** [a]NU-Text omits *not greedy for money.*

ing God, the pillar and ground of the truth. 16 And without controversy
great is the mystery of godliness:

God[a] was manifested in the flesh,
Justified in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Preached among the Gentiles,
Believed on in the world,
Received up in glory.

The Great Apostasy

4 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart
from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of
demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience
seared with a hot iron, 3 forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to
abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiv-
ing by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For every creature
of God *is* good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with
thanksgiving; 5 for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

A Good Servant of Jesus Christ

6 If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good
minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the
good doctrine which you have carefully followed. 7 But reject profane
and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. 8 For
bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things,
having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.
9 This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. 10 For to this
end we both labor and suffer reproach,[a] because we trust in the liv-
ing God, who is *the* Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.
11 These things command and teach.

Take Heed to Your Ministry

12 Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers
in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit,[a] in faith, in purity. 13 Till I come,
give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. 14 Do not neglect
the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the
laying on of the hands of the eldership. 15 Meditate on these things;
give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to
all. 16 Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them,
for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

Treatment of Church Members

5 Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort *him* as a father, younger
men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, younger women as
sisters, with all purity.

3:16 [a]NU-Text reads *Who.* **4:10** [a]NU-Text reads *we labor and strive.* **4:12** [a]NU-Text omits *in spirit.*

Life LESSONS

1 Timothy 3:1–16

SITUATION
Paul laid down certain qualifications for selecting leaders in the church. These qualifications would help the church weed out undeserving candidates, develop Christian maturity, and bring glory and honor to God.

OBSERVATION
Leaders must know God's Word and have a mature Christian lifestyle. Every Christian ought to pursue these characteristics. Leaders must already have them.

INSPIRATION
We have two bosses: one who signs our checks and one who saves our souls. The second has keen interest in our workaday world. What if everyone worked with God in mind? Suppose no one worked to satisfy self or please the bottom line but everyone worked to please God.

Many occupations would instantly cease: drug trafficking, thievery, prostitution, nightclub and casino management. Certain careers, by their nature, cannot please God. These would cease.

Certain behaviors would cease as well. If I'm repairing a car for God, I'm not going to overcharge His children. If I'm painting a wall for God, you think I'm going to use paint thinner?

Imagine if everyone worked for the audience of One. Every nurse, thoughtful. Every officer, careful. Every professor, insightful. Every salesperson, delightful. Every teacher, hopeful. Every lawyer, skillful.

Every corner of every chapel, glistening.

Impossible? Not entirely. All we need is someone to start a worldwide revolution. Might as well be us. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Make a list of all the qualifications Paul gave Timothy for Christian leadership. Rate yourself on each item. What three need your attention most? What steps can you take toward maturity? Pray that your family and friends would notice a difference in the next weeks as you sharpen your character.

EXPLORATION
Leadership—Exodus 15:13; Numbers 27:15–17; Deuteronomy 1:9–18; Luke 22:24–27; Titus 1:5–9; Hebrews 13:17–19.

Life LESSONS

1 Timothy 4:1—6:21

SITUATION
False teachers have always blemished the church. The false teachers in the Ephesian church did not believe Jesus was really human. They contradicted Scripture while appearing to be self-disciplined and morally righteous.

OBSERVATION
Christian leaders must be disciplined. They must guard their motives, be faithful to God and His Word, and live commendable lives. A false teacher can easily be detected if the teacher's message differs from the Bible's truth.

INSPIRATION
Christ repeatedly escaped the noise of the crowd in order to hear the voice of

Honor True Widows

3 Honor widows who are really widows. 4 But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and[a] acceptable before God. 5 Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. 6 But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. 7 And these things command, that they may be blameless. 8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

9 Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, *and not unless* she has been the wife of one man, 10 well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.

11 But refuse *the* younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, 12 having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. 13 And besides they learn *to be* idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. 14 Therefore I desire that *the* younger *widows* marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. 15 For some have already turned aside after Satan. 16 If any believing man or[a] woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.

Honor the Elders

17 Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. 18 For the Scripture says, *"You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,"*[a] and, "The laborer *is* worthy of his wages."[b] 19 Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. 20 Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.

21 I charge *you* before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality. 22 Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure.

23 No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.

24 Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding *them* to judgment, but those of some *men* follow later. 25 Likewise, the good works *of some* are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.

Honor Masters

6 Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and *His*

5:4 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *good and.* **5:16** [a]NU-Text omits *man or.*
5:18 [a]Deuteronomy 25:4 [b]Luke 10:7

doctrine may not be blasphemed. 2And those who have believing masters, let them not despise *them* because they are brethren, but rather serve *them* because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things.

Error and Greed

3If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, 4he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, 5useless wranglings[a] of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a *means of* gain. From such withdraw yourself.[b]

6Now godliness with contentment is great gain. 7For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain[a] we can carry nothing out. 8And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 9But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

The Good Confession

11But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. 12Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and *before* Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, 14that you keep *this* commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, 15which He will manifest in His own time, *He who is* the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom *be* honor and everlasting power. Amen.

Instructions to the Rich

17Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18*Let them* do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Guard the Faith

20O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane *and* idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge— 21by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith.

Grace *be* with you. Amen.

6:5 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *constant friction.* [b]NU-Text omits this sentence.
6:7 [a]NU-Text omits *and it is certain.*

God. After His forty-day pause in the wilderness, the people of Capernaum "sought Him and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from leaving them; but He said to them, 'I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent'" (Luke 4:42, 43).

He resisted the undertow of the people by anchoring to the rock of His purpose: employing His uniqueness (to "preach . . . to the other cities also") to make a big deal out of God ("the kingdom of God") everywhere He could.

And aren't you glad He did? Suppose He had heeded the crowd and set up camp in Capernaum, reasoning, "I thought the whole world was My target and the Cross My destiny. But the entire town tells Me to stay in Capernaum. Could all these people be wrong?"

Yes, they could! In defiance of the crowd, Jesus turned His back on the Capernaum pastorate and followed the will of God. Doing so meant leaving some sick people unhealed and some confused people untaught. He said no to good things so He could say yes to the right thing: His unique call.

Not an easy choice for anyone. . . .

What about you? Do you sense a disconnect between your design and daily duties? Are you neglecting your strengths? God may want you to leave your Capernaum, but you're staying. Or He may want you to stay, and you're leaving. How can you know unless you mute the crowd and meet with Jesus in a deserted place? (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

Contentment

Satisfied? That is one thing we are not. We are not satisfied.

We push back from the Thanksgiving table and pat our round bellies. "I'm satisfied," we declare. But look at us a few hours later, back in the kitchen picking the meat from the bone.

We wake up after a good night's rest and hop out of bed. We couldn't go back to sleep if someone paid us. We are satisfied—for a while. But look at us a dozen or so hours later, crawling back in the sheets.

We take a vacation of a lifetime. For years we planned. For years we saved. And off we go. We satiate ourselves with sun, fun, and good food. But we are not even on the way home before we dread the end of the trip and begin planning another.

We are not satisfied.

As a child we say, "If only I were a teenager." As a teen we say, "If only I were an adult." As an adult, "If only I were married." As a spouse, "If only I had kids." As a parent, "If only my kids were grown." In an empty house, "if only the kids would visit." As a retiree in the rocking chair with stiff joints and fading sight, "If only I were a child again."

We are not satisfied. Contentment is a difficult virtue. Why?

Because there is nothing on earth that can satisfy our deepest longing. We long to see God. The leaves of life are rustling with the rumor that we will—and we won't be satisfied until we do.

Study Guide

Read 1 Timothy 6:6–19.

- Describe what brings you the most happiness in life.
- Why is it important to realize that our earthly goods will be worthless in eternity?
- What is the danger in seeking material wealth?
- How can a person find true contentment?
- Why is it difficult to be satisfied with what we have?
- In what way can a desire for more money destroy a person?
- Why is it tempting to trust in our wealth, instead of God?
- On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being very content), how content are you with what you have?

APPLICATION

Are you satisfied with God's plans for you? Are you discontent because you are too young or too old? Impatient because you are not advancing as high as you would like? Frustrated with your restrictions? Go to the desert place and ask Him for guidance. Then listen.

EXPLORATION

Discipline—Proverbs 3:11, 12; 12:1; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Corinthians 2:5–11; Hebrews 12:5–11; Revelation 3:19.

THE BOOK OF

2 TIMOTHY

INTRODUCTION

I have kept the faith.

They have taken everything else. They have taken his freedom—he's locked in a Roman prison. They have taken his possessions—he hasn't even a shawl to keep him warm. They have taken his churches—he will not see them again. They have taken his future—he is sentenced to die.

What do you have left, Paul? What do you have left to show for your life? Had you stayed a Jew in Jerusalem, you'd have a seat of status and a house of retirement. Had you been more compromising, you might have gone unnoticed by the Romans. Had you been less passionate, you might have pastored a church and stayed in one city. But you were too convinced to compromise—too convicted to stay home.

And now, with the verdict rendered and the end in sight, what do you have left?

The old apostle leans forward with eyes twinkling and says, "I have kept the faith" (4:7).

That was the heart of the apostle. And that is the heart of this Epistle. As far as we know, this is the last one he ever wrote. Paul picks up his pen one final time. He knows the end is near, "I am already being poured out as a drink offering," he tells Timothy, his son in the faith (4:6).

But he has no regrets, only counsel—practical, inspirational counsel for young Timothy, who has been left to lead the church in Ephesus. His tenderness for the young minister peeks out from behind every word. "Be diligent," he urges, "to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2:15).

Timothy never had another teacher like Paul. The world has never had another teacher like Paul. He was convinced of two facts—he was once lost but then saved. He spent a lifetime telling every person who would listen.

In the end it cost him everything. For in the end, all he had was his faith. But in the end, his faith was all he needed.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Paul

Date Written: c. A.D. 67

Key Themes:

- The gospel of Christ is worthy of our full commitment.
- The Christian life and ministry will be difficult at times—persevere.
- The Word of God is unique and powerful.
- The life of faith we live will find its rewards in the kingdom of God beyond this life.

Key Verse:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

Contents:

I. Persistence in Present Testing 1:1—2:26

II. Endurance in Future Testing 3:1—4:22

Greeting

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ[a] by the will of God, according to the
promise of life which is in Christ Jesus,

2 To Timothy, a beloved son:

Grace, mercy, *and* peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our
Lord.

Timothy's Faith and Heritage

3 I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as *my* forefathers *did,* as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and
day, 4 greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that
I may be filled with joy, 5 when I call to remembrance the genuine
faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and
your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also. 6 Therefore I
remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying
on of my hands. 7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power
and of love and of a sound mind.

Not Ashamed of the Gospel

8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor
of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel
according to the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called *us* with
a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own
purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time
began, 10 but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior
Jesus Christ, *who* has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, 11 to which I was appointed a preacher,
an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.[a] 12 For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I
have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have
committed to Him until that Day.

Be Loyal to the Faith

13 Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from
me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 14 That good thing
which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

15 This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from
me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. 16 The Lord grant
mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me,
and was not ashamed of my chain; 17 but when he arrived in Rome, he
sought me out very zealously and found *me.* 18 The Lord grant to him
that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day—and you know very
well how many ways he ministered *to me*[a] at Ephesus.

Be Strong in Grace

2 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ
Jesus. 2 And the things that you have heard from me among many

1:1 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *Christ Jesus.* **1:11** [a]NU-Text omits *of the Gentiles.*
1:18 [a]*To me* is from the Vulgate and a few Greek manuscripts.

Life Lessons

2 Timothy 1:1–18

SITUATION
Paul gave hope and encouragement to Timothy. Christians came under increasing persecution from Romans throughout the empire. The pressure to abandon the faith was strong.

OBSERVATION
We must seek strength from the Lord to deal with daily stresses and the pressure to abandon our faith.

INSPIRATION
In our house we call 5:00 P.M. the piranha hour. That's the time of day when everyone wants a piece of Mom. Sara, the baby, is hungry. Andrea wants Mom to read her a book. Jenna wants help with her homework. And I—the ever-loving, ever-sensitive husband—want Denalyn to drop everything and talk to me about my day.

When is your piranha hour? When do people in your world demand much and offer little?

Every boss has had a day in which the requests outnumber the results. There's not a businessperson alive who hasn't groaned as an armada of assignments docks at his or her desk. For the teacher, the piranha hour often begins when the first student enters and ends when the last student leaves.

Piranha hours: parents have them, bosses endure them, secretaries dread them, teachers are besieged by them, and Jesus taught us how to live through them successfully.

When hands extended and voices demanded, Jesus

responded with love. He did so because the code within Him disarmed the alarm. The code is worth noting: "People are precious." (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 3You therefore must endure[a] hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 4No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of *this* life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. 5And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned

2:3 [a]NU-Text reads *You must share.*

Christ Through The Bible

Christ the Savior

Picture the scene. Peter, John, James. They came back. Banking on some zany possibility that the well of forgiveness still had a few drops, they came back. Daring to dream that the master had left them some word, some plan, some direction, they came back.

But little did they know, their wildest dream wasn't wild enough. Just as someone mumbles, "It's no use," they hear a noise. They hear a voice.

"Peace to you."

Every head lifted. Every eye turned. Every mouth dropped open. Someone looked at the door.

It was still locked.

It was a moment the apostles would never forget, a story they would never cease to tell. The stone of the tomb was not enough to keep Him *in*. The walls of the room were not enough to keep Him *out*.

The one betrayed sought His betrayers. What did He say to them? Not "What a bunch of flops!" Not "I told you so." No "Where-were-you-when-I-needed-you?" speeches. But simply one phrase, "Peace be with you." The very thing they didn't have was the very thing He offered: peace.

It was too good to be true! So amazing was the appearance that some were saying, "Pinch me, I'm dreaming" even at the ascension. No wonder they returned to Jerusalem with great joy! No wonder they were always in the temple praising God!

A transformed group stood beside a transformed Peter as he announced some weeks later: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).

No timidity in his words. No reluctance. About three thousand people believed his message.

The apostles sparked a movement. The people became followers of the death-conqueror. They couldn't hear enough or say enough about Him. . . . Christ was their model, their message. They preached "Jesus Christ and Him crucified," not for the lack of another topic, but because they couldn't exhaust this one.

What unlocked the doors of the apostles' hearts?

Simple. They saw Jesus. They encountered the Christ. Their sins collided with their Savior and their Savior won! (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1682.

unless he competes according to the rules. 6 The hardworking farmer
must be first to partake of the crops. 7 Consider what I say, and may[a]
the Lord give you understanding in all things.

8 Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from
the dead according to my gospel, 9 for which I suffer trouble as an evil-
doer, *even* to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained.
10 Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also
may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

11 *This is* a faithful saying:

For if we died with *Him,*
We shall also live with *Him.*
12 If we endure,
We shall also reign with *Him.*
If we deny *Him,*
He also will deny us.
13 If we are faithless,
He remains faithful;
He cannot deny Himself.

Approved and Disapproved Workers

14 Remind *them* of these things, charging *them* before the Lord
not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. 15 Be
diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not
need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. 16 But shun
profane *and* idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodli-
ness. 17 And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and
Philetus are of this sort, 18 who have strayed concerning the truth, say-
ing that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith
of some. 19 Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having
this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who
names the name of Christ[a] depart from iniquity."

20 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver,
but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor.
21 Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a
vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for
every good work. 22 Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness,
faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.
23 But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate
strife. 24 And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all,
able to teach, patient, 25 in humility correcting those who are in oppo-
sition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may
know the truth, 26 and *that* they may come to their senses *and escape*
the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to *do* his will.

Perilous Times and Perilous Men

3 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2 For
men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud,
blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving,
unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of

2:7 [a]NU-Text reads *the Lord will give you.* **2:19** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *the Lord.*

APPLICATION
Do daily stresses cause you to doubt the power of God? Guard your heart against the external influences that attack your faith. Turn to the Lord for wisdom and strength to counter these challenges.

EXPLORATION
Pressure—Genesis 25:32, 33; Judges 6:25–30; Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 4:1; James 1:2–4.

Life LESSONS

2 Timothy 2:1–26

SITUATION
Believers in Timothy's church had lost their focus on Christ. Paul knew that concentrating on Christ and ignoring personal annoyances would help Timothy's problems.

OBSERVATION
Christians, even those enduring suffering, must focus on Jesus the Savior and avoid being distracted by worldly problems.

INSPIRATION
In the shop of a blacksmith, there are three types of tools.

There are tools on the junk pile: outdated, broken, dull, rusty. . . .

There are tools on the anvil: melted down, molten hot, moldable, changeable. . . .

There are tools of usefulness: sharpened, primed, defined, mobile. They lie ready in the blacksmith's tool chest, available to their master, fulfilling their calling. . . .

We are all somewhere in the blacksmith's shop. We are either on the scrap pile, on the anvil, in the Master's hands, or in the tool chest.

(Some of us have been in all three.) . . .

From the shelves to the workbench, from the water to the fire. . . .

I'm sure that somewhere you'll see yourself. . . .

The rubbish pile of broken tools, the anvil of recasting, the hands of the Master—it's a simultaneously joyful and painful voyage.

And for you who make the journey—who leave the heap and enter the fire, dare to be pounded on God's anvil, and doggedly seek to discover your own purpose—take courage, for you await the privilege of being called "God's chosen instruments." (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Is your walk with the Lord obscured by day-to-day annoyances? Remember the priority of your relationship with the Lord and get back on track through prayer, Bible study, and worship.

EXPLORATION

Focus—Judges 15:18; Nehemiah 13:25–29; 2 Corinthians 11:3.

Life Lessons

2 Timothy 3:1—4:22

SITUATION

Paul warned that godlessness and evil schemes would increase as the end of history approached. People would follow false teachers who would tell them what they wanted to hear. Paul's words warned and encouraged Timothy to teach the Scriptures soundly.

OBSERVATION

Christians must guard against deceit by knowing what Scripture teaches.

good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than
lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And
from such people turn away! 6 For of this sort are those who creep
into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down
with sins, led away by various lusts, 7 always learning and never able
to come to the knowledge of the truth. 8 Now as Jannes and Jambres
resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt
minds, disapproved concerning the faith; 9 but they will progress no
further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.

The Man of God and the Word of God

10 But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, pur-
pose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, 11 persecutions, afflic-
tions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what
persecutions I endured. And out of *them* all the Lord delivered me.
12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer per-
secution. 13 But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse,
deceiving and being deceived. 14 But you must continue in the things
which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom
you have learned *them,* 15 and that from childhood you have known
the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation
through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

16 All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for
doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,
17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for
every good work.

Preach the Word

4 I charge *you* therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ,
who will judge the living and the dead at[a] His appearing and His
kingdom: 2 Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season.
Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For
the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but
according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they
will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn *their* ears
away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 5 But you be watch-
ful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill
your ministry.

Paul's Valedictory

6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the
time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have
finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me
the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will
give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have
loved His appearing.

The Abandoned Apostle

9 Be diligent to come to me quickly; 10 for Demas has forsaken me,
having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—

4:1 [a]NU-Text omits *therefore* and reads *and by* for *at*.

Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. 12 And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. 13 Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments.

14 Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. 15 You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words.

16 At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.

The Lord Is Faithful

17 But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. 18 And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve *me* for His heavenly kingdom. To Him *be* glory forever and ever. Amen!

Come Before Winter

19 Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. 20 Erastus stayed in Corinth, but Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick.

21 Do your utmost to come before winter.

Eubulus greets you, as well as Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the brethren.

Farewell

22 The Lord Jesus Christ[a] be with your spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.

4:22 [a]NU-Text omits *Jesus Christ.*

INSPIRATION

Questions can make hermits out of us, driving us into hiding. Yet the cave has no answers. Christ distributes courage through community; He dissipates doubts through fellowship. He never deposits all knowledge in one person but distributes pieces of the jigsaw puzzle to many. When you interlock your understanding with mine, and we share our discoveries . . . When we mix, mingle, confess, and pray, Christ speaks.

The adhesiveness of the disciples instructs us. They stuck together. Even with ransacked hopes, they clustered in conversant community. "They talked together of all these things which had happened" (Luke 24:14). Isn't this a picture of the church—sharing notes, exchanging ideas, mulling over possibilities, lifting spirits? And as they did, Jesus showed up to teach them, proving "where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20).

And when He speaks, He shares His story. God's go-to therapy for doubters is His own Word. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). So listen to it. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

False religious teachers today still deceive people with twisted versions of "truth" that hurt people and sidetrack lives. Keep such people away from your family and church. You will find strength in the true gospel, not in phony substitutes.

EXPLORATION

False Teachers—Deuteronomy 13:1–3; Matthew 7:15; 24:11; Mark 13:22, 23; 2 Corinthians 11:3, 4; 1 Timothy 4:1, 2; 1 John 4:1–6.

THE BOOK OF

TITUS

INTRODUCTION

The letter to Titus was the result of a storm of relativism, which left the Cretans with little values.

"Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." The words didn't originate with Paul but might as well have. He used them to summarize the state of affairs on the island (1:12).

He had reason to lament. By the time of Paul the society had a despicable reputation. Greed was god. Schemers were admired. Cheating was wrong only if you got caught. Right and wrong were determined by the situation, and rape was not a crime.

The economy was so bad that boys were sold as mercenaries as young as the age of twelve. Hence, the people were left with few male role models and fewer abiding beliefs.

Paul established the church in the society and sent Titus to "set in order the things that are lacking" (1:5). Since Paul had definite ideas as to what still needed to be done, we are given definite principles of a healthy church. Strong leadership is the first item. Titus is instructed to select elders and to do so carefully (1:4–16).

Strong character is the next. Judging from the style of life in Crete, it would have been easy for the Cretan Christians to compromise their convictions. Paul urges them not to.

Judging from the style of life in our world, we could do with the same reminder.

By the way, don't miss Paul's eloquent paragraph on grace (2:11–14). We're familiar with grace which saves, but grace does much more. It trains us, "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age."

Something told Paul the Cretans needed such instruction. Something tells me, we do, too.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Paul

Date Written: c. A.D. 63

Key Themes:

- The leadership of the church should live lives of honor.
- The older members of the church should train the younger members.
- Good works do not earn our salvation, but they are a product of it.

Key Verse:

"In all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility" (Titus 2:7).

Contents:

I. Church Leaders 1:1–16

II. Church Organization 2:1—3:15

Greeting

Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, 2 in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began, 3 but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior;

4 To Titus, a true son in *our* common faith:

Grace, mercy, *and* peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ[a] our Savior.

Qualified Elders

5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you— 6 if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. 7 For a bishop[a] must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, 8 but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, 9 holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

The Elders' Task

10 For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, 11 whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. 12 One of them, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans *are* always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." 13 This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, 14 not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth. 15 To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. 16 They profess to know God, but in works they deny *Him,* being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

Qualities of a Sound Church

2 But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: 2 that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; 3 the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things— 4 that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 *to be* discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

6 Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, 7 in all things showing yourself *to be* a pattern of good works; in doctrine *showing*

1:4 [a]NU-Text reads *and Christ Jesus.* **1:7** [a]Literally *overseer*

Life Lessons

Titus 1:1—2:15

SITUATION

The Christians in Titus's church needed role models. Imitating those who lived a God-honoring life would help them be morally distinct from their culture.

OBSERVATION

As we grow to become more like Christ, our behavior grows more distinctive from the world. Believers should be known for their eagerness to do good and help others.

INSPIRATION

Get it straight: Someone who sees grace as permission to sin has missed grace entirely. Mercy understood is holiness desired. "[Jesus] gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, *zealous for good works"* (Titus 2:14, italics mine).

Note that last phrase: "zealous for good works." Grace fosters an eagerness for good. Grace doesn't spawn a desire to sin. If one has truly embraced God's gift, He will not mock it. In fact, if a person uses God's mercy as liberty to sin, one might wonder whether the person ever knew God's mercy at all.

When my father gave me his [credit] card, he didn't attach a list of regulations. There was no contract for me to sign or rules for me to read. He didn't tell me to place my hand on the Bible and pledge to reimburse him for any expenses. In fact, he didn't ask for any payment at all. As things turned out, I went a few

integrity, reverence, incorruptibility,[a] [8]sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.[a]

[9]*Exhort* bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all *things,* not answering back, [10]not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.

Trained by Saving Grace

[11]For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, [12]teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we

2:7 [a]NU-Text omits *incorruptibility.* **2:8** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *us.*

weeks into the semester without using it. Why? Because he gave me more than a card; he gave me his trust. And where I might break his rules, I wasn't about to abuse his trust.

God's trust makes us eager to do right. Such is the genius of grace. The law can show us where we do wrong, but it can't make us eager to do right. Grace can. Or as Paul answers, "Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law" (Romans 3:31). (From *In the Grip of Grace* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Do you truly love Christ? Do you look forward to His return? If you truly understand grace and mercy, you will desire godly living and will be eager to do "good works." What good works can you do today to serve and love others?

EXPLORATION
Good Works—Philippians 1:11; Colossians 1:10; 2 Timothy 2:14–26; Hebrews 6:10; James 3:17.

Life Lessons

Titus 3:1–15

SITUATION
Paul reminded Christians that Christ saved them from sin and death. Paul's teaching opposed false teachers who tried to win converts.

OBSERVATION
Christians need to be reminded of God's great forgiveness.

INSPIRATION
God gives no sponge baths. He washes us from head to toe. Paul reflected on

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus Is Truth

Dishonesty is absolutely contrary to the character of God. According to Hebrews 6:18, it is impossible for God to lie. It's not that God will not lie or that He has chosen not to lie—He cannot lie. For God to lie is for a dog to fly and a bird to bark. It simply cannot happen. The Book of Titus echoes the same three words as the Book of Hebrews: "God . . . cannot lie" (Titus 1:2).

God always speaks truth. When He makes a covenant, He keeps it. When He makes a statement, He means it. And when He proclaims the truth, we can believe it. What He says is true. Even "if we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13).

Satan, on the other hand, finds it impossible to tell the truth. According to Jesus, the devil is "a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44). If you'll remember, deceit was the first tool out of the devil's bag. In the Garden of Eden, Satan didn't discourage Eve. He didn't seduce her. He didn't sneak up on her. He just lied to her. "God says you'll die if you eat the fruit? You will not die" (see Genesis 3:1–4).

Big Fat Liar. But Eve was suckered, and the fruit was plucked, and it's not more than a few paragraphs before husband and son are following suit and the honesty of Eden seems a distant memory.

It still does. Daniel Webster was right when he observed, "There is nothing as powerful as the truth and often nothing as strange." (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1692.

should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.

15 Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.

Graces of the Heirs of Grace

3 Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, 2 to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. 3 For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. 4 But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.

Avoid Dissension

9 But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. 10 Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, 11 knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.

Final Messages

12 When I send Artemas to you, or Tychicus, be diligent to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. 13 Send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey with haste, that they may lack nothing. 14 And let our *people* also learn to maintain good works, to *meet* urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.

Farewell

15 All who *are* with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith.

Grace *be* with you all. Amen.

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his conversion and wrote: "He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). Your sins stand no chance against the fire hydrant of God's grace.

But more is needed. God is not content to clean you; He indwells you. God deposits within you "His working which works . . . mightily" (Colossians 1:29).

He does not do with you what my dad did with my brother and me. Our high-school car was a '65 Rambler station wagon. The clunker had as much glamour as Forrest Gump: three speed, shift on the column, bench seats covered with plastic, no air conditioning.

And, oh, the engine. Our lawn mower had more power. The car's highest speed, downhill with a tailwind, was fifty miles per hour. To this day I'm convinced that my father (a trained mechanic) searched for the slowest possible car and bought it for us.

When we complained about her pitiful shape, he just smiled and said, "Fix it up." We did the best we could. We cleaned the carpets, sprayed air freshener on the seats, stuck a peace symbol on the back window, and hung Styrofoam dice from the rearview mirror. We removed the hubcaps and spray-painted the rims black. The car looked better, smelled better, but ran the same. Still a clunker—a clean clunker, to be sure—but still a clunker.

Don't for a microsecond think God does this with you. Washing the outside isn't enough for Him. He places power on the inside. Better stated, He places *Himself* on the inside. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

You have been washed, cleansed, renewed—from the inside out. Good works are a sign that we are grateful to God and that we love Him. What service project in your community or church could you join? Ask the Lord to guide you to service that pleases Him.

EXPLORATION

Service—Joshua 24:14, 15; Matthew 25:35–45; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Colossians 3:23; 1 Timothy 1:12; 1 Peter 4:10, 11.

Extending God's Grace

God's judgment has never been a problem for me. In fact, it always seemed right. Lightning bolts on Sodom. Fire on Gomorrah. Good job, God. Egyptians swallowed in the Red Sea. They had it coming. Forty years of wandering to loosen the stiff necks of the Israelites? Would've done it myself. Ananias and Sapphira? You bet.

Discipline is easy for me to swallow. Logical to assimilate. Manageable and appropriate.

But God's grace? Anything but.

Examples? How much time do you have?

David the psalmist becomes David the voyeur, but by God's grace becomes David the psalmist again.

Peter denied Christ before he preached Christ.

Zacchaeus, the crook. The cleanest part of his life was the money he'd laundered. But Jesus still had time for him.

The thief on the cross: hellbent and hung-out-to-die one minute, heaven-bound and smiling the next.

Story after story. Prayer after prayer. Surprise after surprise.

If God can tolerate my mistakes, can't I tolerate the mistakes of others? If God can overlook my errors, can't I overlook the errors of others? If God allows me with my foibles and failures to call him Father, shouldn't I extend the same grace to others?

Study Guide

Titus 3:3-8

- Describe a person in your life who has shown you the grace of God in a practical way.
- In what ways is our salvation an act of generosity on God's part?
- Having received God's love and mercy, why is it still difficult at times to show love and mercy to the people around us?
- Why do we get a sense of satisfaction when somebody gets what's coming to them?
- Why is it often easier to show judgment than grace?
- Why do we sometimes tend to forget what God saved us from?
- What three words best describe God's love for you?
- Describe a world where everyone gives someone else the break they hope to receive.
- To whom do you need to show God's grace this week?

THE BOOK OF

PHILEMON

INTRODUCTION

Philemon had every reason to be angry. His slave, Onesimus, had stolen from him and run away. He had escaped to Rome, where he met Paul and became a Believer.

Now Onesimus is returning to Philemon. Under normal circumstances, Philemon has the right to exact revenge. But these are not normal circumstances, Paul explains. Onesimus fled as a slave, he returns as a believer.

Paul doesn't ask Philemon to free Onesimus from slavery, but to free him from anger. He urges Philemon to offer grace rather than demand justice.

Does this short letter have any application for your life? It does if there is an Onesimus in your world. It does if someone has betrayed you or offended you or turned away from you. What they did wasn't right. And to demand justice is only natural, which is precisely the problem. Getting even is natural; it's not spiritual.

As you consider how to respond, consider a higher law. A law which sets all men, slave or nonslave, free.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Paul

Date Written: c. A.D. 60

Key Themes:

- Salvation is not determined or affected by a person's station in life.
- The love God expects from us goes beyond the standards of this world.

Key Verses:

"For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother . . . " (Philemon 15, 16).

Contents:

I. Greetings 1–7
II. Appeal for Onesimus 8–21
III. Farewell 22–25

Life LESSONS

Philemon 1–25

SITUATION
Both Christians and non-Christians owned slaves in the Roman empire. Onesimus, a slave from Colosse, stole from his owner, Philemon. After stealing, Onesimus ran away to Rome where Paul met him. Paul led Onesimus to Jesus.

OBSERVATION
Paul asked Philemon to forgive and accept his runaway slave back without punishment.

INSPIRATION
A couple of days ago twenty thousand of us ran through the streets of San Antonio, raising money for breast cancer research. Most of us ran out of kindness, happy to log three miles and donate a few dollars to the cause. A few ran in memory of a loved one, others in honor of a cancer survivor. We ran for different reasons. But no runner was more passionate than one I spotted. A bandanna covered her bald head, and dark circles shadowed her eyes. She had cancer. While we ran out of kindness, she ran out of conviction. She knows how cancer victims feel. She's been there.

So has Jesus. "He is able . . . to run to the cry of . . . those who are being tempted and tested and tried."

When you turn to Him *for* help, He runs to you *to* help. Why? He knows how you feel. He's been there.

By the way, remember how Jesus was not reluctant to call His ancestors His family? He's not ashamed of you either: "Jesus, who

Greeting

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy *our* brother,

To Philemon our beloved *friend* and fellow laborer, 2 to the beloved[a] Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philemon's Love and Faith

4 I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, 5 hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints, 6 that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you[a] in Christ Jesus. 7 For we have[a] great joy[b] and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.

The Plea for Onesimus

8 Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, 9 *yet* for love's sake I rather appeal *to you*—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ— 10 I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten *while* in my chains, 11 who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me.

12 I am sending him back.[a] You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, 13 whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel. 14 But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary.

15 For perhaps he departed for a while for this *purpose,* that you might receive him forever, 16 no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Philemon's Obedience Encouraged

17 If then you count me as a partner, receive him as *you would* me. 18 But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account. 19 I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay—not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides. 20 Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.

21 Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. 22 But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.

2 [a]NU-Text reads *to our sister Apphia.* **6** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *us.* **7** [a]NU-Text reads *had.* [b]M-Text reads *thanksgiving.* **12** [a]NU-Text reads *back to you in person, that is, my own heart.*

Farewell

23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ
Jesus, greets you, 24 *as do* Mark, Aristarchus,
Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.

25 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with
your spirit. Amen.

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makes people holy, and those who are made holy are from the same family. So he is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters" (Hebrews 2:11 NCV).

He's not ashamed of you. Nor is He confused by you. Your actions don't bewilder Him. Your tilted halo doesn't trouble Him. So go to Him. After all, you're a part of His family. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Jesus makes you holy. He is not ashamed of you. He is proud to call you His brother or sister. Are you willing to let Him? Don't let anything get in the way of your relationship with Him.

EXPLORATION

Respect—Job 31:13–15; Proverbs 22:2; Micah 6:8; Romans 13:7; Galatians 3:28; 1 Peter 2:17.

THE BOOK OF

HEBREWS

INTRODUCTION

The best just got better—it's a favorite slogan with advertisers.

It's not that our previous product was poor. It's just that the current one is superior.

The Book of Hebrews might well use the same slogan. The best just got better.

There was nothing inferior about the Jewish religion. It was given by God and designed by God. Every principle, rule, and ritual had a wealth of meaning. The Old Testament served as a faithful guide for thousands of people over thousands of years. It was the best offered to man.

But when Christ came, the best got better.

Hebrews was written for Jewish believers who were torn between their new faith and their old ways. The temptation was to slip back into familiar routines and rituals, settling for second best.

The author skillfully makes a case against such a digression. He argues that Jesus is better than every form of the old faith—better than the angels (1:4—2:18), better than their leaders (3:1—4:13), and better than their priests (4:14—7:28). When it comes to comparing the two, there is simply no comparison. Christianity has a better covenant (8:1–13), a better sanctuary, (9:1–10), and a better sacrifice for sins (9:11—10:18).

It's not that the old law was bad, it's just that the new law—salvation by faith in Christ—is better. Once you've known the best, why settle for second rate?

It's doubtful that you will ever be tempted to exchange your faith for an ancient system of priests and sacrifices. But you will be tempted to exchange it for something inferior.

If you are reading Hebrews, be reminded: Once you've known the best, why settle for anything less? (Hmmm, there's another catchy slogan.)

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Unknown

Date Written: Before A.D. 70

Key Themes:

- Jesus Christ brought about a whole new way of connecting with and following God.
- Jesus is our compassionate high priest.
- Faith is the connector between this life and the next.

Key Verse:

"Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

Contents:

I. Christ Above All 1:1—4:13

II. Christ's Priesthood 4:14—10:18

III. Faith in Christ 10:19—13:25

God's Supreme Revelation

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past
to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us
by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom
also He made the worlds; 3 who being the brightness of *His* glory and
the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word
of His power, when He had by Himself[a] purged our[b] sins, sat down at
the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become so much bet-
ter than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excel-
lent name than they.

The Son Exalted Above Angels

5 For to which of the angels did He ever say:

"You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You"?[a]

And again:

"I will be to Him a Father,
And He shall be to Me a Son"?[b]

6 But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says:

"Let all the angels of God worship Him."[a]

7 And of the angels He says:

"Who makes His angels spirits
And His ministers a flame of fire."[a]

8 But to the Son *He says:*

"Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;
A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.
9 *You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;*
Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You
With the oil of gladness more than Your companions."[a]

10 And:

"You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth,
And the heavens are the work of Your hands.
11 *They will perish, but You remain;*
And they will all grow old like a garment;
12 *Like a cloak You will fold them up,*
And they will be changed.
But You are the same,
And Your years will not fail."[a]

1:3 [a]NU-Text omits *by Himself.* [b]NU-Text omits *our.* **1:5** [a]Psalm 2:7 [b]2 Samuel 7:14 **1:6** [a]Deuteronomy 32:43 (Septuagint, Dead Sea Scrolls); Psalm 97:7 **1:7** [a]Psalm 104:4 **1:9** [a]Psalm 45:6, 7 **1:12** [a]Psalm 102:25–27

Life Lessons

Hebrews 1:1–14

SITUATION
The recipients of this letter thought highly of angels. This writer began by telling them that Jesus was greater than any other spiritual force.

OBSERVATION
Jesus reveals all we need to know about God. Jesus' power is like none other, and He holds the highest position over anyone else.

INSPIRATION
Imagine the change [Jesus] had to make, the distance He had to travel. What would it be like to become flesh?

This question surfaced as I was golfing recently. Waiting my turn to putt, I squatted down to clean my ball and noticed a mountain of ants beside it. Must have been dozens of them, all over each other. A pyramid of motion at least half an inch tall.

I don't know what you think when you see ants on a green as you are waiting to putt. But here is what I thought: *Why are you guys all bunched up? You have the whole green. Why, the entire golf course is yours to spread out in.* Then it occurred to me. These ants are nervous. Who could blame them? They live under a constant meteor shower. Every few minutes a dimpled orb comes crashing into their world. *Bam! Bam! Bam!* Just when the bombing stops, the mallet-swinging giants arrive. If you survive their feet and sticks, they roll a meteor at you. A golf green is no place for an ant.

So I tried to help them.

Leaning down where they could hear me, I invited, "Come on, follow me. We'll find a nice spot in the rough. I know it well." Not one looked in my direction. "Hey, ants!" Still no reply. Then I realized, *I don't speak their language.* I don't speak Ant. Pretty fluent in the idiom of Uncle, but I don't speak Ant.

So what could I do to reach them? Only one thing. I needed to become an ant. Go from six feet two inches to teeny-weeny. From 200-plus pounds to tenths of an ounce. Swap my big world for their tiny one. Give up burgers and start eating grass. "No thanks," I said.

Love goes the distance . . . and Christ traveled from limitless eternity to be confined by time in order to become one of us. . . . (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

The author of Hebrews does not ask what you think about Christianity. He tells you about Jesus, God's Son, superior to the prophets of old, superior to the angels. Learn more about what Jesus reveals to us about God through church, friends, prayer, and Bible study. Is there any opinion you value more highly than His?

EXPLORATION

Jesus Is God—John 1:1–18; Philippians 2:5–11.

13 But to which of the angels has He ever said:

"Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"?[a]

14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?

Do Not Neglect Salvation

2 Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him,* 4 God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

The Son Made Lower than Angels

5 For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. 6 But one testified in a certain place, saying:

"What is man that You are mindful of him,
Or the son of man that You take care of him?
7 *You have made him a little lower than the angels;*
You have crowned him with glory and honor,[a]
And set him over the works of Your hands.
8 *You have put all things in subjection under his feet."*[a]

For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing *that is* not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. 9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

Bringing Many Sons to Glory

10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. 11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified *are* all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying:

"I will declare Your name to My brethren;
In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You."[a]

13 And again:

"I will put My trust in Him."[a]

1:13 [a]Psalm 110:1 **2:7** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit the rest of verse 7. **2:8** [a]Psalm 8:4–6 **2:12** [a]Psalm 22:22 **2:13** [a]2 Samuel 22:3; Isaiah 8:17

And again:

"Here am I and the children whom God has given Me."[b]

[14]Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood,
He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might
destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, [15]and
release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject
to bondage. [16]For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does
give aid to the seed of Abraham. [17]Therefore, in all things He had to be
made like *His* brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High
Priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make propitiation for the sins of
the people. [18]For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He
is able to aid those who are tempted.

The Son Was Faithful

3 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus,
[2]who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also *was*
faithful in all His house. [3]For this One has been counted worthy of
more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has
more honor than the house. [4]For every house is built by someone, but
He who built all things *is* God. [5]And Moses indeed *was* faithful in all
His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would
be spoken *afterward,* [6]but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose
house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the
hope firm to the end.[a]

Be Faithful

[7]Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says:

"Today, if you will hear His voice,
[8] *Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,*
In the day of trial in the wilderness,
[9] *Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me,*
And saw My works forty years.
[10] *Therefore I was angry with that generation,*
And said, 'They always go astray in their heart,
And they have not known My ways.'
[11] *So I swore in My wrath,*
'They shall not enter My rest.'"[a]

[12]Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of
unbelief in departing from the living God; [13]but exhort one another
daily, while it is called *"Today,"* lest any of you be hardened through
the deceitfulness of sin. [14]For we have become partakers of Christ if
we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, [15]while
it is said:

2:13 [b]Isaiah 8:18 **3:6** [a]NU-Text omits *firm to the end.* **3:11** [a]Psalm 95:7–11

Life Lessons

Hebrews 2:1—3:19

SITUATION
As God's Son, Jesus' authority surpassed any prophet or angel. He is God, yet He became man.

OBSERVATION
Because Jesus became man, we know He understands our human frustrations.

INSPIRATION
Ever have so many demands that you can't stop for lunch? [Jesus] can relate. "For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat" (Mark 6:31).

Do you have too much e-mail to fit in a screen or too many calls to make in a day? Christ has been there. "Then great multitudes came to Him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them" (Matthew 15:30). How about family tension? "When his family heard what was happening, they tried to take him home with them. 'He's out of his mind,' they said" (Mark 3:21 NLT).

Have you been falsely accused? Enemies called Jesus a wino and a chowhound (Matthew 11:19). The night before His death people "sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death" (Matthew 26:59).

Do your friends ever let you down? When Christ needed help, His friends dozed off. "What? Could you not watch with Me one hour?" (Matthew 26:40).

Unsure of the future? Jesus was. Regarding the last day of history, He explained, "Of that day

and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matthew 24:36). Can Jesus be the Son of God and not know something? He can if He chooses not to. Knowing you would face the unknown,He chose to face the same.

Jesus has been there. "He Himself has suffered, being tempted" (Hebrews 2:18). Jesus was angry enough to purge the temple, hungry enough to eat raw grain, distraught enough to weep in public, fun loving enough to be called a drunkard, winsome enough to attract kids, weary enough to sleep in a storm-bounced boat, poor enough to sleep on dirt and borrow a coin for a sermon illustration, radical enough to get kicked out of town, responsible enough to care for His mother, tempted enough to know the smell of Satan, and fearful enough to sweat blood.

But why? Why would heaven's finest Son endure earth's toughest pain? So you would know that "He is able to aid those who are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18). (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Jesus knows all about life on earth. Tell Him what will be your biggest temptations and struggles today. Ask Him to provide you with strength and encouragement. He knows how you feel.

EXPLORATION

Christ's Victory over Sin and Death—Romans 6:5–11.

"Today, if you will hear His voice,
Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."[a]

Failure of the Wilderness Wanderers

16 For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, *was it* not all who came
out of Egypt, *led* by Moses? 17 Now with whom was He angry forty
years? *Was it* not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the
wilderness? 18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter

3:15 [a]Psalm 95:7, 8

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: More Than a Carpenter

Envision a dusty, quiet village. Nazareth. An unimpressive town in an unimpressive nation.

Ignore the nicer homes of the village. Joseph and Mary celebrated the birth of Jesus with a temple offering of two turtle-doves, the gift of the poor (Luke 2:22–24). Go to the poorer part of town. Not poverty stricken or destitute, just simple.

And look for a single mom. The absence of Joseph in the adult life of Jesus suggests that Mary may have raised Him and the rest of the kids alone. We need a simple home with a single mom and an ordinary laborer. Jesus' neighbors remembered Him as a worker. "Is this not the carpenter?" (Mark 6:3).

Jesus had dirty hands, sweat-stained shirts, and—this may surprise you—common looks. "He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him" (Isaiah 53:2).

Raised in an overlooked nation among oppressed people in an obscure village. Can you spot Him? See the adobe house with the thatched roof? Yes, the one with the chickens in the yard and the gangly teenager repairing chairs in the shed.

"He had to enter into every detail of human life. Then, when he came before God as high priest to get rid of the people's sins, he would have already experienced it all himself—all the pain, all the testing—and would be able to help where help was needed" (Heb. 2:17, 18 MSG).

Why would heaven's finest Son endure earth's toughest pain? So you would know that He knows how you feel. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1705.

His rest, but to those who did not obey? 19So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

The Promise of Rest

4 Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. 2For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them,[a] not being mixed with faith in those who heard *it*. 3For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said:

> *"So I swore in My wrath,*
> *'They shall not enter My rest,'"*[a]

although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh *day* in this way: *"And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"*;[a] 5and again in this *place: "They shall not enter My rest."*[a]

6Since therefore it remains that some *must* enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, 7again He designates a certain day, saying in David, *"Today,"* after such a long time, as it has been said:

> *"Today, if you will hear His voice,*
> *Do not harden your hearts."*[a]

8For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. 9There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. 10For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God *did* from His.

The Word Discovers Our Condition

11Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. 12For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.

Our Compassionate High Priest

14Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. 15For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are, yet* without sin. 16Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

4:2 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *profit them, since they were not united by faith with those who heeded it.* **4:3** [a]Psalm 95:11 **4:4** [a]Genesis 2:2 **4:5** [a]Psalm 95:11 **4:7** [a]Psalm 95:7, 8

Life LESSONS

Hebrews 4:1—5:10

SITUATION
Just as Jesus surpassed Moses, He also surpassed Aaron, God's high priest. The author of Hebrews continued presenting the reasons for Jesus' superiority.

OBSERVATION
Jesus intercedes for us before God.

INSPIRATION
Why Jesus? Why not Muhammad or Moses? Joseph Smith or Buddha? What uniquely qualifies Jesus to safeguard the sin-sick? In a sentence: *Christ, the sinless, became sin so that we, the sinners, could be counted sinless.* "[God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ not only became the sin offering by receiving God's wrath for the sins of humanity, He overcame the punishment for sin (death) through His glorious resurrection from the dead.

Life's greatest calamity, from God's perspective, is that people die in sin. In one sentence Christ twice warned, "I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24). Forget earthquakes or economic depressions. The ultimate disaster is carrying your sins to your casket. Heaven cannot fathom a worse tragedy. And heaven could not offer a greater gift than this one: "Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God"

Approach the Throne

Christ meets you outside the throne room, takes you by the hand, and walks you into the presence of God. Upon entrance we find grace, not condemnation; mercy, not punishment. Where we would never be granted an audience with the King, we are now welcomed into His presence.

If you are a parent you understand this. If a child you don't know appears on your doorstep and asks to spend the night, what would you do? Likely you would ask him his name, where he lives, find out why he is roaming the streets, and contact his parents. On the other hand, if a youngster enters your house escorted by your child, that child is welcome. The same is true with God. By becoming friends with the Son we gain access to the Father.

Jesus promised, "Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32). Because we are friends of His Son, we have entrance to the throne room. He ushers us into that "grace in which we stand" (Romans 5:2).

Study Guide

Read Hebrews 4:14—5:10.

- Describe a time when you received something you didn't think you deserved. How did you feel?
- Think of a time when someone has vouched for you. What did you feel you owed that person?
- How has Christ's action on your behalf impacted your life?
- How would you describe to a friend the way to find peace with God?
- What does it mean to you to be the dwelling place of the Spirit of God?
- If we have access to God, what keeps us from interacting with Him?
- How does our citizenship in heaven affect our life on earth?
- List some things that keep you from enjoying God's presence.
- What concrete action can you take to draw closer to God?

Qualifications for High Priesthood

5 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for
men in things *pertaining* to God, that he may offer both gifts and
sacrifices for sins. 2 He can have compassion on those who are igno-
rant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness.
3 Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to
offer *sacrifices* for sins. 4 And no man takes this honor to himself, but
he who is called by God, just as Aaron *was.*

A Priest Forever

5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but
it was He who said to Him:

"You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You."[a]

6 As *He* also says in another *place:*

"You are a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek";[a]

7 who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and
supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able
to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear,
8 though He was a Son, *yet* He learned obedience by the things which
He suffered. 9 And having been perfected, He became the author of
eternal salvation to all who obey Him, 10 called by God as High Priest
"according to the order of Melchizedek," 11 of whom we have much to
say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

Spiritual Immaturity

12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *some-*
one to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and
you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who
partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he
is a babe. 14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that*
is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern
both good and evil.

The Peril of Not Progressing

6 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary *principles* of
Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation
of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of the doc-
trine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead,
and of eternal judgment. 3 And this we will[a] do if God permits.

4 For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and
have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy
Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the
age to come, 6 if they fall away,[a] to renew them again to repentance,

5:5 [a]Psalm 2:7 **5:6** [a]Psalm 110:4 **6:3** [a]M-Text reads *let us do.* **6:6** [a]Or *and have fallen away*

(1 Peter 3:18). (From *Come Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Because of Jesus, you can ask God to meet your needs.

EXPLORATION
Aaron—Leviticus 8; Numbers 12. Melchizedek—Genesis 14; Hebrews 7.

Life Lessons

Hebrews 5:11—7:28

SITUATION
Melchizedek, king of Salem, was greater than Abraham. Abraham, the father of all Jews, offered sacrifices to God through Melchizedek. Yet Jesus even surpassed Melchizedek's service.

OBSERVATION
Jesus is our perfect high priest. Only through Christ's perfect sacrifice are we able to find forgiveness for our sins. Jesus offered this sacrifice once for all.

INSPIRATION
What is the fruit of sin? Step into the briar patch of humanity and feel a few thistles. Shame. Fear. Disgrace. Discouragement. Anxiety. Haven't our hearts been caught in these brambles?

The heart of Jesus, however, had not. He had never been cut by the thorns of sin. What you and I face daily, He never knew. Anxiety? He never worried! Guilt? He was never guilty! Fear? He never left the presence of God! Jesus never knew the fruits of sin . . . until He became sin for us.

And when He did, all the emotions of sin tumbled in on Him like shadows in a forest. He felt anxious, guilty, and alone. Can't you

since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame.

7 For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it,
and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives
blessing from God; 8 but if it bears thorns and briers, *it is* rejected and
near to being cursed, whose end *is* to be burned.

A Better Estimate

9 But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you,
yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this man-
ner. 10 For God *is* not unjust to forget your work and labor of[a] love
which you have shown toward His name, *in that* you have ministered
to the saints, and do minister. 11 And we desire that each one of you
show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end,
12 that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through
faith and patience inherit the promises.

God's Infallible Purpose in Christ

13 For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could
swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, 14 saying, *"Surely
blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you."*[a] 15 And
so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. 16 For
men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation *is* for
them an end of all dispute. 17 Thus God, determining to show more
abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel,
confirmed *it* by an oath, 18 that by two immutable things, in which it
is impossible for God to lie, we might[a] have strong consolation, who
have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before *us.*

19 This *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and
steadfast, and which enters the *Presence* behind the veil, 20 where the
forerunner has entered for us, *even* Jesus, having become High Priest
forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

The King of Righteousness

7 For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God,
who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and
blessed him, 2 to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first
being translated "king of righteousness," and then also king of Salem,
meaning "king of peace," 3 without father, without mother, without
genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made
like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.

4 Now consider how great this man *was,* to whom even the patri-
arch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils. 5 And indeed those who are
of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment
to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from
their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham;
6 but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes
from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. 7 Now beyond
all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better. 8 Here mortal men
receive tithes, but there he *receives them,* of whom it is witnessed that

6:10 [a]NU-Text omits *labor of.* **6:14** [a]Genesis 22:17 **6:18** [a]M-Text omits *might.*

hear the emotion in His prayer? "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). These are not the words of a saint. This is the cry of a sinner.

And this prayer is one of the most remarkable parts of His coming. But I can think of something even greater. Want to know what it is? Want to know the coolest thing about the coming?

Not that the One who played marbles with the stars gave it up to play marbles with marbles. Or that the One who hung the galaxies gave it up to hang doorjambs to the displeasure of a cranky client who wanted everything yesterday but couldn't pay for anything until tomorrow.

Not that He, in an instant, went from needing nothing to needing air, food, a tub of hot water and salts for His tired feet, and, more than anything, needing somebody—anybody—who was more concerned about where he would spend eternity than where he would spend Friday's paycheck.

Or that He resisted the urge to fry the two-bit, self-appointed hall monitors of holiness who dared suggest that He was doing the work of the devil.

Not that He kept His cool while the dozen best friends He ever had felt the heat and got out of the kitchen. Or that He gave no command to the angels who begged, "Just give the nod, Lord. One word and these demons will be deviled eggs."

Not that He refused to defend Himself when blamed for every sin of every slut and sailor since Adam. Or that He stood silent as a million guilty

he lives. 9 Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, 10 for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

Need for a New Priesthood

11 Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need *was there* that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? 12 For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. 13 For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar.

14 For *it is* evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood.[a] 15 And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest 16 who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. 17 For He testifies:[a]

"You are a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek."[b]

18 For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, 19 for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, *there is the* bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

Greatness of the New Priest

20 And inasmuch as *He was* not *made priest* without an oath 21 (for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him:

"The Lord has sworn
And will not relent,
'You are a priest forever[a]
According to the order of Melchizedek'"),[b]

22 by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant.

23 Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. 24 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. 25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. 28 For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, *appoints* the Son who has been perfected forever.

7:14 [a]NU-Text reads *priests.* **7:17** [a]NU-Text reads *it is testified.* [b]Psalm 110:4
7:21 [a]NU-Text ends the quotation here. [b]Psalm 110:4

verdicts echoed in the tribunal of heaven and the giver of light was left in the chill of a sinner's night.

Not even that after three days in a dark hole He stepped into the Easter sunrise with a smile and a swagger and a question for lowly Lucifer—"Is that your best punch?"

That was cool, incredibly cool.

But want to know the coolest thing about the One who gave up the crown of heaven for a crown of thorns?

He did it for you. Just for you. (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Luacdo)

APPLICATION
What does the significance of Christ's death specifically *for* you mean *to* you? If you find that His death has lost meaning, or your heart has hardened toward the event, spend time meditating on the most incredible act of love ever accomplished.

EXPLORATION
Purpose of His Death—Romans 5:6; 14:9; Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 3:18.

Life LESSONS

Hebrews 8:1–13

SITUATION
Jewish Christians struggled to understand the relationship between God's free salvation and the Mosaic Law. The author explained that Jesus Christ was superior to the Law of Moses.

OBSERVATION
God does not keep a record of our sins in order to use them against us. Rather, He forgives and loves us even as we suffer through the consequences of our sins.

INSPIRATION
I was thanking the Father today for His mercy. I began listing the sins He'd forgiven. One by one I thanked God for forgiving my stumbles and tumbles. My motives were pure and my heart was thankful, but my understanding of God was wrong. It was when I used the word "remember" that it hit me. . . .

God doesn't just forgive, He forgets. He erases the board. He destroys the evidence. He burns the microfilm. He clears the computer. . . .

No, He doesn't remember. But I do, you do. You still remember. You're like me. You still remember what you did before you changed. In the cellar of your heart lurk the ghosts of yesterday's sins. Sins you've confessed; errors of which you've repented; damage you've done your best to repair.

And though you're a different person, the ghosts still linger. Though you've locked the basement door, they still haunt you. They float to meet you, spooking

The New Priestly Service

8 Now *this is* the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, 2 a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.

3 For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore *it is* necessary that this One also have something to offer. 4 For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; 5 who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, *"See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."* [a] 6 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.

A New Covenant

7 For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. 8 Because finding fault with them, He says: *"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—* 9 *not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord.* 10 *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.* 11 *None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.* 12 *For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds*[a] *I will remember no more."* [b]

13 In that He says, *"A new covenant,"* He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

The Earthly Sanctuary

9 Then indeed, even the first *covenant* had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. 2 For a tabernacle was prepared: the first *part,* in which *was* the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; 3 and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, 4 which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which *were* the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; 5 and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

Limitations of the Earthly Service

6 Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the

8:5 [a] Exodus 25:40 **8:12** [a] NU-Text omits *and their lawless deeds.* [b] Jeremiah 31:31–34

services. 7But into the second part the high priest *went* alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and *for* the people's sins *committed* in ignorance; 8the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. 9It *was* symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience— 10*concerned* only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.

The Heavenly Sanctuary

11But Christ came *as* High Priest of the good things to come,[a] with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, 14how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

The Mediator's Death Necessary

16For where there *is* a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. 17For a testament *is* in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives. 18Therefore not even the first *covenant* was dedicated without blood. 19For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, 20saying, *"This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you."*[a] 21Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. 22And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.

Greatness of Christ's Sacrifice

23Therefore *it was* necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, *which are* copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; 25not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another— 26He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. 27And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this

9:11 [a]NU-Text reads *that have come.* **9:20** [a]Exodus 24:8

your soul and robbing your joy. With wordless whispers they remind you of moments when you forgot whose child you were. . . .

Poltergeists from yesterday's pitfalls. Spiteful specters that slyly suggest, "Are you really forgiven? Sure God forgets most of our mistakes, but do you think he could actually forget the time you . . . "

. . . Was [God] exaggerating when He said He would cast our sins as far as the east is from the west? Do you actually believe He would make a statement like "I will not hold their iniquities against them" and then rub our noses in them whenever we ask for help? . . .

You see, God is either the God of perfect grace . . . or He is not God. Grace forgets. Period. He who is perfect love cannot hold grudges. If He does, then He isn't perfect love. And if He isn't perfect love, you might as well put this book down and go fishing, because both of us are chasing fairy tales.

But I believe in his loving forgetfulness. And I believe He has a graciously terrible memory. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Because of Jesus' perfect sacrifice, God forgets our sins. Jesus paid the penalty for sins. We must no longer feel guilty for sins that God forgave.

EXPLORATION

Promised Pardon of God—Isaiah 43:25; 44:22; 55:7; Micah 7:18; 1 John 1:9.

the judgment, 28 so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.
To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart
from sin, for salvation.

Animal Sacrifices Insufficient

10 For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, *and*
not the very image of the things, can never with these same
sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those
who approach perfect. 2 For then would they not have ceased to be
offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more
consciousness of sins. 3 But in those *sacrifices there is* a reminder of
sins every year. 4 For *it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and goats
could take away sins.

Christ's Death Fulfills God's Will

5 Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:

"Sacrifice and offering You did not desire,
But a body You have prepared for Me.
6 *In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin*
You had no pleasure.
7 *Then I said, 'Behold, I have come—*
In the volume of the book it is written of Me—
To do Your will, O God.'" [a]

8 Previously saying, *"Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them"* (which are offered according to the law), 9 then He said, *"Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God."* [a] He takes away the first that He may establish the second. 10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all.*

Christ's Death Perfects the Sanctified

11 And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, 13 from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. 14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

15 But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before,

16 *"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,"* [a] 17 *then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."* [a] 18 Now where there is remission of these, *there is* no longer an offering for sin.

10:7 [a] Psalm 40:6–8 **10:9** [a] NU-Text and M-Text omit *O God.* **10:16** [a] Jeremiah 31:33
10:17 [a] Jeremiah 31:34

Life Lessons

Hebrews 9:1–22

SITUATION
The writer of Hebrews emphasized that Christ's sacrifice surpassed the sacrifices of the Old Testament. There will never be a greater sacrifice.

OBSERVATION
Christ's perfect sacrifice should affect the way believers serve God.

INSPIRATION
Come with me to the hill of Calvary. Watch as the soldiers shove the Carpenter to the ground and stretch His arms against the beams. One presses a knee against a forearm and a spike against a hand. Jesus turns His face toward the nail just as the soldier lifts the hammer to strike it.

Couldn't Jesus have stopped him? With a flex of the biceps, with a clench of the fist, He could have resisted. Is this not the same hand that stilled the sea? Summoned the dead?

But the fist doesn't clench . . . and the moment isn't aborted.

The mallet rings and the skin rips and the blood begins to drip, then rush. Then the questions follow. Why? Why didn't Jesus resist?

"Because He loved us," we reply. That is true, wonderfully true, but—forgive me—only partially true. There is more to his reason. He saw something that made Him stay. As the soldier pressed His arm, Jesus rolled His head to the side, and with His cheek resting on the wood, He saw:

A mallet? Yes.

A nail? Yes.

Hold Fast Your Confession

19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the
blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for
us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and *having* a High Priest over
the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance
of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our
bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of
our hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful. 24 And
let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,
25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner
of some, but exhorting *one another,* and so much the more as you see
the Day approaching.

The Just Live by Faith

26 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of
the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain
fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will
devour the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies
without mercy on *the testimony of* two or three witnesses. 29 Of how
much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy
who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the
covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted
the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, *"Vengeance is Mine,
I will repay,"*[a] says the Lord.[b] And again, *"The Lord will judge His
people."*[c] 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

32 But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated,
you endured a great struggle with sufferings: 33 partly while you were
made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly
while you became companions of those who were so treated; 34 for
you had compassion on me[a] in my chains, and joyfully accepted the
plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an
enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.[b] 35 Therefore do not
cast away your confidence, which has great reward. 36 For you have
need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you
may receive the promise:

37 *"For yet a little while,*
And He[a] *who is coming will come and will not tarry.*
38 *Now the*[a] *just shall live by faith;*
But if anyone draws back,
My soul has no pleasure in him."[b]

39 But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those
who believe to the saving of the soul.

By Faith We Understand

11 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence
of things not seen. 2 For by it the elders obtained a *good* testi-
mony.

10:30 [a]Deuteronomy 32:35 [b]NU-Text omits *says the Lord.* [c]Deuteronomy 32:36
10:34 [a]NU-Text reads *the prisoners* instead of *me in my chains.* [b]NU-Text omits *in heaven.* **10:37** [a]Or *that which* **10:38** [a]NU-Text reads *My just one.* [b]Habakkuk 2:3, 4

The soldier's hand? Yes.

But He saw something else. Between his hand and the wood, there was a list. A long list. A list of our mistakes: our lusts and lies and greedy moments and prodigal years. A list of our sins.

The bad decisions from last year. The bad attitudes from last week. There, in broad daylight for all of heaven to see, was a list of your mistakes.

He saw the list! He knew the price of those sins was death. He knew the source of those sins was you, and since He couldn't bear the thought of eternity without you, He chose the nails. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
True repentance is not just confession of sin but a sincere willingness to not do that sin again. If your conscience is not clear toward God in even one area of your life, repent and ask God to cleanse you because of His shed blood.

EXPLORATION
A Good Conscience—Acts 23:1; 1 Timothy 1:18, 19; 3:8, 9; Titus 1:15.

Hebrews 9:23—10:39

SITUATION
Once the author told that Jesus' death surpassed any earthly sacrifice, he encouraged the Hebrew Christians to have confidence.

OBSERVATION
Jesus' death not only provides salvation, but also great confidence for Christians. We can step boldly before the Lord in prayer, and boldly into the world in service and witness.

Jesus has already won the battle!

INSPIRATION

Picture it this way. Imagine that you are an ice skater in competition. You are in first place with one more round to go. If you perform well, the trophy is yours. You are nervous, anxious, and frightened.

Then, only minutes before your performance, your trainer rushes to you with the thrilling news: "You've already won! The judges tabulated the scores, and the person in second place can't catch you. You are too far ahead."

Upon hearing that news, how will you feel? Exhilarated!

And how will you skate? Timidly? Cautiously? Of course not. How about courageously and confidently? You bet you will. You will do your best because the prize is yours. You will skate like a champion because that is what you are! You will hear the applause of victory. . . .

The point is clear: the truth will triumph. The father of truth will win, and the followers of truth will be saved. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

If you are a child of God, claim your victory over sin! Be confident. Nothing can ever take you out of God's hand. No one can ever take away your salvation. No matter what happens, you are *always* His.

EXPLORATION

Spiritual Boldness—Ephesians 3:12; 1 Timothy 3:13; Hebrews 4:16; 1 John 4:17.

3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word
of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things
which are visible.

Faith at the Dawn of History

4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain,
through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testi-
fying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.
5 By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, *"and
was not found, because God had taken him"*;[a] for before he was taken
he had this testimony, that he pleased God. 6 But without faith *it is*
impossible to please *Him,* for he who comes to God must believe that
He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.
7 By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen,
moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his house-
hold, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the
righteousness which is according to faith.

Faithful Abraham

8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the
place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not
knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of prom-
ise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the
heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which
has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.
11 By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed,
and she bore a child[a] when she was past the age, because she judged
Him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him
as good as dead, were born *as many* as the stars of the sky in multi-
tude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

The Heavenly Hope

13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but
having seen them afar off were assured of them,[a] embraced *them* and
confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For
those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.
15 And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they
had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now
they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country.* Therefore God is not
ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

The Faith of the Patriarchs

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he
who had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son,* 18 of
whom it was said, *"In Isaac your seed shall be called,"*[a] 19 concluding
that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he
also received him in a figurative sense.
20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

11:5 [a]Genesis 5:24 **11:11** [a]NU-Text omits *she bore a child.* **11:13** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *were assured of them.* **11:18** [a]Genesis 21:12

[21] By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, *leaning* on the top of his staff.

[22] By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.

The Faith of Moses

[23] By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw *he was* a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command.

[24] By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, [25] choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, [26] esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in[a] Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

[27] By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. [28] By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

[29] By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry *land, whereas* the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.

By Faith They Overcame

[30] By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. [31] By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

[32] And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also *of* David and Samuel and the prophets: [33] who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, [34] quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. [35] Women received their dead raised to life again.

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. [36] Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. [37] They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted,[a] were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— [38] of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in* dens and caves of the earth.

[39] And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, [40] God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

The Race of Faith

12 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us,* and let us run with endurance the race that is set

11:26 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *of.* **11:37** [a]NU-Text omits *were tempted.*

Life Lessons

Hebrews 11:1–40

SITUATION

Old Testament heroes provided examples of faith and obedience to God.

OBSERVATION

Faith is more than a belief in God. It is also a way of life. Heroes of faith, although imperfect, trusted God and gave their lives to Him.

INSPIRATION

Faith is the belief that God is real and that God is good. . . . It is a choice to believe that the one who made it all hasn't left it all and that He still sends light into the shadows and responds to gestures of faith. . . .

Faith is the belief that God will do what is right.

"Blessed are the dirt-poor, nothing-to-give, trapped-in-a-corner, destitute, diseased," Jesus said, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3, my translation). . . .

God says that the more hopeless your circumstances, the more likely your salvation. The greater your cares, the more genuine your prayers. The darker the room, the greater the need for light. . . .

God's help is near and always available, but it is only given to those who seek it. Nothing results from apathy. . . .

Compared to God's part, our part is minuscule but necessary. . . . Write a letter. Ask forgiveness. Call a counselor. Confess. Call Mom. Visit a doctor. Be baptized. Feed a hungry person. Pray. Teach. Go.

Do something that demonstrates faith. For faith with no effort is no faith at all. *God will respond.* He

has never rejected a genuine gesture of faith. Never. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Hebrews 11 can encourage you by telling about people's faith in the Old Testament. These examples encourage you. What are you doing to encourage others? Who will you tell?

EXPLORATION
Remembering the Faithful—Proverbs 10:7; Matthew 26:13; 2 Timothy 1:5.

Life LESSONS

Hebrews 12:1—13:25

SITUATION
The Hebrew readers of this book needed encouragement to face persecution. They were called to follow the perfect example of Jesus, who overcame difficult circumstances.

OBSERVATION
Jesus, the perfect model of faith, obeyed God to the point of death. He looked beyond His immediate, painful circumstances and knew that His sacrifice would bring life to others.

INSPIRATION
He looked around the carpentry shop. He stood for a moment in the refuge of the little room that housed so many sweet memories. He balanced the hammer in His hand. He ran His fingers across the sharp teeth of the saw. He stroked the smoothly worn wood of the sawhorse. He had come to say goodbye.

It was time for Him to leave. He had heard something that made Him know it was time to go. So He came one last time

before us, [2]looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The Discipline of God

[3]For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. [4]You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. [5]And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

"My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
[6] *For whom the Lord loves He chastens,*
And scourges every son whom He receives."[a]

[7]If[a] you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? [8]But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. [9]Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us,* and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? [10]For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness. [11]Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Renew Your Spiritual Vitality

[12]Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, [13]and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

[14]Pursue peace with all *people,* and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: [15]looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; [16]lest there *be* any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. [17]For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

The Glorious Company

[18]For you have not come to the mountain that[a] may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness[b] and tempest, [19]and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard *it* begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. [20](For they could not endure what was commanded: *"And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned*[a]

12:6 [a]Proverbs 3:11, 12 **12:7** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *It is for discipline that you endure; God . . . .* **12:18** [a]NU-Text reads *to that which.* [b]NU-Text reads *gloom.* **12:20** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit the rest of this verse.

or shot with an arrow."[b] 21 And so terrifying was the sight *that* Moses said, *"I am exceedingly afraid* and trembling."[a])

22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made

12:20 [b]Exodus 19:12, 13 **12:21** [a]Deuteronomy 9:19

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: The One Who Endured

Consider this admonition from the author of Hebrews: "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1).

Had golf existed in the New Testament era, I'm sure the writers would have spoken of mulligans and foot wedges, but it didn't, so they wrote about running. The word *race* is from the Greek *agon,* from which we get the word *agony.* The Christian's race is not a jog but rather a demanding and grueling, sometimes agonizing race. It takes a massive effort to finish strong.

Likely you've noticed that many don't? Surely you've observed there are many on the side of the trail? They used to be running. There was a time when they kept the pace. But then weariness set in. They didn't think the run would be this tough. Or they were discouraged by a bump and daunted by a fellow runner. Whatever the reason, they don't run anymore. They may be Christians. They may come to church. They may put a buck in the plate and warm a pew, but their hearts aren't in the race. They retired before their time. Unless something changes, their best work will have been their first work, and they will finish with a whimper.

By contrast, Jesus' best work was His final work, and His strongest step was His last step. Our Master is the classic example of one who endured. The writer of Hebrews goes on to say that Jesus "endured such hostility from sinners against Himself" (v. 3). The Bible says Jesus "endured," implying that Jesus could have "let go." The runner could have given up, sat down, gone home. He could have quit the race. But He didn't. He "endured such hostility from sinners against Himself." (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1710.

to smell the sawdust and lumber.

Life was peaceful here. Life was so . . . safe. . . .

I wonder if he wanted to stay. . . . I wonder because I know He had already read the last chapter. He knew that the feet that would step out of the safe shadow of the carpentry shop would not rest until they'd been pierced and placed on a Roman cross.

. . . If there was any hesitation on the part of His humanity, it was overcome by the compassion of His divinity. His divinity heard the voices. . . .

And His divinity saw the faces. . . . From the face of Adam to the face of the infant born somewhere in the world as you read these words, He saw them all.

And you can be sure of one thing. Among the voices that found their way into that carpentry shop in Nazareth was your voice. . . .

And not only did He hear you, He saw you. He saw your face aglow the hour you first knew Him. He saw your face in shame the hour you first fell. The same face that looked back at you from this morning's mirror, looked at Him. And it was enough to kill Him.

He left because of you.

He laid His security down with his hammer. He hung tranquility on the peg with His nail apron. He closed the window shutters on the sunshine of His youth and locked the door on the comfort and ease of anonymity.

Since He could bear your sins more easily than He could bear the thought of your hopelessness, he chose to leave.

It wasn't easy. Leaving the carpentry shop never has been. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Look for joy in difficult times. How can others benefit from your struggle? Look beyond the pain and find God's purpose for your struggle.

EXPLORATION
Joy in Troubled Times—Psalm 126:2; Luke 15:5; John 15:11.

perfect, [24] to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel.

Hear the Heavenly Voice

[25] See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more *shall we not escape* if we turn away from Him who *speaks* from heaven, [26] whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, *"Yet once more I shake*[a] *not only the earth, but also heaven."*[b] [27] Now this, *"Yet once more,"* indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

[28] Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may[a] serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. [29] For our God *is* a consuming fire.

Concluding Moral Directions

13 Let brotherly love continue. [2] Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so *doing* some have unwittingly entertained angels. [3] Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also.

[4] Marriage *is* honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

[5] *Let your* conduct *be* without covetousness; *be* content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."*[a] [6] So we may boldly say:

"The Lord is my helper;
I will not fear.
What can man do to me?"[a]

Concluding Religious Directions

[7] Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of *their* conduct. [8] Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, today, and forever. [9] Do not be carried about[a] with various and strange doctrines. For *it is* good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

[10] We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. [11] For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. [12] Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. [13] Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. [14] For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. [15] Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name. [16] But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

[17] Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch

12:26 [a]NU-Text reads *will shake.* [b]Haggai 2:6 **12:28** [a]M-Text omits *may.*
13:5 [a]Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; Joshua 1:5 **13:6** [a]Psalm 118:6 **13:9** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *away.*

out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

Prayer Requested

18 Pray for us; for we are confident that we
have a good conscience, in all things desiring
to live honorably. 19 But I especially urge *you*
to do this, that I may be restored to you the
sooner.

Benediction, Final Exhortation, Farewell

20 Now may the God of peace who brought
up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great
Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of
the everlasting covenant, 21 make you com-
plete in every good work to do His will, work-
ing in you[a] what is well pleasing in His sight,
through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever
and ever. Amen.

22 And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with
the word of exhortation, for I have written to
you in few words. 23 Know that *our* brother
Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall
see you if he comes shortly.

24 Greet all those who rule over you, and all
the saints. Those from Italy greet you.

25 Grace *be* with you all. Amen.

13:21 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *us.*

THE BOOK OF

JAMES

INTRODUCTION

Here is a story James would have liked.

Francis of Assisi once invited an apprentice to go with him to a nearby village to preach. The young monk quickly agreed, seizing an opportunity to hear his teacher speak. When they arrived in the village, St. Francis began to visit with the people.

First he stopped in on the butcher. Next a visit with the cobbler. Then a short walk to the home of a woman who'd recently buried her husband. After that a stop at the school to chat with the teacher. This continued throughout the morning. After some time, Francis told his disciple that it was time to return to the abbey.

The student didn't understand. "But we came to preach," he reminded. "We haven't preached a sermon."

"Haven't we?" questioned the elder. "People have watched us, listened to us, responded to us. Every word we have spoken, every deed we have done has been a sermon. We have preached all morning."

James would have liked that. As far as he was concerned, Christianity was more action on Monday than worship on Sunday. "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?" (2:14).

His message is bare-knuckled; his style is bare-boned. Talk is cheap, he argues. Service is invaluable.

It's not that works save the Christian, but that works mark the Christian. In James's book of logic, it only makes sense that we who have been given much should give much. Not just with words. But with our lives.

Or as St. Francis is noted as saying, "Preach without ceasing. If you must, use words."

James would have liked that, too.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: James

Date Written: c. A.D. 50

Key Themes:

- God gives us true wisdom.
- Satan tempts to break us; God tests to strengthen us.
- The words we use are powerful and influential.
- Faith and good deeds go hand in hand.

Key Verse:

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:26).

Contents:

I. Faith and Temptations 1:1–27
II. Faith at Work 2:1—5:6
III. Faith's Rewards 5:7–20

Greeting to the Twelve Tribes

James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad:

Greetings.

Profiting from Trials

2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,
3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.
4 But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.
5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.
6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.
7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;
8 *he is* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

The Perspective of Rich and Poor

9 Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation,
10 but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away.
11 For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.

Loving God Under Trials

12 Blessed *is* the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.
13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.
14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.
15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.
16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.
17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.
18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

Qualities Needed in Trials

19 So then,[a] my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;
20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Doers—Not Hearers Only

21 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.
22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving

1:19 [a]NU-Text reads *Know this* or *This you know.*

Life LESSONS

James 1:1–27

SITUATION

James knew that Christians scattered all over the world would face challenges to their faith. If they were to remain faithful, their beliefs needed to be not only intellectual, but also very practical. He urged his readers to put their faith into action.

OBSERVATION

God allows tough situations in our lives in order to refine us and bring us closer to Him. We should approach these times with a right attitude and seek wisdom from God.

INSPIRATION

When a potter bakes a pot, he checks its solidity by pulling it out of the oven and thumping it. If it "sings" it's ready. If it "thuds," it's placed back in the oven. The character of a person is also checked by thumping.

Been thumped lately? Late-night phone calls. Grouchy teacher. Grumpy moms. Burnt meals. Flat tires. "You've got to be kidding" deadlines. Those are thumps. Thumps are those irritating inconveniences that trigger the worst in us. They catch us off guard. Flat footed. They aren't big enough to be crises, but if you get enough of them, watch out! Traffic jams. Long lines. Empty mailboxes. Dirty clothes on the floor . . . Thump. Thump. Thump. How do I respond? Do I sing? Or do I thud? Jesus said that out of the nature of the heart a man speaks (Luke 6:45). There's nothing like a good thump to reveal

the nature of a heart. The true character of a person is seen not in momentary heroics, but in the thump-packed humdrum of day-to-day living. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
How do you respond when you are "thumped" by people at work, school, family, or people at the grocery store? Your initial reaction during these times reflects who you are. What responses need to change? Make the changes today.

EXPLORATION
Perseverance—Romans 2:7; 8:24, 25; 2 Corinthians 6:3–7.

yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he
is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes
himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.
25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it,*
and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be
blessed in what he does.

26 If anyone among you[a] thinks he is religious, and does not bridle
his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion *is* useless.
27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit
orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted
from the world.

Beware of Personal Favoritism

2 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the*
Lord of glory, with partiality. 2 For if there should come into your
assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also
come in a poor man in filthy clothes, 3 and you pay attention to the
one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good
place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at

1:26 [a]NU-Text omits *among you.*

Life Lessons

James 2:1–26

SITUATION
These Christians drew social lines among themselves. Certain cliques were more popular and more important in the church.

OBSERVATION
Christians should avoid forming cliques. God sees no difference between the social elite and the lowest class. All are called to serve and worship side-by-side.

INSPIRATION
Jesus' fellow citizens lived under foreign rule. Roman soldiers imposed high taxes and oppressive laws. . . .

Some responded by selling out, working the system to their own advantage. Others got out. The writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran chose to separate themselves from the wicked world. Still others decided to fight back. The Zealot option was clear: say your prayers,

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: One Who Understands Us

Jesus . . . has been where you are and can relate to how you feel. And if His life on earth doesn't convince you, His death on the Cross should. He understands what you are going through. Our Lord does not patronize us or scoff at our needs. He gives "to all liberally and without reproach" (James 1:5). How can He do this? No one penned it more clearly than did the author of Hebrews [Hebrews 4:15, 16] . . .

Why did the throat of heaven grow raw? So we would know that He understands; so all who struggle would hear His invitation: "You can trust Me. . . . "

Why, in His final moments, was Jesus determined to fulfill prophecy? He knew we would doubt. He knew we would question. And since He did not want our heads to keep His love from our hearts, He used His final moments to offer proof that He was the Messiah. He systematically fulfilled centuries-old prophecies. (From *He Chose the Nails* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1738.

my footstool," [4]have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

[5]Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? [6]But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? [7]Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?

[8]If you really fulfill *the* royal law according to the Scripture, *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself,"*[a] you do well; [9]but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. [10]For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point,* he is guilty of all. [11]For He who said, *"Do not commit adultery,"*[a] also said, *"Do not murder."*[b] Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. [12]So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. [13]For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Faith Without Works Is Dead

[14]What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? [15]If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, [16]and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit? [17]Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

[18]But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your[a] works, and I will show you my faith by my[b] works. [19]You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! [20]But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?[a] [21]Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? [22]Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? [23]And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, *"Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."*[a] And he was called the friend of God. [24]You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

[25]Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent *them* out another way?

[26]For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

The Untamable Tongue

3 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. [2]For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he *is* a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. [3]Indeed,[a] we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. [4]Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they

2:8 [a]Leviticus 19:18 **2:11** [a]Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18 [b]Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17 **2:18** [a]NU-Text omits *your.* [b]NU-Text omits *my.* **2:20** [a]NU-Text reads *useless.* **2:23** [a]Genesis 15:6 **3:3** [a]NU-Text reads *Now if.*

sharpen your sword, and fight a holy war.

Three options: sell out, get out, or fight back.

Jesus introduced a fourth. Serve. Serve the ones who hate you; forgive the ones who hurt you. Take the lowest place, not the highest; seek to serve, not to be served. Retaliate, not in kind, but in kindness. He created what we might deem the Society of the Second Mile.

Roman soldiers could legally coerce Jewish citizens into carrying their load for one mile. With nothing more than a command, they could requisition a farmer out of his field or a merchant out of his shop.

In such a case, Jesus said, "Give more than requested." Go two. At the end of one mile, keep going. Surprise the sandals off the soldier by saying, "I haven't done enough for you. I'm going a second mile." Do more than demanded. And do so with joy and grace!

The Society of the Second Mile still exists. Its members surrender Everest-level ambitions so they can help weary climbers find safety. . . .

The Society of the Second Mile. Let me tell you how to spot its members. They don't wear badges or uniforms; they wear smiles. They have discovered the secret. The joy is found in the extra effort. The sweetest satisfaction lies, not in climbing your own Everest, but in helping other climbers. (From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you attend a church regularly? Are you involved enough to see which people are on the "outside"? If not, become more involved; then help break down walls

by bringing people on the fringe into your circle. Be willing to go the second mile.

EXPLORATION
Unity—Psalm 133:1; John 10:16; 17:23; Acts 4:32; Romans 12:4, 5; 15:5; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 10:17; Ephesians 2:14–20; Philippians 2:1, 2.

Life LESSONS

James 3:1–18

SITUATION
James described how faith works in everyday life. Everyday speech and actions should correspond with inward faith.

OBSERVATION
The tongue can build others up or tear them down. It needs to be controlled.

INSPIRATION
Ask God to inject his passion in your day.

Pray for every person you pass. Don't grumble in traffic jams or complain in crowded elevators. These are prayer moments. Intercede for each person you see, "praying always with all prayer" (Ephesians 6:18). Imitate Epaphras, who Paul said was "always laboring fervently for you in prayers" (Colossians 4:12). He labored, strove, worked in prayers. I'm envisioning a strained face, tearful cheeks, clenched hands.

Stir spiritual dialogue. At the right time, with the right heart, ask your friends and family, "What do you think happens after we die?" "What is your view of God?" Jesus asked such questions: "Who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8:29). Let's ask them too.

Love because God loves. People can be tough to

are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. 5 Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.

See how great a forest a little fire kindles! 6 And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. 8 But no man can tame the tongue. *It is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. 10 Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring send forth fresh *water* and bitter from the same opening? 12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.[a]

Heavenly Versus Demonic Wisdom

13 Who *is* wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct *that* his works *are done* in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic. 16 For where envy and self-seeking *exist,* confusion and every evil thing *are* there. 17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. 18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Pride Promotes Strife

4 Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires for* pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet[a] you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. 4 Adulterers and[a] adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?

6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says:

"God resists the proud,
But gives grace to the humble."[a]

Humility Cures Worldliness

7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded. 9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to

3:12 [a]NU-Text reads *Neither can a salty spring produce fresh water.* **4:2** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *Yet.* **4:4** [a]NU-Text omits *Adulterers and.* **4:6** [a]Proverbs 3:34

Peace

Want to see a miracle? Try this.

Take a seed the size of a freckle. Put it under several inches of dirt. Give it enough water, light, and fertilizer. And get ready. A mountain will be moved. It doesn't matter that the ground is a zillion times the weight of the seed. The seed will push it back.

Every spring, dreamers around the world plant tiny hopes in overturned soil. And every spring, their hopes press against impossible odds and blossom.

Never underestimate the power of a seed.

As far as I know, James, the epistle writer, wasn't a farmer, but he knew the power of a seed sown in fertile soil.

"Those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness."

The principle for peace is the same as the principle for crops: Never underestimate the power of a seed.

How good are you at sowing seeds of peace?

Pause for a moment and think about the people who make up your world. Take a stroll through the gallery of faces that are significant to you.

Want to see a miracle? Plant a word of love heart-deep in a person's life. Nurture it with a smile and a prayer, and watch what happens. . . . Never underestimate the power of a seed.

Study Guide

Read James 3:17—4:3.

- How have you seen peace work like a seed?
- If peace works like a seed, how do you water it?
- What is the quickest way to erode peace between friends?
- Once an argument has started, why is it so difficult to stop?
- What things destroy your inner peace?
- What sense of responsibility do you feel for living peaceably with the people around you?
- In what kinds of life situations is it most difficult to sow peace?
- How does your life function differently when you are living at peace with others?

love. Love them anyway. "He who loves God must love his brother also" (1 John 4:21). (From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Today, use your tongue to bring joy, peace, and happiness into the lives of others. Thank others for their friendship. Encourage those who are struggling. Tell others of your love for them. Most of all, use your words to praise God throughout today.

EXPLORATION
Restraining the Tongue—Psalm 34:13; Proverbs 13:3; 21:23; Titus 3:2; James 1:26; 1 Peter 3:10.

Life LESSONS

James 4:1–17

SITUATION
God planned for His people to be distinct by their peaceful and humble attitudes. Both words and actions mark these qualities.

OBSERVATION
People who are self-sufficient must recognize that their plans and their lives are not their own but could change in a moment.

INSPIRATION
There are certain mountains only God can climb. The names of these mountains? You'll see them as you look from the window of the chapel in the Great House of God. "Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever." A trio of peaks mantled by the clouds. Admire them, applaud them, but don't climb them.

It's not that you aren't welcome to try, it's just that you aren't able. The

mourning and *your* joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

Do Not Judge a Brother

11 Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. 12 There is one Lawgiver,[a] who is able to save and to destroy. Who[b] are you to judge another?[c]

Do Not Boast About Tomorrow

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will[a] go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; 14 whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. 15 Instead you *ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." 16 But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

17 Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it,* to him it is sin.

Rich Oppressors Will Be Judged

5 Come now, *you* rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon *you!* 2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. 4 Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.[a] 5 You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as[a] in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.

Be Patient and Persevering

7 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See *how* the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. 8 You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

9 Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned.[a] Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! 10 My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. 11 Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end *intended by* the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and *your* "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.[a]

4:12 [a]NU-Text adds *and Judge.* [b]NU-Text and M-Text read *But who.* [c]NU-Text reads *a neighbor.* **4:13** [a]M-Text reads *let us.* **5:4** [a]Literally, in Hebrew, *Hosts* **5:5** [a]NU-Text omits *as.* **5:9** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *judged.* **5:12** [a]M-Text reads *hypocrisy.*

Meeting Specific Needs

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him
pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.
14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for
the elders of the church, and let them pray
over him, anointing him with oil in the name
of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save
the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And
if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.
16 Confess *your* trespasses[a] to one another, and
pray for one another, that you may be healed.
The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous
man avails much. 17 Elijah was a man with a
nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that
it would not rain; and it did not rain on the
land for three years and six months. 18 And he
prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and
the earth produced its fruit.

Bring Back the Erring One

19 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders
from the truth, and someone turns him back,
20 let him know that he who turns a sinner
from the error of his way will save a soul[a] from
death and cover a multitude of sins.

5:16 [a]NU-Text reads *Therefore confess your sins.* **5:20** [a]NU-Text reads *his soul.*

pronoun is "thine," not "mine"; "thine" is the kingdom, not "mine" is the kingdom. If the word "Savior" is in your job description, it's because you put it there. Your role is to help the world, not save it. Mount Messiah is one mountain you weren't made to climb.

Nor is Mount Self-Sufficient. You aren't able to run the world, nor are you able to sustain it. Some of you think you can. You are self-made. You don't bow your knees, you just roll up your sleeves and put in another twelve-hour day . . . which may be enough when it comes to making a living or building a business. But when you face your own grave or your own guilt, your power will not do the trick.

You were not made to run a kingdom, nor are you expected to be all-powerful. And you certainly can't handle all the glory. Mount Applause is the most seductive of the three peaks. The higher you climb the more people applaud, but the thinner the air becomes. More than one person has stood at the top and shouted, "Mine is the glory!" only to lose their balance and fall.

"Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever." What protection this final phrase affords. As you confess that God is in charge, you admit that you aren't. As you proclaim that God has power, you admit that you don't. And as you give God all the applause, there is none left to dizzy your brain. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

List five experiences that make you proud. Pray that real service would begin as God humbles you. Ask God to help you realize that you can't make life work on your own.

EXPLORATION

Submission—Luke 14:27; John 14:23; 1 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Peter 3:5

Life LESSONS

James 5:1–20

SITUATION

Wealth can lead some into false security. Jesus and the Old Testament prophets defended the poor. James explained that instead of hoarding, exploiting, and self-indulging, believers should share with those in need.

OBSERVATION

A Christian should be more concerned with sharing and meeting the needs of others than with accumulating earthly treasures.

INSPIRATION

Jesus, in His first message, declared His passion for the poor. Early in His ministry He returned to His hometown of Nazareth to deliver an inaugural address of sorts. He entered the same synagogue where He had worshipped as a young man and looked into the faces of the villagers. They were simple folk: stonecutters, carpenters, and craftsmen. They survived on minimal wages and lived beneath the shadow of Roman oppression. There wasn't much good news in Nazareth.

But this day was special. Jesus was in town. The hometown boy who had made the big time. They asked Him to read Scripture, and He accepted. "And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written" (Luke 4:17).

This is the only such moment in all the Gospels. Jesus *quoted* Scripture many times. But the Son of God selecting and reading Scripture? This is it. On the singular occasion we know of, which verse did He choose? He shuffled the scroll toward the end of the text and read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted" (Luke 4:18, quoting Isaiah 61:1).

God Listens

You and I live in a loud world. To get someone's attention is no easy task. He must be willing to set everything aside to listen; turn down the radio, turn away from the monitor, turn the corner of the page and set down the book. When someone is willing to silence everything else so he can hear us clearly, it is a privilege. A rare privilege, indeed.

You can talk to God because God listens. Your voice matters in heaven. He takes you very seriously. When you enter His presence, the attendants turn to you to hear your voice. No need to fear that you will be ignored. Even if you stammer or stumble, even if what you have to say impresses no one, it impresses God, and He listens. He listens to the painful plea of the elderly in the rest home. He listens to the gruff confession of the death–row inmate. When the alcoholic begs for mercy, when the spouse seeks guidance, when the businessman steps off the street into the chapel, God listens.

Intently. Carefully. The prayers are honored as precious jewels . . . your words do not stop until they reach the very throne of God.

Your prayers move God to change the world. You may not understand the mystery of prayer. You don't need to. But this much is clear: Actions in heaven begin when someone prays on earth. What an amazing thought!

Study Guide

Read James 5:13–18.

- How do you respond to the statement, "Your voice matters in heaven"?
- If there was a how-to manual about prayer, what do you think would be the first direction?
- What does the act of prayer accomplish in your life?
- How is praying to God like talking with a friend?
- In what ways does praying to God benefit you much differently than talking with a friend?
- What do you find difficult to understand about prayer?
- If you could ask God something directly about prayer, what would it be?
- What usually prompts you to pray?
- Why don't we pray even though we believe that praying will make a difference?

Jesus lifted His eyes from the parchment and quoted the rest of the words. The crowd, who cherished the words as much as he did, mouthed the lines along with him. "To proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18, 19).

Jesus had a target audience. The poor. The brokenhearted. Captives. The blind and oppressed.

His to-do list? Help for the body *and* soul, strength for the physical *and* the spiritual, therapy for the temporal *and* eternal. "This is my mission statement," Jesus declared. The Nazareth Manifesto.

Preach the gospel to the poor.
Heal the brokenhearted.
Proclaim liberty to the captives.
Proclaim recovery of sight to the blind.
Set at liberty those who are oppressed.
And proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. . . .

No one can do everything, but everyone can do something. Some people can fast and pray about social sin. Others can study and speak out. What about you? Get out of your comfort zone, for Christ's sake. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you free to lend your possessions? Is money set aside for giving? Develop a plan today, keep it for six months, and evaluate the results.

EXPLORATION

Sharing—Acts 2:44; 4:32–35.

THE BOOK OF

1 PETER

INTRODUCTION

The science teacher makes a derisive statement about God creating the world. You raise your hand and state your convictions. Your teacher rolls her eyes. The students behind you chuckle.

It's not easy being the only one in your family who goes to church. It's bad enough that they don't go. It's worse that they make fun of you for going.

If you would pad your expense account, so could the other salesmen. But if you don't, they can't. "Come on," they urge you, "just hedge a little." You refuse. The next day someone has spilled paint on your car.

Persecution. Not by firing squad. Not by death threats. Not by the government. But it's persecution nonetheless. A more subtle persecution. Persecution from friends, family, and peers. They won't take your life . . . but they will take your peace . . . and they'd like to take your faith, if you'd let them.

How do you respond? Begin with Peter's survival manual. He understood persecution. Beaten and jailed. Threatened and punished. He knew the sting of the false word and the angry whip. No doubt he'd seen some Christians stand and others fall. He'd seen enough to know what it takes to stay strong in tough times.

His counsel may surprise you.

His counsel may sustain you. It may be just what you need so that "the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:7).

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Peter

Date Written: c. A.D. 64

Key Themes:

- Our richest inheritance is not in this world—it waits in heaven.
- It is up to each Christian to remain pure.
- It is an honor to suffer for Christ.
- Satan fights against the growth and victory of believers.

Key Verse:

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15).

Contents:

I. Holy Living 1:1—2:12

II. Submission to Authorities 2:13—3:12

III. The Believer and Suffering 3:13—5:14

Greeting to the Elect Pilgrims

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

A Heavenly Inheritance

3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 8 whom having not seen[a] you love. Though now you do not see *Him,* yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of *your* souls.

10 Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, 11 searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. 12 To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us[a] they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.

Living Before God Our Father

13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest *your* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, *as* in your ignorance; 15 but as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct, 16 because it is written, *"Be holy, for I am holy."*[a]

17 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay *here* in fear; 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. 20 He indeed

1:8 [a]M-Text reads *known.* **1:12** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *you.* **1:16** [a]Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7

Life Lessons

1 Peter 1:1–25

SITUATION

Peter reminded Christians who were scattered all over the world that they were guaranteed an inheritance. They were to base their confidence on the indestructible truth of God's Word.

OBSERVATION

God promises us new life and an inheritance that will never pass away.

INSPIRATION

Jesus' obedience began in a small town carpentry shop. His uncommon approach to His common life groomed Him for His uncommon call. "Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age" (Luke 3:23). In order to enter public life, you have to leave private life. In order for Jesus to change the world, He had to say goodbye to *His* world.

He had to give Mary a kiss. Have a final meal in the kitchen, a final walk through the streets. Did he ascend one of the Hills of Nazareth and think of the day He would ascend the hill near Jerusalem?

He knew what was going to happen. "He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Peter 1:20). Every ounce of suffering had been scripted—it just fell to Him to play the part.

Not that he had to. Nazareth was a cozy town. Why not build a carpentry business? Keep His identity a secret? Return in the era of guillotines or electric chairs, and pass on the Cross. To be forced to die is one thing, but to willingly take up your own cross is something else.

New Life In Christ

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. —1 Peter 1:3

A Living Hope

Jesus' offer still stands. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3, 4).

Others offer life, but no one offers to do what Jesus does—to reconnect us to His power. But how can we know? How do we know that Jesus knows what He's talking about? The ultimate answer, according to His flagship followers, is the vacated tomb. Did you note the words you just read? "A living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away." In the final sum, it was the disrupted grave that convinced the maiden Christians to cast their lots with Christ. "He was seen by Cephas [Peter], then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once" (1 Corinthians 15:5, 6).

Can Jesus actually replace death with life? He did a convincing job with His own. We can trust Him because He has been there. . . .

He's been to Bethlehem, wearing barn rags and hearing sheep crunch. Suckling milk and shivering against the cold. All of divinity content to cocoon itself in an eight-pound body and to sleep on a cow's supper. Millions who face the chill of empty pockets or the fears of sudden change turn to Christ. Why?

Because He's been there.

He's been to Nazareth, where He made deadlines and paid bills; to Galilee, where He recruited direct reports and separated fighters; to Jerusalem, where He stared down critics and stood up against cynics.

We have our Nazareths as well—demands and due dates.

Jesus wasn't the last to build a team; accusers didn't disappear with Jerusalem's temple. Why seek Jesus' help with your challenges? Because He's been there. To Nazareth, to Galilee, to Jerusalem.

But most of all, He's been to the grave. Not as a visitor, but as a corpse. Buried amidst the cadavers. Numbered among the dead.

Heart silent and lungs vacant. Body wrapped and grave sealed.

The cemetery. He's been buried there.

You haven't yet. But you will be. And since you will, don't you need someone who knows the way out? (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

Question: How does the promise of the resurrection and life eternal with Jesus make a difference in how you feel about your life today?

For more on "New Life in Christ," see page 35.

was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you 21who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

The Enduring Word

22Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit[a] in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, 23having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,[a] 24because

"All flesh is as grass,
And all the glory of man[a] as the flower of the grass.
The grass withers,
And its flower falls away,
25 *But the word of the Lord endures forever."*[a]

Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

2 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,[a] 3if indeed you have tasted that the Lord *is* gracious.

The Chosen Stone and His Chosen People

4Coming to Him *as to* a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God *and* precious, 5you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture,

"Behold, I lay in Zion
A chief cornerstone, elect, precious,
And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame."[a]

7Therefore, to you who believe, *He is* precious; but to those who are disobedient,[a]

"The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone,"[b]

8and

"A stone of stumbling
And a rock of offense."[a]

1:22 [a]NU-Text omits *through the Spirit.* **1:23** [a]NU-Text omits *forever.* **1:24** [a]NU-Text reads *all its glory.* **1:25** [a]Isaiah 40:6–8 **2:2** [a]NU-Text adds *up to salvation.* **2:6** [a]Isaiah 28:16 **2:7** [a]NU-Text reads *to those who disbelieve.* [b]Psalm 118:22 **2:8** [a]Isaiah 8:14

I wonder, what kind of love is this? When you come up with a word for such a love, give it to Christ. For the day he left Nazareth is the day He declared His devotion for you and me. According to Peter, our lives were filled with "aimless conduct" (1 Peter 1:18). But God, "who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:4, 5).

Jesus left Nazareth and brought us to life. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
How many times during the last week have you praised God because of the new life and inheritance He has promised you?

EXPLORATION
Security—Psalm 9:10; Zephaniah 2:3–7; Romans 6:6–11; 2 Corinthians 4:14; 1 John 5:13.

Life Lessons

1 Peter 2:1–25

SITUATION
Peter knew that loyal Christians suffered from the abuse of cruel Roman practices. He told them to expect suffering. Suffering might be endured so that others could see the Lord's power to help Christians endure. After all, God was building a "spiritual house" with his "living stones."

OBSERVATION
Peter encouraged his readers that God is building something lasting. Despite persecution, the people should recognize the glory of their faith and take their God-ordained places in this new "building" of God.

INSPIRATION

When I was six years old, my father built us a house. *Architectural Digest* didn't notice, but my mom sure did. Dad constructed it, board by board, every day after work. My youth didn't deter him from giving me a job. He tied an empty nail apron around my waist, placed a magnet in my hands, and sent me on daily patrols around the building site, carrying my magnet only inches off the ground.

One look at my tools and you could guess my job. Stray nail collector.

One look at yours and the same can be said. Brick by brick, life by life, God is creating a kingdom, a "spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5). He entrusted you with a key task in the project. Examine your tools and discover it. Your ability unveils your destiny. "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 4:11).When God gives an assignment, He also gives the skill. Study your skills, then, to reveal your assignment.

Look at you. Your uncanny ease with numbers. Your quenchless curiosity about chemistry. Others stare at blueprints and yawn; you read them and drool. "I was made to do this," you say.

Heed that inner music. No one else hears it the way you do. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

You are part of God's building—His eternal spiritual house. What is He calling you to do to help with the continued construction? You have a

They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

9 But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Living Before the World

11 Beloved, I beg *you* as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, 12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by *your* good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Submission to Government

13 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, 14 or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and *for the* praise of those who do good. 15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men— 16 as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. 17 Honor all *people.* Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

Submission to Masters

18 Servants, *be* submissive to *your* masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. 19 For this *is* commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. 20 For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this *is* commendable before God. 21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us,[a] leaving us[b] an example, that you should follow His steps:

22 *"Who committed no sin,*
Nor was deceit found in His mouth";[a]

23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; 24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer[a] of your souls.

Submission to Husbands

3 Wives, likewise, *be* submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they observe your chaste conduct *accompanied* by fear. 3 Do not let your adornment be *merely* out-

2:21 [a]NU-Text reads *you.* [b]NU-Text and M-Text read *you.* **2:22** [a]Isaiah 53:9
2:25 [a]Greek *Episkopos*

ward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on *fine* apparel—
4 rather *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible
beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight
of God. 5 For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who
trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their
own husbands, 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose
daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.

A Word to Husbands

7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with *them* with understanding, giving
honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as *being* heirs together
of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

Called to Blessing

8 Finally, all *of you be* of one mind, having compassion for one
another; love as brothers, *be* tenderhearted, *be* courteous;[a] 9 not
returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary
blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit
a blessing. 10 For

"He who would love life
And see good days,
Let him refrain his tongue from evil,
And his lips from speaking deceit.
11 *Let him turn away from evil and do good;*
Let him seek peace and pursue it.
12 *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,*
And His ears are open to their prayers;
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."[a]

Suffering for Right and Wrong

13 And who *is* he who will harm you if you become followers of what
is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, *you*
are blessed. *"And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled."*[a]
15 But sanctify the Lord God[a] in your hearts, and always *be* ready to
give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that
is in you, with meekness and fear; 16 having a good conscience, that
when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good con-
duct in Christ may be ashamed. 17 For *it is* better, if it is the will of God,
to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

Christ's Suffering and Ours

18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that
He might bring us[a] to God, being put to death in the flesh but made
alive by the Spirit, 19 by whom also He went and preached to the spir-
its in prison, 20 who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine
longsuffering waited[a] in the days of Noah, while *the* ark was being pre-
pared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.

3:8 [a]NU-Text reads *humble.* **3:12** [a]Psalm 34:12–16 **3:14** [a]Isaiah 8:12 **3:15** [a]NU-Text reads *Christ as Lord.* **3:18** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *you.* **3:20** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *when the longsuffering of God waited patiently.*

part to play. Ask God to show you.

EXPLORATION
Suffering—Matthew 24:9–13; Mark 8:31–33; Romans 8:17; Philippians 1:12–14; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; 1 Peter 4:12–16.

Life LESSONS

1 Peter 3:1–22

SITUATION
In Peter's day, women had little status. Peter encouraged wives and husbands to recognize each other's needs and respect them. He also encouraged those who were suffering for their faith to remember what Christ had suffered for them.

OBSERVATION
Because Christ died for us, we should always be ready to share our faith, to suffer for our faith, even to die for our faith. Peter's audience knew this all too well.

INSPIRATION
Would you consider the offer of Jesus? "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger" (John 6:35).

The grain-to-bread process is a demanding one. The seed must be planted before it can grow. When the grain is ripe, it must be cut down and ground into flour. Before it can become bread, it must pass through the oven. Bread is the end result of planting, harvesting, and heating.

Jesus endured an identical process. He was born into this world. He was cut down, bruised, and beaten on the threshing floor of Calvary. He passed through the fire of God's wrath, for our sake. He "suffered once for sins, the just for the

unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18).

Bread of Life? Jesus lived up to the title. But an unopened loaf does a person no good. Have you received the bread? Have you received God's forgiveness? (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Have you opened the loaf of the Bread of Life? Have you discovered all that Jesus did for you? The life He gives you is better than any you could begin to imagine. His forgiveness, mercy, grace, and guidance make life worth living.

EXPLORATION

Submission—Luke 14:27; John 14:23; 1 Corinthians 11:3, 9–12; Ephesians 5:21–24.

Life LESSONS

1 Peter 4:1–19

SITUATION

Christians have shed an old set of rules and adopted a new set full of love and God's power. Following God's standards helps Christians face the difficult trials ahead.

OBSERVATION

Peter said that each believer has been given at least one gift to use to serve others. We are told to be good servants of those gifts.

INSPIRATION

Want to know God's will for your life? Then answer this question: What ignites your heart? Forgotten orphans? Untouched nations? The inner city? The outer limits?

Heed the fire within!

21 There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the
removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience
toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone
into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities
and powers having been made subject to Him.

4 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us[a] in the flesh, arm yourselves
also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has
ceased from sin, 2 that he no longer should live the rest of *his* time in
the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. 3 For we *have*
spent enough of our past lifetime[a] in doing the will of the Gentiles—
when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking
parties, and abominable idolatries. 4 In regard to these, they think it
strange that you do not run with *them* in the same flood of dissipa-
tion, speaking evil of *you.* 5 They will give an account to Him who is
ready to judge the living and the dead. 6 For this reason the gospel
was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged
according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

Serving for God's Glory

7 But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and
watchful in your prayers. 8 And above all things have fervent love for
one another, for *"love will cover a multitude of sins."*[a] 9 *Be* hospitable
to one another without grumbling. 10 As each one has received a gift,
minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of
God. 11 If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone
ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in
all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong
the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Suffering for God's Glory

12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which
is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13 but
rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when
His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. 14 If you
are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you,* for the Spirit of
glory and of God rests upon you.[a] On their part He is blasphemed, but
on your part He is glorified. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer,
a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. 16 Yet
if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him
glorify God in this matter.[a]

17 For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God;
and if *it begins* with us first, what will *be* the end of those who do not
obey the gospel of God? 18 Now

"If the righteous one is scarcely saved,
Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"[a]

19 Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit
their souls *to Him* in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

4:1 [a]NU-Text omits *for us.* **4:3** [a]NU-Text reads *time.* **4:8** [a]Proverbs 10:12
4:14 [a]NU-Text omits the rest of this verse. **4:16** [a]NU-Text reads *name.*
4:18 [a]Proverbs 11:31

Shepherd the Flock

5 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: 2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly,[a] not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

Submit to God, Resist the Devil

5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to *your* elders. Yes, all of *you* be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for

> *"God resists the proud,*
> *But gives grace to the humble."*[a]

6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

8 Be sober, be vigilant; because[a] your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. 10 But may[a] the God of all grace, who called us[b] to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle *you.* 11 To Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Farewell and Peace

12 By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand.

13 She who is in Babylon, elect together with *you,* greets you; and *so does* Mark my son. 14 Greet one another with a kiss of love.

Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus. Amen.

5:2 [a]NU-Text adds *according to God.* **5:5** [a]Proverbs 3:34 **5:8** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *because.* **5:10** [a]NU-Text reads *But the God of all grace . . . will perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.* [b]NU-Text and M-Text read *you.*

Do you have a passion to sing? Then sing!
Are you stirred to manage? Then manage!
Do you ache for the ill? Then treat them!
Do you hurt for the lost? Then teach them!

As a young man I felt the call to preach. Unsure if I was correct in my reading of God's will for me, I sought the counsel of a minister I admired. His counsel still rings true. "Don't preach," he said, "unless you have to."

As I pondered his words I found my answer: "I *have* to. If I don't, the fire will consume me."

What is the fire that consumes you?

Mark it down: Jesus comes to set you on fire! He walks as a torch from heart to heart, warming the cold and thawing the chilled and stirring the ashes. He is at once a Galilean wildfire and a welcome candle. He comes to purge infection and illuminate your direction.

The fire of your heart is the light of your path. Disregard it at your own expense. Fan it at your own delight. Blow it. Stir it. Nourish it. Cynics will doubt it. Those without it will mock it. But those who know it—those who know *Him*—will understand it.

To meet the Savior is to be set aflame.

To discover the flame is to discover His will.

And to discover His will is to access a world like none you've ever seen. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

You have been given spiritual gifts. Have you identified them? If not, consider taking a spiritual inventory test (your local church can help you). Or ask friends and family to help you discover and use your gifts. Then pray about ways you can use your gifts to build up the body of believers and share the good news of salvation.

EXPLORATION

Spiritual Gifts—Romans 12:4–8; 1 Corinthians 12:12–31; Ephesians 4:11–16.

1 Peter 5:1–14

SITUATION

Peter challenged the elders to be good shepherds of their churches, just as Christ was a good shepherd with His disciples. He urged elders to look out for struggling Christians as shepherds would for lost sheep.

OBSERVATION
Christians can encourage others who are suffering by showing mercy, humility, and kindness to them.

INSPIRATION
Is there anything more frail than a bruised reed? Look at the bruised reed at the water's edge. A once slender and tall stalk of sturdy river grass, it is now bowed and bent.

Are you a bruised reed? Was it so long ago that you stood so tall, so proud? . . .

Then something happened. You were bruised . . .
by harsh words
by a friend's anger
by a spouse's betrayal
by your own failure
by religion's rigidity.

. . . Your hollow reed, once erect, now stooped, and hidden in the bulrush.

And the smoldering wick on the candle. . . . Once aflame, now flickering and failing. . . . Was it that long ago you blazed with faith? Remember how you illuminated the path? . . .

Painted on canvas after canvas is the tender touch of a Creator who has a special place for the bruised and weary of the world. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Christians who are younger in their faith need close fellowship with those further along in their Christian life. Do you have someone who helps refine, confront, disciple, and encourage you? Do you serve in that role for someone else? Pray that God would raise up someone to help you, as you help someone else.

EXPLORATION
Church Leaders—1 Timothy 3:8–13; Titus 1:5–9; Revelation 4:4.

THE BOOK OF

2 PETER

INTRODUCTION

If a friend warns you, it's one thing. If a doctor warns you, you listen. But if your friend is your doctor, you lean forward and take note.

My friend is my doctor. My doctor is my friend. Most of my physical exams are salted with friendly chatter and jokes. There have been occasions, however, when his tone gets solemn and his voice urgent.

"We're going to have to watch this, Max."

"You haven't been exercising, have you . . . "

"With your family's history, you have to watch your diet."

When it's a warning from a friend, you listen.

The second letter from Peter is a warning from a friend. His first letter was a warning about trials from without (persecution). His second caution is a warning about trials from within (heresy).

In this the last letter we have from him, he urges Christians to be careful. Avoid shortsightedness (1:2–11). Be on guard for false teachers (2:1–22). And, most importantly, be vigilant against personal complacency which will lead to a lazy faith.

The doctor's task is to detect concerns from within and urge you to take caution. Peter's task is the same. Heed his counsel.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Peter

Date Written: c. A.D. 67

Key Themes:

- The Scriptures were divinely inspired.
- There will be a great accountability in the final days when Jesus returns and God judges.
- It is utterly important to teach God's truth, purely and without addition.

Key Verse:

"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Contents:

I. Living Like Christ 1:1–21

II. False Teachers 2:1–22

III. The Last Days 3:1–18

Life Lessons

2 Peter 1:1–21

SITUATION
The believers had weathered persecution from the outside. Now Peter encouraged them to withstand attacks from within the church.

OBSERVATION
Continue to grow in your faith and knowledge of Jesus.

INSPIRATION
Jesus claims to be, not a *top* theologian, an *accomplished* theologian, or even the *Supreme* Theologian, but rather the *Only* Theologian. "No one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son" [Matthew 11:27]. He does not say, "No one really knows the Father *like* the Son" or "*in the fashion* of the Son." But rather, "Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son."

Heaven's door has one key, and Jesus holds it.

Think of it this way. You're a fifth grader studying astronomy. The day you read about the first mission to the moon, you and your classmates pepper the teacher with space-travel questions.

"What does moondust feel like?"

"Can you swallow when there's no gravity?"

"What about going to the bathroom?"

The teacher does the best she can but prefaces most replies with "I would guess . . ." or "I think . . ." or "Perhaps . . ."

How could she know? She's never been there. But the next day she brings a guest who has. Neil

Greeting the Faithful

Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God
and of Jesus our Lord, 3 as His divine power has given to us all things
that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who
called us by glory and virtue, 4 by which have been given to us exceed-
ingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be
partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is*
in the world through lust.

Fruitful Growth in the Faith

5 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith
virtue, to virtue knowledge, 6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control
perseverance, to perseverance godliness, 7 to godliness brotherly
kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. 8 For if these things are yours
and abound, *you* will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowl-
edge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these things is short-
sighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed
from his old sins.

10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and
election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; 11 for
so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting
kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Peter's Approaching Death

12 For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of
these things, though you know and are established in the present
truth. 13 Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you
up by reminding *you,* 14 knowing that shortly I *must* put off my tent,
just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. 15 Moreover I will be careful
to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my
decease.

The Trustworthy Prophetic Word

16 For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made
known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but
were eyewitnesses of His majesty. 17 For He received from God the
Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the
Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."
18 And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were
with Him on the holy mountain.

19 And so we have the prophetic word confirmed,[a] which you do
well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns
and the morning star rises in your hearts; 20 knowing this first, that no
prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation,[a] 21 for prophecy

1:19 [a]Or *We also have the more sure prophetic word.* **1:20** [a]Or *origin*

never came by the will of man, but holy men of God[a] spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit.

Destructive Doctrines

2 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction. [2]And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. [3]By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does[a] not slumber.

Doom of False Teachers

[4]For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast *them* down to hell and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; [5]and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, *one of* eight *people,* a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; [6]and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned *them* to destruction, making *them* an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; [7]and delivered righteous Lot, *who was* oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked [8](for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented *his* righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing *their* lawless deeds)— [9]*then* the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, [10]and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. *They are* presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, [11]whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord.

Depravity of False Teachers

[12]But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, [13]*and* will receive the wages of unrighteousness, *as* those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. *They are* spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, [14]having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, *and are* accursed children. [15]They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the *son* of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; [16]but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet.

[17]These are wells without water, clouds[a] carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.[b]

1:21 [a]NU-Text reads *but men spoke from God.* **2:3** [a]M-Text reads *will not.*
2:17 [a]NU-Text reads *and mists.* [b]NU-Text omits *forever.*

Armstrong enters the room. Yes, the "one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind" Neil Armstrong.

"Now ask your questions," the teacher invites. And Astronaut Armstrong answers each with certainty. He knows the moon; he's walked on it. No speculation or hesitation—he speaks with conviction.

So did Jesus. "He taught them as one having authority" (Matthew 7:29). Jesus knows the dimensions of God's throne room, the fragrance of its incense, the favorite songs of the unceasing choir. He has a unique, one-of-a-kind, unrivaled knowledge of God and wants to share His knowledge with you. "Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, *and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him*" (Matthew 11:27, emphasis mine).

Jesus doesn't boast in His knowledge; He shares it. He doesn't gloat; He gives. He doesn't revel; He reveals. He reveals to us the secrets of eternity. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Write down on an index card the characteristics listed in verses 5–7. Put it in a strategic position, such as on your bedroom mirror, for two weeks. Whenever you pass by, take a moment and read through the list. Which are you adding to your life? Which need more effort? Look to Jesus as your example and guide. His Spirit will give you the help you need.

EXPLORATION

Perseverance—Nehemiah 4:6; Matthew 24:13; Mark 13:13; Hebrews 3:6; 12:1–3.

Life Lessons

2 Peter 2:1–22

SITUATION
Some teachers in this church were teaching ideas that did not agree with God's Word. Peter harshly opposed them.

OBSERVATION
Beware of false teachers. God will punish them severely.

INSPIRATION
The disciples were making a big to-do over the buildings of the Jerusalem temple. Impressed with the massive hewed stones—some of them nearly twenty-four feet long—the followers applauded the awesome structure with its variegated marble that resembled the waves of the sea. Jesus was not so impressed. "Jesus said to them, 'Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down'" (Matthew 24:2).

Imagine someone forecasting the collapse of the White House, Buckingham Palace, or the Louvre. Wouldn't you want some details? The disciples did. "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (v. 3).

Sitting on the Mount of Olives, in full view of the temple and the City of David, Jesus issued a "buckle your seat belt, no kidding, life can be fatal to your health" warning.

He began with "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (vv. 4, 5). Note the

Deceptions of False Teachers

18 For when they speak great swelling *words* of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped[a] from those who live in error. 19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. 20 For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. 21 For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known *it,* to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. 22 But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: *"A dog returns to his own vomit,"*[a] and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

God's Promise Is Not Slack

3 Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in *both of* which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), 2 that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us,[a] the apostles of the Lord and Savior, 3 knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, 4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of creation." 5 For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, 6 by which the world *that* then existed perished, being flooded with water. 7 But the heavens and the earth *which* are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us,[a] not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

The Day of the Lord

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.[a] 11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? 13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

2:18 [a]NU-Text reads *are barely escaping.* **2:22** [a]Proverbs 26:11 **3:2** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *commandment of the apostles of your Lord and Savior* or *commandment of your apostles of the Lord and Savior.* **3:9** [a]NU-Text reads *you.* **3:10** [a]NU-Text reads *laid bare* (literally *found*).

Be Steadfast

14 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; 15 and consider *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, 16 as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable *people* twist to their own destruction, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures.

17 You therefore, beloved, since you know *this* beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; 18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen.

twofold appearance of the word *many*. Many deceived and many deceivers. Churches are petri dishes for self-serving egomaniacs who masquerade as ministers of God. They will do so "in His name," claiming a special status, a superior spirituality. They boast of insider information and adorn their teaching with phrases like "God told me . . . ," "God spoke to me . . . ," "God led me . . . " They present themselves as religious gurus, code breakers, members of an inner circle, implying that they have access to knowledge unavailable to the common person. Some even position themselves as Jesus Himself, "saying, 'I am the Christ'" (v. 5). . . .

Filter all messages and messengers through these verses: "Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also" (1 John 2:22, 23). False prophets always minimize the role of Christ and maximize the role of humanity. Be doctrinally diligent. Stick to one question—is this person directing listeners to Jesus? If the answer is yes, be grateful and pray for that individual. If the answer is no, get out while you still can. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you listen to preachers passively? Do you find yourself assuming the preacher is correct? Listen actively. No matter how good the message seems, compare it with the Bible. Find out what God says on the topic.

EXPLORATION

Dangers of False Teachers—Isaiah 56:10–12; Jeremiah 23:1, 2; 50:6; Ezekiel 34:2, 3; Matthew 7:15–23; John 10:12; Philippians 1:15; 1 Timothy 6:3–5.

Life Lessons

2 Peter 3:1–18

SITUATION

Peter reminded his readers that God would faithfully keep every promise.

OBSERVATION

Christ's coming should motivate all Believers to live in anticipation of His arrival.

INSPIRATION

One thing is for sure: you'll love [heaven]. Never weary, selfish, or defeated. Clear mind, tireless muscles, unhindered joy. Heaven is a perfect place of perfected people with our perfect Lord. "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33).

Don't assume we will exhaust our study of God. Endless attributes await us. His grace will increasingly stun, wisdom progressively astound, and perfection ever more sharpen into focus.

We serve a God so rapt with wonders that their viewing requires an eternity. A God whose beauty enhances with proximity. And this is the invitation He gives: "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3). . . .

Jesus is preparing for you a place. A perfect place of perfected people overseen by our perfect Lord. And at the right time He will come and take you home. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you look forward to Christ's return? Choose actions you would want Him to see and words you would want Him to hear. Make decisions He would approve.

EXPLORATION

Christ's Second Coming—Matthew 24:27; 26:64; Luke 12:40; 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 23; Hebrews 9:28; James 5:8; 1 John 2:28; Revelation 16:15.

THE BOOK OF

1 JOHN

INTRODUCTION

Tolerance. A prized virtue today. The ability to be understanding of those with whom you differ is a sign of sophistication. Jesus, too, was a champion of tolerance:

—Tolerant of the disciples when they doubted

—Tolerant of the crowds when they misunderstood

—Tolerant of us when we fall

But there is one area where Jesus was intolerant. There was one area where He was unindulgent and dogmatic. Were he to share His opinion today, He would be accused of being narrow, biased, one-sided, even bigoted.

But as far as He was concerned, when it comes to salvation, there aren't several roads . . . there is only one road. There aren't several ways . . . there is only one way . . . there aren't several paths . . . there is only one path. And that path is Jesus Himself.

That is why it is so hard for people to believe in Jesus. It's much easier to consider Him one of several options rather than *the* option. But such a philosophy is no option. Jesus closed that door. Jesus positioned Himself as the peerless Savior of the world. In defining who He is, Jesus is bold and unapologetic.

His disciple John was equally firm.

First John was written to dispel doubts about Jesus. False teachers had entered the church, denying the incarnation of Christ. John steps up to the bench and makes His defense. John knew Him, walked with Him, lived with Him. He saw Him heal. He heard His words. John had been to the empty tomb and He knew . . . Jesus is not one of many options. He is the only option or nothing at all.

There are times to be tolerant. And there are times to take a stand for truth. In this letter, John takes a stand.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: John

Date Written: c. A.D. 90

Key Themes:

- Our obedience in faith keeps us in fellowship with God.
- God will forgive our sins.
- We can measure any truth by where it places Jesus in relation to God.
- God's love and Christ's victory are the Christian's inheritance.

Key Verse:

"That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

Contents:

I. Fellowship with God 1:1—2:14

II. Beware of Enemies 2:15—3:10

III. The Command to Love 3:11—4:21

IV. Victory in Jesus 5:1–21

What Was Heard, Seen, and Touched

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— 2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— 3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 And these things we write to you that your[a] joy may be full.

Fellowship with Him and One Another

5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

2 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

The Test of Knowing Him

3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. 6 He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

7 Brethren,[a] I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning.[b] 8 Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.

9 He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. 10 He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 11 But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Their Spiritual State

12 I write to you, little children,
Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.

1:4 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *our.* **2:7** [a]NU-Text reads *Beloved.* [b]NU-Text omits *from the beginning.*

Life LESSONS

1 John 1:1–10

SITUATION

Because John was Jesus' friend, he could speak with authority about maintaining true fellowship with God—and what hinders it!

OBSERVATION

Living in fellowship with God means that we will have joy. Yet, our pride causes us to forfeit that joy when we hide our own sin. We cannot be in a right relationship with God unless we live humbly, honestly, and dependently on Him.

INSPIRATION

"If we confess our sins . . ." The biggest word in Scriptures just might be that two letter one, *if.* For confessing sins—admitting failure—is exactly what prisoners of pride refuse to do.

"Well, I may not be perfect, but I'm better than Hitler and certainly kinder than Idi Amin!"

"Me a sinner? Oh, sure, I get rowdy every so often, but I'm a pretty good ol' boy."

"Listen, I'm just as good as the next guy. I pay my taxes. I coach the Little League team. I even make donations to Red Cross. Why, God's probably proud to have someone like me on his team."

Justification.

Rationalization.

Comparison. These are the tools of the jailbird. They sound good. They sound familiar. They even sound American. But in the kingdom, they sound hollow. . . .

When you get to the point of sorrow for your sins, when you admit that

Confession

Perhaps we didn't take money but we've taken advantage or taken control or taken leave of our senses and then, like the thief, we've taken off. Dashing down alleys of deceit. Hiding behind buildings of work to be done or deadlines to be met. Though we try to act normal, anyone who looks closely at us can see we are on the lam: Eyes darting and hands fidgeting, we chatter nervously committed to the cover-up, we scheme and squirm, changing the topic and changing direction. We don't want anyone to know the truth, especially God.

Am I missing the mark when I say that many of us attend church on the run? Am I out of line when I say many of us spend life on the run?

Am I overstating the case when I announce, "Grace means you don't have to run anymore!" It's the truth. Grace means it's finally safe to turn ourselves in.

Confession does for the soul what preparing the land does for the field. Before the farmer sows the seed he works the acreage, removing the rocks and pulling the stumps. He knows that seed grows better if the land is prepared. Confession is the act of inviting God to walk the acreage of our hearts. "There is a rock of greed over here, Father; I can't budge it. And that tree of guilt near the fence? Its roots are long and deep. And may I show you some dry soil, too crusty for seed?" God's seed grows better if the soil of the heart is cleared.

And so the Father and the Son walk the field together; digging and pulling, preparing the heart for fruit. Confession invites the Father to work the soil of the soul.

Study Guide

Read 1 John 1:8–10.

- Think of a time when you felt very guilty about something. How did your guilty conscience affect your behavior?
- How does chronic guilt affect us physically?
- If God knows us better than we know ourselves and is eager to forgive us, what keeps us from confessing our sin to Him?
- Describe the freedom that confession brings.
- Why is it so difficult to confess our sins to one another?
- What criteria do most people follow to determine which sins to openly confess to others?
- How do we relate to God and other people differently when we have confessed and received forgiveness?
- Why do people say, "Admitting your problem is the first step to overcoming it"?
- Think of the most difficult confession you've ever made. What did you learn from that experience?
- How can you practice confession on a more regular basis?

13 I write to you, fathers,
Because you have known Him *who is* from the beginning.
I write to you, young men,
Because you have overcome the wicked one.
I write to you, little children,
Because you have known the Father.
14 I have written to you, fathers,
Because you have known Him *who is* from the beginning.
I have written to you, young men,
Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you,
And you have overcome the wicked one.

Do Not Love the World

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

Deceptions of the Last Hour

18 Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the[a] Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

20 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.[a] 21 I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

22 Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. 23 Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

Let Truth Abide in You

24 Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. 25 And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life.

26 These things I have written to you concerning those who *try to* deceive you. 27 But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will[a] abide in Him.

The Children of God

28 And now, little children, abide in Him, that when[a] He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His com-

2:18 [a]NU-Text omits *the.* **2:20** [a]NU-Text reads *you all know.* **2:27** [a]NU-Text reads *you abide.* **2:28** [a]NU-Text reads *if.*

you have no other option but to cast all your cares on Him, and when there is truly no other one that you can call, then cast all your cares on Him, for He is waiting. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
What activities in your life need forgiveness? Confess them. Then remove every sinful activity from your life.

EXPLORATION
Confessing Sin—
2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 32:5; Mark 1:5.

Life Lessons

1 John 2:1–29

SITUATION
John advised that Christians should have integrity. Obedience and repentance are the marks of those who love God.

OBSERVATION
Christians avoid the temptation to compromise their standards. If we fail, however, Jesus stands ready to forgive.

INSPIRATION
Jesus appeared to the followers in a flesh-and-bone body: "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have" (Luke 24:39). His resurrected body was a real body, real enough to walk on the road to Emmaus, to be mistaken for that of a gardener, to swallow fish at breakfast.

In the same breath, Jesus' real body was *really* different. The Emmaus disciples didn't recognize Him, and walls didn't stop Him. Mark tried to describe the new look and settled for

ing. 29If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

3 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God![a] Therefore the world does not know us,[b] because it did not know Him. 2Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. 3And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Sin and the Child of God

4Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. 5And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. 6Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.

7Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. 8He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. 9Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

The Imperative of Love

10In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor *is* he who does not love his brother. 11For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, 12not as Cain *who* was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.

13Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. 14We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love *his* brother[a] abides in death. 15Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

The Outworking of Love

16By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. 17But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

18My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. 19And by this we know[a] that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. 20For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. 21Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. 22And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. 23And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us[a] commandment.

3:1 [a]NU-Text adds *And we are.* [b]M-Text reads *you.* **3:14** [a]NU-Text omits *his brother.* **3:19** [a]NU-Text reads *we shall know.* **3:23** [a]M-Text omits *us.*

"[Jesus] appeared in another form" (Mark 16:12). While His body was the same, it was better; it was glorified. It was a heavenly body.

And I can't find the passage that says He shed it. He ascended in it. "While they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). He will return in it. The angel told the followers, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

The God-man is still both. The hands that blessed the bread of the boy now bless the prayers of the millions. And the mouth that commissions angels is the mouth that kissed children.

You know what this means? The greatest force in the cosmos understands and intercedes for you. "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). . . .

You, too, have an advocate with the Father. When you are weak, He is strong. When you are timid, He speaks. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Is there a situation in which you have not been completely honest? Admit to God that you have sinned and ask for his forgiveness. Then seek the forgiveness of the person you have deceived and take steps to make things right. Pray that God would keep you honest. Remember that Jesus is advocating for you.

EXPLORATION

Honesty—Psalm 51:6; Proverbs 12:22; Romans 9:1; Colossians 3:9.

The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error

24 Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He
in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom
He has given us.

4 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether
they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into
the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that con-
fesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 3 and every
spirit that does not confess that[a] Jesus Christ has come in the flesh
is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have
heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because
He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5 They are of
the world. Therefore they speak *as* of the world, and the world hears
them. 6 We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of
God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit
of error.

Knowing God Through Love

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone
who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does
not know God, for God is love. 9 In this the love of God was manifested
toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world,
that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved
God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation
for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one
another.

Seeing God Through Love

12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God
abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. 13 By this we know
that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His
Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son
as Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of
God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 And we have known and
believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides
in love abides in God, and God in him.

The Consummation of Love

17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have
boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in
this world. 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear,
because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made
perfect in love. 19 We love Him[a] because He first loved us.

Obedience by Faith

20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar;
for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can[a] he

4:3 [a]NU-Text omits *that* and *Christ has come in the flesh.* **4:19** [a]NU-Text omits *Him.*
4:20 [a]NU-Text reads *he cannot.*

Life LESSONS

1 John 3:1–24

SITUATION
John wrote that Christians should become more like Jesus. Their actions should prove that they unite in love as the church of God.

OBSERVATION
Believers' future transformation will take place when we see Him as He is.

INSPIRATION
Why do Jesus and His angels rejoice over one repenting sinner? Can they see something we can't? Do they know something we don't? Absolutely. They know what heaven holds. They've seen the table, and they've heard the music, and they can't wait to see your face when you arrive. Better still, they can't wait to see you.

When you arrive and enter the party, something wonderful will happen. A final transformation will occur. You will be just like Jesus. Drink deeply from 1 John 3:2: "It has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, *for we shall see Him as He is"* (italics mine).

Of all the blessings of heaven, one of the greatest will be you! You will be God's magnum opus, His work of art. The angels will gasp. God's work will be completed. At last, you will have a heart like His.

You will love with a perfect love.

You will worship with a radiant face.

You'll hear each word God speaks.

Your heart will be pure, your words will be like

jewels, your thoughts will be like treasures.

You will be just like Jesus. You will, at long last, have a heart like His. Envision the heart of Jesus and you'll be envisioning your own. Guiltless. Fearless. Thrilled and joyous. Tirelessly worshiping. Flawlessly discerning. As the mountain stream is pristine and endless, so will be your heart. You will be like Him.

And if that were not enough, everyone else will be like Him as well. "Heaven is the perfect place for people made perfect." Heaven is populated by those who let God change them. Arguments will cease, for jealousy won't exist. Suspicions won't surface, for there will be no secrets. Every sin is gone. Every insecurity is forgotten. Every fear is past. Pure wheat. No weeds. Pure gold. No alloy. Pure love. No lust. Pure hope. No fear. No wonder the angels rejoice when one sinner repents; they know another work of art will soon grace the gallery of God. They know what heaven holds. (From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do you really believe that you will be a blessing in heaven? Make your own list of the types of transformations you'll be looking forward to. Thank God that you will be perfect then, and strive to live like it now.

EXPLORATION

Transformation—Romans 8:18–25; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:16–18; 2 Peter 1:3, 4.

love God whom he has not seen? 21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God *must* love his brother also.

5 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our[a] faith. 5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

The Certainty of God's Witness

6 This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears wit-

5:4 [a] M-Text reads *your.*

CHRIST THROUGH THE BIBLE

Jesus: True God, Our Source

Should a man see only popularity, he becomes a mirror, reflecting whatever needs to be reflected to gain acceptance. . . . He is everyone and no one.

Should a man see only power, he becomes a wolf—prowling, hunting, and stalking the elusive game. Recognition is his prey and people are his prizes. His quest is endless. . . . As a result, he who sees only power is degraded to an animal, an insatiable scavenger, controlled not by a will from within, but by luring from without.

Should a man see only pleasure, he becomes a carnival thrill-seeker, alive only in bright lights, wild rides, and titillating entertainment. With lustful fever he races from ride to ride, satisfying his insatiable passion for sensations only long enough to look for another. . . .

Seekers of popularity, power, and pleasure. The end result is the same: painful unfulfillment.

Only in seeking his Maker does a man truly become man. For in seeing his Creator man catches a glimpse of what he was intended to be. He who would see his God would then see the reason for death and the purpose of time. Destiny? Tomorrow? Truth? All are questions within the reach of the man who knows his source. (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1753.

ness, because the Spirit is truth. 7For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. 8And there are three that bear witness on earth:[a] the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.

9If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which[a] He has testified of His Son. 10He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. 11And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 13These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life,[a] and that you may *continue to* believe in the name of the Son of God.

Confidence and Compassion in Prayer

14Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

16If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin *which does* not *lead* to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is sin *leading* to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. 17All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not *leading* to death.

Knowing the True—Rejecting the False

18We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself,[a] and the wicked one does not touch him.

19We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies *under the sway of* the wicked one.

20And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

21Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

5:8 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit the words from *in heaven* (verse 7) through *on earth* (verse 8). Only four or five very late manuscripts contain these words in Greek. **5:9** [a]NU-Text reads *God, that.* **5:13** [a]NU-Text omits the rest of this verse. **5:18** [a]NU-Text reads *him.*

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1 John 4:1—5:21

SITUATION
John reminded believers to reject the lies of false teachers. He also told them that God illustrates perfect love to us.

OBSERVATION
Because of God's self-sacrificing love for us, we should love Him and love others.

INSPIRATION
Every day do something you don't want to do. Pick up someone else's trash. Surrender your parking place. Call the long-winded relative. Carry the cooler. Doesn't have to be a big thing. . . . Don't be too big to do something small. "My beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58). . . .

A good action not only brings good fortune, it brings God's attention. He notices the actions of servants. He sent His Son to be one.

When you and I crest Mount Zion and hear the applause of saints, we'll realize this: hands pushed us up the mountain. The pierced hands of Jesus Christ, the greatest servant who ever lived. (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Who is one person you have difficulty loving? What three steps can you take this week to show love to that person? Pray that God would give you a loving heart; then show your love.

EXPLORATION
Loving Others—John 15:9–13; Galatians 5:6, 13; Ephesians 5:1; Colossians 3:12; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11–24.

THE BOOK OF

2 JOHN

INTRODUCTION

The single most difficult pursuit is truth and love.

That sentence is grammatically correct. I know every English teacher wanted to pluralize it to read: The most difficult pursuits are those of truth and love. But that's not what I meant to say.

True, love is a difficult pursuit.

Correct, truth is a tough one, too.

But put them together, pursue truth and love at the same time, and hang on, baby, you're in for the ride of your life.

But that's the task of the Christian. Love in truth. Truth in love. Never one at the expense of the other. Never the embrace of love without the torch of truth. Never the heat of truth without the warmth of love.

Never would be easier if we could choose between the two, but we can't. So John, in this second letter, calls for a hybrid.

"Because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love" (vv. 2, 3).

Truth and love. Love and truth. Never one without the other. To pursue both is our singular task.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: John

Date Written: c. A.D. 90

Key Themes:

- Love is an ultimate force, the essence of God and His command to us.
- The truth of Jesus Christ is the foundation of the gospel.
- Those who do not teach the truth do serious harm and should be treated seriously.

Key Verse:

"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9).

Contents:

I. Truth and Love 1–6

II. False Teachers 7–13

Greeting the Elect Lady

The Elder,

To the elect lady and her children, whom I
love in truth, and not only I, but also all those
who have known the truth, 2because of the
truth which abides in us and will be with us
forever:

3Grace, mercy, *and* peace will be with you[a]
from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus
Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.

Walk in Christ's Commandments

4I rejoiced greatly that I have found *some* of
your children walking in truth, as we received
commandment from the Father. 5And now I
plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a
new commandment to you, but that which we
have had from the beginning: that we love one
another. 6This is love, that we walk according
to His commandments. This is the command-
ment, that as you have heard from the begin-
ning, you should walk in it.

Beware of Antichrist Deceivers

7For many deceivers have gone out into
the world who do not confess Jesus Christ *as*
coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an
antichrist. 8Look to yourselves, that we[a] do not
lose those things we worked for, but *that* we[b]
may receive a full reward.

9Whoever transgresses[a] and does not abide
in the doctrine of Christ does not have God.
He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has
both the Father and the Son. 10If anyone
comes to you and does not bring this doctrine,
do not receive him into your house nor greet
him; 11for he who greets him shares in his evil
deeds.

John's Farewell Greeting

12Having many things to write to you, I
did not wish *to do so* with paper and ink; but
I hope to come to you and speak face to face,
that our joy may be full.

13The children of your elect sister greet you.
Amen.

3 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *us.* **8** [a]NU-Text reads *you.* [b]NU-Text reads *you.* **9** [a]NU-Text reads *goes ahead.*

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2 John 1–13

SITUATION

John exhorted Christians to live in a way that pleased God and to be aware of those who did not speak God's truth.

OBSERVATION

God's Word and God's Spirit provide what we need to detect false teachers.

INSPIRATION

For thousands of years, God gave us His voice. Prior to Bethlehem, He gave His messengers, His teachers, His words. But in the manger, God gave us Himself.

Many people have trouble with such a teaching. Islam sees God as one who sends others. He sends angels, prophets, books, but God is too holy to come to us Himself. For God to touch the earth would be called a "shirk." People who claim that God has touched the earth shirk God's holiness; they make Him gross. They blaspheme Him.

Christianity, by contrast, celebrates God's surprising descent. His nature does not trap Him in heaven, but leads Him to earth. In God's great gospel, He not only sends, He becomes; He not only looks down, He lives among; He not only talks to us, He lives with us as one of us.

He swims in Mary's womb.
Wiggles in the itchy manger straw.
Totters as He learns to walk.
Bounces on the back of a donkey.
God with us.
He knows hurt. His siblings called Him crazy.
He knows hunger. He made a meal out of wheat-field grains.
He knows exhaustion. So sleepy, He dozed in a storm-tossed boat.
He knows betrayal. He gave Judas three years of love. Judas, in turn, gave Jesus a betrayer's kiss.
Most of all, He knows sin. Not His own, mind you. But He knows yours.
Every lie you've told.
Person you've hurt.
Dollar you've taken.
Promise you've broken.
Virtue you've abandoned.
Opportunity you've squandered.

Every deed you've committed against God—for all sin is against God—Jesus knows. He knows them better than you do. He knows their price. Because He paid it. "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the

unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18). (From *Cure for the Common Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

In order to resist Satan and his false teachers, Christians must know God's Word and depend on the Spirit for discernment. Study the Scriptures daily and become involved in a Bible study with other Christians through your local church. Get to know better the Jesus who loves you and died for you.

EXPLORATION

Truth—Psalm 25:5; 51:6; 119:160; John 14:6; Colossians 1:5, 6; 2 Timothy 2:15; 2 Peter 1:12.

THE BOOK OF

3 JOHN

INTRODUCTION

It's like finding a postcard written from one friend to another. The writer is John; the recipient is Gaius.

John we know. We met him when he was a young man in the shadow of John the Baptist. We saw him as he stood in the shadow of the cross. We now read him as he writes as the elder statesman of the church.

He writes to Gaius. Whoever Gaius was, he had a special place in John's heart. John is writing to thank him for his hospitality. Word was out that Gaius kept his door open and pantry stocked for traveling missionaries, and John is writing to commend him.

His words are not so kind, however, for Diotrephes. Apparently, he was the opposite of Gaius. Where Gaius was accepting, Diotrephes was judgmental. Where Gaius was a servant, Diotrephes was demanding.

In a way, it's like reading a postcard that wasn't intended for you. But in another, it's like getting a personal letter from John. By the way, are you more like Gaius or Diotrephes? Or better, do you love people or love the limelight?

If John were writing a note to you, what would he say?

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: John

Date Written: c. A.D. 90

Key Themes:

- When we help ministers of the gospel we become part of their ministry.
- We need to be generous toward one another.
- Personal pride has no place in ministry.

Key Verse:

"Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God" (3 John 11).

Contents:

I. Gaius 1–8
II. Diotrephes 9–14

Greeting to Gaius

The Elder,

To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth:

2 Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in
all things and be in health, just as your soul
prospers. 3 For I rejoiced greatly when breth-
ren came and testified of the truth *that is* in
you, just as you walk in the truth. 4 I have no
greater joy than to hear that my children walk
in truth.[a]

Gaius Commended for Generosity

5 Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you
do for the brethren and[a] for strangers, 6 who
have borne witness of your love before the
church. *If* you send them forward on their
journey in a manner worthy of God, you will
do well, 7 because they went forth for His
name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles.
8 We therefore ought to receive[a] such, that we
may become fellow workers for the truth.

Diotrephes and Demetrius

9 I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who
loves to have the preeminence among them,
does not receive us. 10 Therefore, if I come,
I will call to mind his deeds which he does,
prating against us with malicious words. And
not content with that, he himself does not
receive the brethren, and forbids those who
wish to, putting *them* out of the church.

11 Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but
what is good. He who does good is of God,
but[a] he who does evil has not seen God.

12 Demetrius has a *good* testimony from all,
and from the truth itself. And we also bear wit-
ness, and you know that our testimony is true.

Farewell Greeting

13 I had many things to write, but I do not
wish to write to you with pen and ink; 14 but
I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak
face to face.

Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet
the friends by name.

4 [a]NU-Text reads *the truth.* **5** [a]NU-Text adds *especially.* **8** [a]NU-Text reads *support.* **11** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *but.*

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3 John 1–15

SITUATION

In the early church, Christians showed hospitality to traveling prophets, teachers, and evangelists. Gaius, as a church elder, was exemplary in providing hospitality and walking in truth.

OBSERVATION

Believers should live by appropriate standards—be faithful to the truth and show hospitality to fellow Believers, especially teachers. John cites Gaius and Demetrius as good examples and warns against the ways of Diotrephes.

INSPIRATION

Call us a fast society, an efficient society, but don't call us a personal society. Our society is set up for isolation. We wear earbuds when we exercise. We communicate via e-mail and text messages. We enter and exit our houses with gates and garage-door openers. Our mantra: "I leave you alone. You leave me alone."

Yet God wants His people to be an exception. Let everyone else go the way of computers and keyboards. God's children will be people of hospitality.

Long before the church had pulpits and baptisteries, she had kitchens and dinner tables. "Continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart" (Acts 2:46). "Daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:42).

Even a casual reading of the New Testament unveils the house as the primary tool of the church. "To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer . . . and to the church in your house" (Philemon 1, 2). "Greet Priscilla and Aquila . . . . Likewise greet the church that is in their house" (Romans 16:3, 5). "Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house" (Colossians 4:15).

It's no wonder that the church's elders were to be "hospitable" (1 Timothy 3:2). The primary gathering place of the church was the home. . . .

Not everyone can serve in a foreign land, lead a relief effort, or volunteer at the downtown soup kitchen. But who can't be hospitable? Do you have a front door? A table? Chairs? Bread and meat for sandwiches? Congratulations! You just qualified to serve in the most ancient of ministries: hospitality. (From *Outlive Your Life* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

How hospitable are you? Do you feel as if you can't entertain much because of poor circumstances?

Fellowship with other Christians doesn't require silver, china, and fine dining. During the next three months, look for ways you can help other Christians, especially those who are traveling.

EXPLORATION
Hospitality—Mark 9:41; Romans 12:13; 16:23; 2 Timothy 1:16–18; 1 Peter 4:9–11; James 2:15, 16.

THE BOOK OF

JUDE

INTRODUCTION

A redwood tree fell in a California forest. Four hundred years old.

It wasn't destroyed by lightning. Storms had come and gone, but the tree stood. It wasn't felled by winds. Bent by their force, but never uprooted. The tree didn't fall to fire. It had stood when others collapsed.

What destroyed the redwood?

Insects. Termites devoured it from within. It had stood for four centuries against the elements from without, but collapsed because of an attack within.

Jude warns that the same can happen to the church.

He wanted to write "concerning our common salvation" (v. 3).

But he felt compelled to address a more somber issue—the danger of false teachers.

Apparently, some had entered the church (v. 8). They were not students of the Word but, rather, promoters of sexual sin. They used God's grace as a license for passion (v. 4). The only solution? "Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (v. 3).

Jude is urgent in his warning. What destroyed the redwood can destroy a church. But he is equally urgent in his encouragement. "To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior" (vv. 24, 25).

Can God really keep you from falling? To answer that, go to another tree on a barren hill. A tree older than time. A tree which covers the mistakes of your past and the problems of your future. Be assured—that tree will never fall.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: Jude

Date Written: c. A.D. 60

Key Themes:

- Each Christian should feel a responsibility to defend the truth.
- Stand against false teachers when you recognize them.
- Trust God to give you the strength and awareness to represent Him in the world.

Key Verse:

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24).

Contents:

I. Recognizing False Teachers 1–16

II. Standing Against False Teachers 17–25

Greeting to the Called

Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James,

To those who are called, sanctified[a] by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ:

2 Mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.

Contend for the Faith

3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. 4 For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God[a] and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Old and New Apostates

5 But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. 6 And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; 7 as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

8 Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. 9 Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" 10 But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves. 11 Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

Apostates Depraved and Doomed

12 These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving *only* themselves. *They are* clouds without water, carried about[a] by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; 13 raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.

14 Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, 15 to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed

1 [a]NU-Text reads *beloved.* **4** [a]NU-Text omits *God.* **12** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *along.*

Life Lessons

Jude 1–25

SITUATION
Jude warned Jewish Christians about false teachers and wicked people who found their way into the church. These people taught that because God's grace was free, behavior didn't matter. Jude reminds believers of the punishment immoral people receive.

OBSERVATION
Some people claim to love God but don't obey Him. Be careful that disobedience does not create a wedge between you and God. Remember His constant and unfailing love for you. He will "present you faultless" (v. 24).

INSPIRATION
The big news of the Bible is not that you love God but that God loves you; not that you can know God but that God already knows you! He tattooed your name on the palm of His hand. His thoughts of you outnumber the sand on the shore. You never leave His mind, escape His sight, flee His thoughts. He sees the worst of you and loves you still. Your sins of tomorrow and failings of the future will not surprise Him; He sees them now. Every day and deed of your life has passed before His eyes and been calculated in His decision. He knows you better than you know you and has reached His verdict: He loves you still. No discovery will disillusion Him; no rebellion will dissuade Him. He loves you with an everlasting love. . . .

The greatest discovery in the universe is the greatest love in the universe—God's

in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

Apostates Predicted

16 These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling *words,* flattering people to gain advantage. 17 But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: 18 how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. 19 These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.

Maintain Your Life with God

20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

22 And on some have compassion, making a distinction;[a] 23 but others save with fear, pulling *them* out of the fire,[a] hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.

Glory to God

24 Now to Him who is able to keep you[a]
from stumbling,
And to present *you* faultless
Before the presence of His glory with
exceeding joy,
25 To God our Savior,[a]
Who alone is wise,[b]
Be glory and majesty,
Dominion and power,[c]
Both now and forever.
Amen.

22 [a]NU-Text reads *who are doubting* (or *making distinctions*). **23** [a]NU-Text adds *and on some have mercy with fear* and omits *with fear* in first clause. **24** [a]M-Text reads *them.* **25** [a]NU-Text reads *To the only God our Savior.* [b]NU-Text omits *Who . . . is wise* and adds *Through Jesus Christ our Lord.* [c]NU-Text adds *Before all time.*

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love. "Nothing can ever separate us from his love" (Romans 8:38 NLT). Think what those words mean. You may be separated from your spouse, from your folks, from your kids, from your hair, but you are not separated from the love of God. And you never will be. Ever.

Step to the well of His love and drink up. It may take some time to feel the difference. Occasional drinks won't bedew the evaporated heart. Ceaseless swallows will. Once filled up by His love, you'll never be the same.

Peter wasn't. He traded his boat for a pulpit and never looked back. The disciples weren't. The same men who fled the garden in fear traveled the world in faith. . . .

The joy of a love found changed the disciples. May you be changed. (From C*ome Thirsty* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

You may be great at obeying some commands of God but lax in obeying others. Which biblical teachings do you struggle to obey? Help others who are struggling, and let them help you. Depend on God, who can help you stand firm.

EXPLORATION

Grace and Sin—Leviticus 19:2; Romans 6; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Galatians 5:13, 16, 17; 6:7, 8; Hebrews 12:14; 2 Peter 2:1, 2, 17–20; 3:11, 14, 17.

THE BOOK OF

REVELATION

INTRODUCTION

An ancient legend tells of a general whose army was afraid to fight. The soldiers were frightened. The enemy was too strong. Its fortress was too high and weapons too mighty.

The king, however, was not afraid. He knew his men would win. How could he convince them?

He had an idea. He told his soldiers that he possessed a magical coin. A prophetic coin. A coin which would foretell the outcome of the battle. On one side was an eagle and on the other a bear. He would toss the coin. If it landed eagle-side up, they would win. If it landed with the bear up, they would lose.

The army was silent as the coin flipped in the air. Soldiers circled as it fell to the ground. They held their breath as they looked and shouted when they saw the eagle. The army would win.

Bolstered by the assurance of victory, the men marched against the castle and won.

It was only after the victory that the king showed the men the coin. The two sides were identical.

Though the story is fictional, the truth is reliable: assured victory empowers the army.

That may be the reason God gives us the Book of Revelation. In it He assures victory. We, the soldiers, are privileged a glimpse into the final battlefield. All hell breaks loose as all heaven comes forth. The two collide in the ultimate battle of good and evil. Left standing amidst the smoke and thunder is the Son of God. Jesus, born in a manger—now triumphant over Satan.

Satan is defeated. Christ is triumphant. And we, the soldiers, are assured of victory.

Let us march.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Author: John

Date Written: c. A.D. 95

Key Themes:

- God has a plan and a future for the world.
- God will be ultimately victorious over evil.
- There will be a final accounting for our faith and our lives.
- There is a better world in store.

Key Verse:

"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Contents:

I. The Seven Churches 1:1—3:22

II. Images of Final Judgment 4:1—19:6

III. Images of a New World 19:7—22:21

Life Lessons

Revelation 1:1–20

SITUATION
John wrote Revelation to encourage Christians to resist the cult of emperor worship and to stand firm during persecution.

OBSERVATION
Jesus, the Mighty One, cares for us and stands with us. No matter what we face, He gives us His love and power. But in the end, judgment must come.

INSPIRATION
Accuse God of unfairness? He has wrapped caution tape on hell's porch and posted a million and one red flags outside the entrance. To descend its stairs, you'd have to cover your ears, blindfold your eyes, and, most of all, ignore the epic sacrifice of history: Christ, in God's hell on humanity's cross, crying out to the blackened sky, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). You'll more easily capture the Pacific in a jar than describe that sacrifice in words. But a description might read like this: God, who hates sin, unleashed His wrath on His sin-filled Son. Christ, who never sinned, endured the awful forsakenness of hell. The supreme surprise of hell is this: Christ went there so you won't have to. Yet hell could not contain Him. He arose, not just from the dead, but from the depths. "Through death He [destroyed] him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14).

Christ emerged from Satan's domain with this declaration: "I have the keys of Hades and of Death"

Introduction and Benediction

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John, 2 who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. 3 Blessed *is* he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time *is* near.

Greeting the Seven Churches

4 John, to the seven churches which are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth.

To Him who loved us and washed[a] us from our sins in His own blood, 6 and has made us kings[a] and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

7 Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.

8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End,"[a] says the Lord,[b] "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

Vision of the Son of Man

9 I, John, both[a] your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, 11 saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,"[a] and, "What you see, write in a book and send *it* to the seven churches which are in Asia:[b] to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

12 Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the seven lampstands *One* like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. 14 His head and hair *were* white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; 15 His feet *were* like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; 16 He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance *was* like the sun shining in its strength. 17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me,[a] "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. 18 I *am* He

1:5 [a]NU-Text reads *loves us and freed;* M-Text reads *loves us and washed.* **1:6** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *a kingdom.* **1:8** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *the Beginning and the End.* [b]NU-Text and M-Text add *God.* **1:9** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *both.* **1:11** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *I am* through third *and.* [b]NU-Text and M-Text omit *which are in Asia.* **1:17** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *to me.*

who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. 19 Write[a] the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. 20 The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw[a] are the seven churches.

The Loveless Church

2 "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write,

'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. 4 Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. 6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."'

The Persecuted Church

8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write,

'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: 9 "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and *I know* the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

11 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."'

The Compromising Church

12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write,

'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: 13 "I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne *is*. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas *was* My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. 14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. 15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which

1:19 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *Therefore, write.* **1:20** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *which you saw.*

(Revelation 1:18). He is the warden of eternity. The door He shuts, no one opens. The door He opens, no one shuts (Revelation 3:7).

Thanks to Christ, this earth can be the nearest you come to hell.

But apart from Christ, this earth is the nearest you'll come to heaven. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

God has told you He will destroy Satan and His works that oppose you. Do your actions prove that you believe Him?

EXPLORATION

Sovereignty—Job 37:23; Ezekiel 6:14; Daniel 4:25; Jude 4; Revelation 19:16.

Life Lessons

Revelation 2:1–29

SITUATION

John commended various churches in Asia Minor regarding their faithfulness and fervor for God. He highlights the importance of applying God's Word and avoiding sin.

OBSERVATION

Believers remain faithful to the truth of God's Word by keeping their eyes on Jesus. Those who overcome will share in God's glory.

INSPIRATION

Next time your day goes south, here is what you do. Steep yourself in the grace of God. Saturate your day in His love. Marinate your mind in His mercy. He has settled your accounts, paid your debt. Christ "Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24).

When you lose your temper with your child, Christ intervenes: "I paid for that." When you tell a lie and all of heaven groans,

your Savior speaks up: "My death covered that sin." As you lust, gloat, covet, or judge, Jesus stands before the tribunal of heaven and points to the blood-streaked Cross. "I've already made provision. I've taken away the sins of the world."

What a gift He has given you. You've won the greatest lottery in the history of humanity, and you didn't even pay for the ticket! Your soul is secure, your salvation guaranteed. Your name is written in the only book that matters. You're only a few sand grains in the hourglass from a tearless, graveless, painless existence. What more do you need? (From *Every Day Deserves a Chance* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Remember your joy and sense of achievement when you had a problem and you continued to work on it until it was solved? God wants to give you that same feeling of joy and fulfillment as you persevere in your Christian faith. Ask God to help you endure.

EXPLORATION

Perseverance—Romans 5:3, 4; Hebrews 12:1; James 1:3, 4, 12; 2 Peter 1:5–9.

Life Lessons

Revelation 3:1–22

SITUATION

God continued to address the spiritual lives of His churches. He encouraged the church in the Asian city of Philadelphia to persevere through difficult times. But the churches in Sardis and Laodicea were told to repent of their sin.

OBSERVATION

God does not tolerate a mediocre spiritual life. He

thing I hate.[a] 16 Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

17 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives *it.*" '

The Corrupt Church

18 "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write,

'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: 19 "I know your works, love, service, faith,[a] and your patience; and *as* for your works, the last *are* more than the first. 20 Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow[a] that woman[b] Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce[c] My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent.[a] 22 Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their[a] deeds. 23 I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

24 "Now to you I say, and[a] to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will[b] put on you no other burden. 25 But hold fast what you have till I come. 26 And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—

27 *'He shall rule them with a rod of iron;*
They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'[a]—

as I also have received from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star.

29 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '

The Dead Church

3 "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write,

'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.[a] 3 Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.

2:15 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *likewise* for *which thing I hate.* **2:19** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *faith, service.* **2:20** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *I have against you that you tolerate.* [b]M-Text reads *your wife Jezebel.* [c]NU-Text and M-Text read *and teaches and seduces.* **2:21** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her sexual immorality.* **2:22** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *her.* **2:24** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *and.* [b]NU-Text and M-Text omit *will.* **2:27** [a]Psalm 2:9
3:2 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *My God.*

4 You[a] have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

6 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." '

The Faithful Church

7 "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write,

'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, *"He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens"*:[a] 8 "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it;[a] for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. 9 Indeed I will make *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 Behold,[a] I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one

3:4 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *Nevertheless you have a few names in Sardis.*
3:7 [a]Isaiah 22:22 **3:8** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *which no one can shut.*
3:11 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *Behold.*

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: The One Who Stands at the Door

Let me state something important. There is never a time during which Jesus is not speaking. Never. There is never a place in which Jesus is not present. Never. There is never a room so dark . . . a lounge so sensual . . . an office so sophisticated . . . that the ever-present, ever-pursuing, relentlessly tender Friend is not there, tapping gently on the doors of our hearts—waiting to be invited in.

Few hear His voice. Fewer still open the door.

But never interpret our numbness as His absence. For amidst the fleeting promises of pleasure is the timeless promise of His presence. . . .

There is no chorus so loud that the voice of God cannot be heard . . . if we will but listen. (From *In the Eye of the Storm* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 1770.

wants all Christians to be involved in loving and serving.

INSPIRATION

Consider the Laodicean church. This church was wealthy and self-sufficient. But the church had a problem—hollow, fruitless faith. "I know what you do," God spoke to this group, "that you are not hot nor cold. I wish that you were hot or cold! But because you are lukewarm—neither hot, nor cold—I am ready to spit you out of my Mouth."

The literal translation is "to vomit." Why does the body vomit something? Why does it recoil violently at the presence of certain substances? Because they are incompatible with the body. Vomiting is the body's way of rejecting anything it cannot handle.

What's the point? God can't stomach lukewarm faith. He is angered by a religion that puts on a show but ignores the service. (From *And the Angels Were Silent* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

If God gave you a report card on your relationship with Him, what would it say? Which are the areas you neglect? Continue what you are doing well; aggressively improve an area you have neglected.

EXPLORATION

Hypocrisy—Job 17:1–9; Psalm 5:9; 26:4; Isaiah 29:13; Ezekiel 33:31; Matthew 16:5–12; 23; Romans 2:17–24; Titus 1:16; 1 Peter 2:1.

may take your crown. 12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar
in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on
him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New
Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And *I will
write on him* My new name.
13 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the
churches."'

The Lukewarm Church

14 "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans[a] write,
'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the
Beginning of the creation of God: 15 "I know your works, that you are
neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then,
because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot,[a] I will vomit you
out of My mouth. 17 Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy,
and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched,
miserable, poor, blind, and naked— 18 I counsel you to buy from Me
gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that
you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be
revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 19 As
many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.
20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and
opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with
Me. 21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne,
as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.
22 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the
churches."' "

The Throne Room of Heaven

4 After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open
in heaven. And the first voice which I heard *was* like a trumpet
speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things
which must take place after this."
2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in
heaven, and *One* sat on the throne. 3 And He who sat there was[a] like
a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and *there was* a rainbow
around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. 4 Around the
throne *were* twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-
four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns[a]
of gold on their heads. 5 And from the throne proceeded lightnings,
thunderings, and voices.[a] Seven lamps of fire *were* burning before the
throne, which are the[b] seven Spirits of God.
6 Before the throne *there was*[a] a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the
midst of the throne, and around the throne, *were* four living creatures
full of eyes in front and in back. 7 The first living creature *was* like a
lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had
a face like a man, and the fourth living creature *was* like a flying eagle.

3:14 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *in Laodicea.* **3:16** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *hot nor cold.* **4:3** [a]M-Text omits *And He who sat there was* (which makes the description in verse 3 modify the throne rather than God). **4:4** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *robes, with crowns.* **4:5** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *voices, and thunderings.* [b]M-Text omits *the.* **4:6** [a]NU-Text and M-Text add *something like.*

Life LESSONS

Revelation 4:1—6:17

SITUATION
John reported that Jesus Christ would initiate the final conflict against Satan. At the end, God would defeat Satan and throw him into hell.

OBSERVATION
For believers, the end will be a time of rejoicing. There will be worship in heaven (4:9–11).

INSPIRATION
What is it, then, that God wants us to do? What is the work He seeks? Just believe. Believe the One He sent. "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent" (John 6:29).

Someone is reading this and shaking his or her head and asking, "Are you saying it is possible to go to heaven with no good works?" The answer is no. Good works are a requirement. Someone else is reading and asking, "Are you saying it is possible to go to heaven without good character?" My answer again is no. Good character is also required. In order to enter heaven one must have good works and good character.

But, alas, there is the problem. You have neither.

Oh, you've done some nice things in your life. But you do not have enough good works to go to heaven regardless of your sacrifice. No matter how noble your gifts, they are not enough to get you into heaven.

Nor do you have enough character to go to heaven. Please don't be offended. (Then, again, be offended, if necessary.) You're probably a very decent person. But decency isn't enough.

8 *The* four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying:

"Holy, holy, holy,[a]
Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!"

9 Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

11 "You are worthy, O Lord,[a]
To receive glory and honor and power;
For You created all things,
And by Your will they exist[b] and were created."

The Lamb Takes the Scroll

5 And I saw in the right *hand* of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. 2 Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" 3 And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it.

4 So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read[a] the scroll, or to look at it. 5 But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose[a] its seven seals."

6 And I looked, and behold,[a] in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

Worthy Is the Lamb

8 Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying:

"You are worthy to take the scroll,
And to open its seals;
For You were slain,
And have redeemed us to God by Your blood
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
10 And have made us[a] kings[b] and priests to our God;
And we[c] shall reign on the earth."

4:8 [a]M-Text has *holy* nine times. **4:11** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *our Lord and God.* [b]NU-Text and M-Text read *existed.* **5:4** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *and read.* **5:5** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *to loose.* **5:6** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *I saw in the midst . . . a Lamb standing.* **5:10** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *them.* [b]NU-Text reads *a kingdom.* [c]NU-Text and M-Text read *they.*

Those who see God are not the decent; they are the holy. "Pursue . . . holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

You may be decent. You may pay taxes and kiss your kids and sleep with a clean conscience. But apart from Christ you aren't holy. So how can you go to heaven?

Only believe.

Accept the work already done, the work of Jesus on the cross.

Only believe.

Accept the goodness of Jesus Christ. Abandon your own works and accept His. Abandon your own decency and accept His. Stand before God in His name, not yours. "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16).

It's that simple? It's that simple. It's that easy? There was nothing easy at all about it. The Cross was heavy, the blood was real, and the price was extravagant. It would have bankrupted you or me, so He paid it for us. Call it simple. Call it a gift. But don't call it easy.

Call it what it is. Call it grace. (From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Imagine, like John, you are peering into the very doors of heaven. Why will you be allowed to enter? Jesus' only request is that you believe. Then, like the apostle John, you will be accepted.

EXPLORATION

Heaven as God's Home—Matthew 5:34; Mark 16:19; John 3:13; Revelation 4.

11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of
many angels around the throne, the living
creatures, and the elders; and the number of
them was ten thousand times ten thousand,
and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a
loud voice:

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
To receive power and riches and wisdom,
And strength and honor and glory and
blessing!"

13 And every creature which is in heaven
and on the earth and under the earth and
such as are in the sea, and all that are in them,
I heard saying:

"Blessing and honor and glory and power
Be to Him who sits on the throne,
And to the Lamb, forever and ever!"[a]

14 Then the four living creatures said,
"Amen!" And the twenty-four[a] elders fell down
and worshiped Him who lives forever and
ever.[b]

First Seal: The Conqueror

6 Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of
the seals;[a] and I heard one of the four liv-
ing creatures saying with a voice like thunder,
"Come and see." 2 And I looked, and behold, a
white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a
crown was given to him, and he went out con-
quering and to conquer.

Second Seal: Conflict on Earth

3 When He opened the second seal, I heard
the second living creature saying, "Come and
see."[a] 4 Another horse, fiery red, went out. And
it was granted to the one who sat on it to take
peace from the earth, and that *people* should
kill one another; and there was given to him a
great sword.

Third Seal: Scarcity on Earth

5 When He opened the third seal, I heard
the third living creature say, "Come and see."
So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he
who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand.
6 And I heard a voice in the midst of the four
living creatures saying, "A quart[a] of wheat for
a denarius,[b] and three quarts of barley for a
denarius; and do not harm the oil and the
wine."

Fourth Seal: Widespread Death on Earth

7 When He opened the fourth seal, I heard
the voice of the fourth living creature saying,
"Come and see." 8 So I looked, and behold, a
pale horse. And the name of him who sat on
it was Death, and Hades followed with him.
And power was given to them over a fourth of
the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with
death, and by the beasts of the earth.

Fifth Seal: The Cry of the Martyrs

9 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under
the altar the souls of those who had been slain
for the word of God and for the testimony
which they held. 10 And they cried with a loud
voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and
true, until You judge and avenge our blood on
those who dwell on the earth?" 11 Then a white
robe was given to each of them; and it was
said to them that they should rest a little while
longer, until both *the number of* their fellow
servants and their brethren, who would be
killed as they *were,* was completed.

Sixth Seal: Cosmic Disturbances

12 I looked when He opened the sixth seal,
and behold,[a] there was a great earthquake; and
the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and
the moon[b] became like blood. 13 And the stars
of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops
its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind.
14 Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is
rolled up, and every mountain and island was
moved out of its place. 15 And the kings of the
earth, the great men, the rich men, the com-
manders,[a] the mighty men, every slave and
every free man, hid themselves in the caves and

5:13 [a]M-Text adds *Amen.* **5:14** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *twenty-four.* [b]NU-Text and M-Text omit *Him who lives forever and ever.* **6:1** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *seven seals.* **6:3** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *and see.* **6:6** [a]Greek *choinix;* that is, approximately one quart [b]This was approximately one day's wage for a worker. **6:12** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *behold.* [b]NU-Text and M-Text read *the whole moon.* **6:15** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *the commanders, the rich men.*

in the rocks of the mountains, 16 and said to the mountains and rocks,
"Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and
from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of His wrath has come,
and who is able to stand?"

The Sealed of Israel

7 After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners
of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind
should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. 2 Then I saw
another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living
God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it
was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, "Do not harm
the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our
God on their foreheads." 4 And I heard the number of those who were
sealed. One hundred *and* forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the
children of Israel *were* sealed:

5 of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand *were* sealed;[a]
of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand *were* sealed;
of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand *were* sealed;
6 of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand *were* sealed;
of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand *were* sealed;
of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand *were* sealed;
7 of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand *were* sealed;
of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand *were* sealed;
of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand *were* sealed;
8 of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand *were* sealed;
of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand *were* sealed;
of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand *were* sealed.

A Multitude from the Great Tribulation

9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which
no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues,
standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white
robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a
loud voice, saying, "Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the
throne, and to the Lamb!" 11 All the angels stood around the throne
and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces
before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying:

"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom,
Thanksgiving and honor and power and might,
Be to our God forever and ever.
Amen."

13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these
arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?"
14 And I said to him, "Sir,[a] you know."

7:5 [a] In NU-Text and M-Text *were sealed* is stated only in verses 5a and 8c; the words are understood in the remainder of the passage. **7:14** [a] NU-Text and M-Text read *My lord.*

Life Lessons

Revelation 7:1–17

SITUATION
John assured his readers that God would not lose track of His faithful people during the judgment of the world. He would rescue them.

OBSERVATION
All believers are important to God. God guarantees His protection to His followers by placing His seal over them. Nothing can remove that seal.

INSPIRATION
Oh, to have a . . . soul mate who protects you, who seeks nothing but your interests, wants nothing but your happiness. An ally who lets you be you. You feel safe with that person. No need to weigh thoughts or measure words. . . . God gave David such a friend.

He gave you one as well. David found a companion in Jonathan, a prince of Israel; you can find a friend in the King of Israel, Jesus Christ. Has He not made a covenant with you? Among his final words were these: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Has He not clothed you? He offers you "white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed" (Revelation 3:18). Christ cloaks you with clothing suitable for heaven.

In fact, He outdoes Jonathan. He not only gives you His robe; He dons your rags. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus dresses you. And,

like Jonathan, He equips you. You are invited to "put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11). From His armory He hands you the belt of truth, the body armor of righteousness, the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (vv. 13–17).

Just as Jonathan protected David, Jesus vows to protect you. "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:28).

You long for one true friend? You have one. (From *Facing Your Giants* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
How have you sensed God's protection? Note three people who may be in jeopardy of God's punishment. Pray for them during the day.

EXPLORATION
Protection—Psalm 17:8; 18:2, 3; Proverbs 2:8; 2 Thessalonians 3:3.

Life LESSONS

Revelation 8:1—9:21

SITUATION
John had a vision of a supernatural battle waged between God's and Satan's forces. Although God disciplined His own people, they refused to repent.

OBSERVATION
Sin comes subtly into a person's life. Before we know it, it takes control and alienates us from God. We must repent and turn to God in faith.

INSPIRATION
The face of Jesus softened,

So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. 16 They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters.[a] And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Seventh Seal: Prelude to the Seven Trumpets

8 When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. 2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. 3 Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer *it* with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw *it* to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake.

6 So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

First Trumpet: Vegetation Struck

7 The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth.[a] And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

Second Trumpet: The Seas Struck

8 Then the second angel sounded: And *something* like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. 9 And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

Third Trumpet: The Waters Struck

10 Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. 11 The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter.

Fourth Trumpet: The Heavens Struck

12 Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night.

13 And I looked, and I heard an angel[a] flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of

7:17 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *to fountains of the waters of life.* **8:7** [a]NU-Text and M-Text add *and a third of the earth was burned up.* **8:13** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *eagle.*

the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!"

Fifth Trumpet: The Locusts from the Bottomless Pit

9 Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit. 2 And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit. 3 Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. 4 They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. 5 And they were not given *authority* to kill them, but to torment them *for* five months. Their torment *was* like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. 6 In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them.

7 The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces *were* like the faces of men. 8 They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' *teeth.* 9 And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings *was* like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. 10 They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power *was* to hurt men five months. 11 And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew *is* Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon.

12 One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things.

Sixth Trumpet: The Angels from the Euphrates

13 Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, 14 saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." 15 So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind. 16 Now the number of the army of the horsemen *was* two hundred million; I heard the number of them. 17 And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses *were* like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone. 18 By these three *plagues* a third of mankind was killed—by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths. 19 For their power[a] is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails *are* like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm.

20 But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which

9:19 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *the power of the horses.*

and an afternoon dawn broke as He spoke a final time. "It is finished! . . . Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (John 19:30; Luke 23:46).

As He gave his final breath, the earth gave a sudden stir. A rock rolled, and a soldier stumbled. Then, as suddenly as the silence was broken, the silence returned.

And now all is quiet. The mocking has ceased. There is no one to mock.

The soldiers are busy with the business of cleaning up the dead. Two men have come. Dressed well and meaning well, they are given the body of Jesus.

And we are left with the relics of His death. Three nails in a bin. Three cross-shaped shadows. A braided crown with scarlet tips.

Bizarre, isn't it? The thought that this blood is not man's blood but God's?

Crazy, isn't it? To think that these nails held your sins to a cross?

Absurd, don't you agree? That a scoundrel's prayer was offered and answered? Or more absurd that another scoundrel offered no prayer at all?

Absurdities and ironies. The hill of Calvary is nothing if not both.

We would have scripted the moment differently. Ask us how a God should redeem His world, and we will show you! White horses, flashing swords. Evil flat on his back. God on His throne.

But God on a cross? A split-lipped, puffy-eyed, blood-masked God on a cross? Sponge thrust in His face? Spear plunged in His side? Dice tossed at His feet?

No, we wouldn't have written the drama of redemption this way. But, then again, we weren't

asked to. These players and props were heaven picked and God ordained. We were not asked to design the hour.

But we have been asked to respond to it. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

What is the really good news in your life right now? Tell someone about it today. What sin needs to be confessed? Pray, telling God you are sorry, and resist the temptation to give in to it again.

EXPLORATION

Repentance—Deuteronomy 31:27–29; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Nehemiah 9:28–31; Isaiah 30:15; Luke 13:3; 2 Peter 3:9.

Life Lessons

Revelation 10:1–11

SITUATION

A mighty angel appeared with an open book and announced that time would end. The angel announced the final universal judgment.

OBSERVATION

The reality of judgment and hell is foreign to our culture, but it is often talked about in the Bible.

INSPIRATION

One phrase summarizes the horror of hell. "God isn't there."

Think for a moment about this question: What if God weren't here on earth? You think people can be cruel now, imagine us without the presence of God. You think we are brutal to each other now, imagine the world without the Holy Spirit. You think there is loneliness and despair and guilt now, imagine life without

can neither see nor hear nor walk. 21 And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries[a] or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

The Mighty Angel with the Little Book

10 I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow *was* on his head, his face *was* like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire. 2 He had a little book open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea and *his* left *foot* on the land, 3 and cried with a loud voice, as *when* a lion roars. When he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices. 4 Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices,[a] I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me,[b] "Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them."

5 The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand[a] to heaven 6 and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer, 7 but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets.

John Eats the Little Book

8 Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, "Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth."

9 So I went to the angel and said to him, "Give me the little book."

And he said to me, "Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth."

10 Then I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. 11 And he[a] said to me, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings."

The Two Witnesses

11 Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood,[a] saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. 2 But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot *for* forty-two months. 3 And I will give *power* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."

4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God[a] of the earth. 5 And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. 6 These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their proph-

9:21 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *drugs.* **10:4** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *sounded.* [b]NU-Text and M-Text omit *to me.* **10:5** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *right hand.* **10:11** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *they.* **11:1** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *And the angel stood.* **11:4** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *Lord.*

ecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.

The Witnesses Killed

7 When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. 8 And their dead bodies *will lie* in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our[a] Lord was crucified. 9 Then *those* from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow[a] their dead bodies to be put into graves. 10 And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

The Witnesses Resurrected

11 Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. 12 And they[a] heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. 13 In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven.

14 The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly.

Seventh Trumpet: The Kingdom Proclaimed

15 Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms[a] of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" 16 And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying:

"We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty,
The One who is and who was and who is to come,[a]
Because You have taken Your great power and reigned.
18 The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come,
And the time of the dead, that they should be judged,
And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints,
And those who fear Your name, small and great,
And should destroy those who destroy the earth."

19 Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant[a] was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.

11:8 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *their.* **11:9** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *nations see . . . and will not allow.* **11:12** [a]M-Text reads *I.* **11:15** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *kingdom . . . has become.* **11:17** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *and who is to come.* **11:19** [a]M-Text reads *the covenant of the Lord.*

the touch of Jesus. No forgiveness. No hope. No acts of kindness. No words of love. No more food given in His name. No more songs sung to His praise. No more deeds done in His honor. If God took away His angels, His grace, His promise of eternity, and His servants, what would the world be like?

In a word, hell. No one to comfort you and no music to soothe you. A world where poets don't write of love and minstrels don't sing of hope, for love and hope were passengers on the last ship. The final vessel has departed, and the anthem of hell has only two words: "if only."

According to Jesus hell knows only one sound, the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 22:13). From hell comes a woeful, unending moan as its inhabitants realize the opportunity they have missed. What they would give for one more chance. But that chance is gone (Hebrews 9:27).

Can you see now why the angels rejoice when one sinner repents? Jesus knows what awaits the saved. He also knows what awaits the condemned. Can you see why we should rejoice as well? How can we? How can our hearts be changed so we rejoice like Jesus rejoices?

Ask God to help you have his eternal view of the world. His view of humanity is starkly simple. From His perspective every person is either:

- entering through the small gate or the wide gate (Matthew 7:13, 14)
- traveling the narrow road or the wide road (Matthew 7:13, 14)
- building on rock or sand (Matthew 7:24–27)

• wise or foolish (Matthew 25:2)
• prepared or unprepared (Matthew 24:45–51)
• fruitful or fruitless (Matthew 25:14–27)
• heaven called or hell bound (Mark 16:15, 16)

(From *Just Like Jesus* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Are you prepared to die? If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, you will be separated from God for all eternity. Don't allow that to happen. Repent of your sins and turn to Jesus Christ for salvation today. If you are a believer, make yourself available to share the good news of Jesus.

EXPLORATION

Hell—Matthew 13:42; Mark 9:47, 48; James 3:6; Revelation 14:11.

Life LESSONS

Revelation 11:1–19

SITUATION

God will protect people who are faithful to Him, but unbelievers do not enjoy this privilege.

OBSERVATION

God will protect the faithful until the end, while preparing to judge evil once and for all.

INSPIRATION

Why do I not take Him seriously when he questions, "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!"

Why don't I let my Father do for me what I am more than willing to do for my own children?

I'm learning, though.

The Woman, the Child, and the Dragon

12 Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. [2] Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.

[3] And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. [4] His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. [5] She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne. [6] Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Satan Thrown Out of Heaven

[7] And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, [8] but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them[a] in heaven any longer. [9] So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

[10] Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. [11] And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. [12] Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time."

The Woman Persecuted

[13] Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male *Child.* [14] But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. [15] So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. [16] But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. [17] And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.[a]

The Beast from the Sea

13 Then I[a] stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns,[b] and on

12:8 [a]M-Text reads *him.* **12:17** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *Christ.* **13:1** [a]NU-Text reads *he.* [b]NU-Text and M-Text read *ten horns and seven heads.*

his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. 2 Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like *the feet of* a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. 3 And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast. 4 So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who *is* like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"

5 And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue[a] for forty-two months. 6 Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. 7 It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe,[a] tongue, and nation. 8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

9 If anyone has an ear, let him hear. 10 He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

The Beast from the Earth

11 Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. 12 And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. 13 He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. 14 And he deceives those[a] who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. 15 He was granted *power* to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. 16 He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, 17 and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or[a] the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

18 Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number *is* 666.

The Lamb and the 144,000

14 Then I looked, and behold, a[a] Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred *and* forty-four thousand, having[b] His Father's name written on their foreheads. 2 And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. 3 They

13:5 [a]M-Text reads *make war.* **13:7** [a]NU-Text and M-Text add *and people.* **13:14** [a]M-Text reads *my own people.* **13:17** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *or.* **14:1** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *the.* [b]NU-Text and M-Text add *His name and.*

Being a parent is better than a course on theology. Being a father is teaching me that when I am criticized, injured, or afraid, there is a Father who is ready to comfort me. There is a Father who will hold me until I'm better, help me until I can live with the hurt, and who won't go to sleep when I'm afraid of waking up and seeing the dark. Ever. And that's enough. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Revelation is a great source of encouragement to Christians that the Lord will protect them from evil. Do you feel the Lord has His sheltering arm around you? Look for someone today who needs that encouragement and give it.

EXPLORATION
Protection—Psalm 17:8; 18:2, 3; Revelation 7:4–8.

Life LESSONS

Revelation 12:1–18

SITUATION
This chapter symbolizes conflict between God and Satan. The woman gave birth to Christ. The dragon, Satan, sought to destroy Christ, but his attempts were futile. A heavenly battle between Satan with his demons and God's angels resulted in Satan's defeat.

OBSERVATION
The contest between good and evil is a great, cosmic battle that God will win. We can experience God's victory in our lives through faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

INSPIRATION
What makes no sense in this life will make perfect sense

in the next. I have proof: you in the womb.

I know you don't remember this prenatal season, so let me remind you what happened during it. Every gestation day equipped you for your earthly life. Your bones solidified, your eyes developed, the umbilical cord transported nutrients into your growing frame . . . for what reason? So you might remain enwombed? Quite the contrary. Womb time equipped you for earth time, suited you up for your postpartum existence.

Some prenatal features went unused before birth. You grew a nose but didn't breathe. Eyes developed, but could you see? Your tongue, toenails, and crop of hair served no function in your mother's belly. But aren't you glad you have them now?

Certain chapters in this life seem so unnecessary, like nostrils on the preborn. Suffering. Loneliness. Disease. Holocausts. Martyrdom. Monsoons. If we assume this world exists just for pre-grave happiness, these atrocities disqualify it from doing so. But what if this earth is the womb? Might these challenges, severe as they may be, serve to prepare us, equip us for the world to come? As Paul wrote, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Eternal glory. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Revelation is a beautiful, but often frightening account of the great battle for spiritual supremacy. Be sure not to take your situation for granted. Ask God to keep you aware of Satan's

sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred *and* forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. 4 These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed[a] from *among* men, *being* firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. 5 And in their mouth was found no deceit,[a] for they are without fault before the throne of God.[b]

The Proclamations of Three Angels

6 Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people— 7 saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water."

8 And another angel followed, saying, "Babylon[a] is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."

9 Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives *his* mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."

12 Here is the patience of the saints; here *are* those[a] who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

13 Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me,[a] "Write: 'Blessed *are* the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' "

"Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

Reaping the Earth's Harvest

14 Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat *One* like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. 15 And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You[a] to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." 16 So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.

Reaping the Grapes of Wrath

17 Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.

14:4 [a]M-Text adds *by Jesus.* **14:5** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *falsehood.* [b]NU-Text and M-Text omit *before the throne of God.* **14:8** [a]NU-Text reads *Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, which has made;* M-Text reads *Babylon the great is fallen. She has made.* **14:12** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *here are those.* **14:13** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *to me.* **14:15** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *for You.*

18 And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over
fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle,
saying, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine
of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe." 19 So the angel thrust his
sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw *it*
into the great winepress of the wrath of God. 20 And the winepress was
trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to
the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.

Prelude to the Bowl Judgments

15 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven
angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of
God is complete.

2 And I saw *something* like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and
those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over
his mark[a] *and* over the number of his name, standing on the sea of
glass, having harps of God. 3 They sing the song of Moses, the servant
of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying:

"Great and marvelous *are* Your works,
Lord God Almighty!
Just and true *are* Your ways,
O King of the saints![a]
4 Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?
For *You* alone *are* holy.
For all nations shall come and worship before You,
For Your judgments have been manifested."

5 After these things I looked, and behold,[a] the temple of the taber-
nacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. 6 And out of the tem-
ple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure
bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. 7 Then
one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden
bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever. 8 The temple
was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and
no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven
angels were completed.

16 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven
angels, "Go and pour out the bowls[a] of the wrath of God on the
earth."

First Bowl: Loathsome Sores

2 So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a
foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the
beast and those who worshiped his image.

15:2 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *over his mark.* **15:3** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *nations.* **15:5** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *behold.* **16:1** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *seven bowls.*

attacks. Depend on God for your strength and victory.

EXPLORATION
Souls—Job 32:8; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Isaiah 26:9; John 10:28, 29; 2 Corinthians 4:16, 17.

Life Lessons

Revelation 13:1–18

SITUATION
Before the final battle, Christians would be challenged. God promised, though, that no spiritual harm could come to Believers, although they might have to endure persecution and pain.

OBSERVATION
Christians must discern false prophets who claim to perform miracles and exercise authority from God.

INSPIRATION
Don't be misled, Jesus warns. Don't be wooed by [the false teachers'] slick appearances, silver-tongued oratory, or performances. . . . Jesus said, "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24).

Multitudes and miracles. Large audiences and spectacular deeds. Throngs of people. Displays of power. When you see them, be careful. High volume doesn't equate with sound faith. Don't be impressed by numbers or tricks. Satan can counterfeit both. . . .

Along with heresy we can expect calamity. "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains" (Matthew 24:6–8 NIV). . . .

Though the world may collapse, the work of Christ will endure.

So, *see to it that you are not alarmed* (Matthew 24:6 NIV).

"See to it . . . " Bosses and teachers are known to use that phrase. "*See to it* that you fill out the reports." Or "Your essay is due tomorrow. *See to it* that you finish your work." The words call for additional attention, special focus, extra resolve. Isn't this what Christ is asking of us? In this dangerous day, on this Fabergé-fragile globe, with financial collapse on the news and terrorists on the loose, we have every reason to retreat into bunkers of dread and woe.

But Christ says to us, "See to it that you are not alarmed" (NIV).

"Keep your head and don't panic" (MSG).

"See that you are not troubled" (NKJV).

"Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Can you tell the difference between Christian teaching and false doctrine? Such decisions require careful discernment, ensuring that actions and words spoken are consistent with God's wisdom in the Bible. In your Bible reading this week look for ways to distinguish true teaching from false.

EXPLORATION

Discernment—Matthew 7:6; Philippians 1:10; James 1:5.

Second Bowl: The Sea Turns to Blood

3 Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it
became blood as of a dead *man;* and every living creature in the sea
died.

Third Bowl: The Waters Turn to Blood

4 Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs
of water, and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel of the waters
saying:

"You are righteous, O Lord,[a]
The One who is and who was and who is to be,[b]
Because You have judged these things.
6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
And You have given them blood to drink.
For[a] it is their just due."

7 And I heard another from[a] the altar saying, "Even so, Lord God
Almighty, true and righteous *are* Your judgments."

Fourth Bowl: Men Are Scorched

8 Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power
was given to him to scorch men with fire. 9 And men were scorched
with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has
power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.

Fifth Bowl: Darkness and Pain

10 Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the
beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed
their tongues because of the pain. 11 They blasphemed the God of
heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of
their deeds.

Sixth Bowl: Euphrates Dried Up

12 Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river
Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings
from the east might be prepared. 13 And I saw three unclean spirits like
frogs *coming* out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the
beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14 For they are spirits
of demons, performing signs, *which* go out to the kings of the earth
and[a] of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day
of God Almighty.

15 "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed *is* he who watches, and
keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."

16 And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew,
Armageddon.[a]

16:5 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *O Lord.* [b]NU-Text and M-Text read *who was, the Holy One.* **16:6** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *For.* **16:7** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *another from.* **16:14** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *of the earth and.* **16:16** [a]M-Text reads *Megiddo.*

Seventh Bowl: The Earth Utterly Shaken

17 Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a
loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying,
"It is done!" 18 And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings;
and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake
as had not occurred since men were on the earth. 19 Now the great
city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And
great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the
wine of the fierceness of His wrath. 20 Then every island fled away, and
the mountains were not found. 21 And great hail from heaven fell upon
men, *each hailstone* about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed
God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceed-
ingly great.

The Scarlet Woman and the Scarlet Beast

17 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came
and talked with me, saying to me,[a] "Come, I will show you the
judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, 2 with whom
the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of
the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication."

3 So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw
a woman sitting on a scarlet beast *which was* full of names of blas-
phemy, having seven heads and ten horns. 4 The woman was arrayed
in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones
and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and
the filthiness of her fornication.[a] 5 And on her forehead a name *was*
written:

MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT,
THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF
THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

6 I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the
blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with
great amazement.

The Meaning of the Woman and the Beast

7 But the angel said to me, "Why did you marvel? I will tell you the
mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the
seven heads and the ten horns. 8 The beast that you saw was, and is
not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And
those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not writ-
ten in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they
see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.[a]

9 "Here *is* the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven
mountains on which the woman sits. 10 There are also seven kings.
Five have fallen, one is, *and* the other has not yet come. And when
he comes, he must continue a short time. 11 The beast that was, and

17:1 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *to me.* **17:4** [a]M-Text reads *the filthiness of the fornication of the earth.* **17:8** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *and shall be present.*

Life Lessons

Revelation 14:1—15:8

SITUATION
God's judgment arrived. Only those who were cleansed from sin through faith in Christ remained protected from God's anger against sin. This chapter provided assurance and comfort to the faithful.

OBSERVATION
God's judgment of evil will not be put off indefinitely. Only by submitting our life to Him can we avoid His wrath.

INSPIRATION
I'll be home soon. My plane is nearing San Antonio. I can feel the nose of the jet dipping downward. I can see the flight attendants getting ready. [My wife], Denalyn, is somewhere in the parking lot, parking the car and hustling the girls toward the terminal.

I'll be home soon. The plane will land. I'll walk down that ramp and hear my name and see their faces. I'll be home soon.

You'll be home soon, too. You may not have noticed it, but you are closer to home than ever before. Each moment is a step taken. Each breath is a page turned. Each day is a mile marked, a mountain climbed. You are closer to home than you've ever been.

Before you know it, your appointed arrival time will come; you'll descend the ramp and enter the City. You'll see faces that are waiting for you. You'll hear your name spoken by those who love you. And, maybe, just maybe—in the back, behind the crowds—the One who would rather die

than live without you will remove his pierced hands from his heavenly robe and . . . applaud. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Have you accepted Christ as your Savior? Have you confessed your sins? If so, you have nothing to fear from God's judgment of the world. The judge is on our side! If you are unsure, pray to receive Christ right now.

EXPLORATION
Judgment—Deuteronomy 7:2; Matthew 13:30; 16:27; Luke 11:29–32.

Life Lessons

Revelation 16:1–21

SITUATION
The seven terrible plagues are poured out on the earth. Much sorrow and trouble await those who are not protected from God's judgment. Despite the power of the plagues, people will curse God rather than praise Him.

OBSERVATION
God's terrifying wrath purges the earth of evil.

INSPIRATION
Hell is not a correctional facility or reform school. Its members hear no admonishing parents, candid sermons, or Spirit of God, no voice of God, no voice of God's people. Spend a life-time telling God to be quiet, and He'll do just that. God honors our request for silence.

Hell is the chosen home of insurrectionists, the Alcatraz of malcontents. Hell is reserved, not for those souls who seek God yet struggle, but for those who defy God and rebel.

is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition.

12 "The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received
no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings
with the beast. 13 These are of one mind, and they will give their power
and authority to the beast. 14 These will make war with the Lamb, and
the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of
kings; and those *who are* with Him *are* called, chosen, and faithful."

15 Then he said to me, "The waters which you saw, where the har-
lot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. 16 And the ten
horns which you saw on[a] the beast, these will hate the harlot, make
her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. 17 For God
has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind,
and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are ful-
filled. 18 And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns
over the kings of the earth."

The Fall of Babylon the Great

18 After these things I saw another angel coming down from
heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated
with his glory. 2 And he cried mightily[a] with a loud voice, saying,
"Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place
of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean
and hated bird! 3 For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the
wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed for-
nication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich
through the abundance of her luxury."

4 And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of
her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her
plagues. 5 For her sins have reached[a] to heaven, and God has remem-
bered her iniquities. 6 Render to her just as she rendered to you,[a] and
repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has
mixed, mix double for her. 7 In the measure that she glorified herself
and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sor-
row; for she says in her heart, 'I sit *as* queen, and am no widow, and
will not see sorrow.' 8 Therefore her plagues will come in one day—
death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with
fire, for strong *is* the Lord God who judges[a] her.

The World Mourns Babylon's Fall

9 "The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived
luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the
smoke of her burning, 10 standing at a distance for fear of her torment,
saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one
hour your judgment has come.'

11 "And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her,
for no one buys their merchandise anymore: 12 merchandise of gold
and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and

17:16 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *saw, and the beast.* **18:2** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *mightily.* **18:5** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *have been heaped up.* **18:6** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *to you.* **18:8** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *has judged.*

scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; 13 and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men. 14 The fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you,[a] and you shall find them no more at all. 15 The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, 16 and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! 17 For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.' Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance 18 and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What *is* like this great city?'

19 "They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.'

20 "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and *you* holy apostles[a] and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!"

Finality of Babylon's Fall

21 Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw *it* into the sea, saying, "Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore. 22 The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore. 23 The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived. 24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth."

Heaven Exults over Babylon

19 After these things I heard[a] a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power *belong* to the Lord[b] our God! 2 For true and righteous *are* His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants *shed* by her." 3 Again they said, "Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!" 4 And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, "Amen! Alleluia!" 5 Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both[a] small and great!"

6 And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound

18:14 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *been lost to you.* **18:20** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *saints and apostles.* **19:1** [a]NU-Text and M-Text add *something like.* [b]NU-Text and M-Text omit *the Lord.* **19:5** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *both.*

For those who say about Jesus, "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). So in history's highest expression of fairness, God honors their preference. "'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways!" (Ezekiel 33:11). It is not his will that any should perish, but the fact that some do highlights God's justice. God must punish sin. "There shall by no means enter [heaven] anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life" (Revelation 21:27). God, inherently holy, *must* exclude evil from His new universe. God, eternally gracious, *never* forces His will. He urges mutineers to stay on board but never ties them to the mast. . . .

How could a loving God send sinners to hell? He doesn't. They volunteer.

Once there, they don't want to leave. The hearts of damned fools never soften; their minds never change. "Men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory" (Revelation 16:9). Contrary to the idea that hell prompts remorse, it doesn't. It intensifies blasphemy. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Before the final judgment begins, witness to friends and neighbors about God's offer of eternal life in Christ. Tell them the story of Jesus. Share how God has made a difference in your life.

EXPLORATION

Wrath of God—Genesis 18:20–33; 19:24; Romans 1:24–32.

of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the[a] Lord God Omnipotent reigns! 7 Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." 8 And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

9 Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed *are* those who are called to the marriage supper of

19:6 [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *our.*

Christ Through The Bible

Jesus: King of Kings

You are in your car driving home. Thoughts wander to the game you want to see or meal you want to eat, when suddenly a sound unlike any you've ever heard fills the air. The sound is high above you. A trumpet? A choir? A choir of trumpets? You don't know, but you want to know. So you pull over, get out of your car, and look up. As you do, you see you aren't the only curious one. The roadside has become a parking lot. Car doors are open, and people are staring at the sky. Shoppers are racing out of the grocery store. The Little League baseball game across the street has come to a halt. Players and parents are searching the clouds.

And what they see, and what you see, has never before been seen.

As if the sky were a curtain, the drapes of the atmosphere part. A brilliant light spills onto the earth. There are no shadows. None. From whence came the light begins to tumble a river of color—spiking crystals of every hue ever seen and a million more never seen. Riding on the flow is an endless fleet of angels. They pass through the curtains one myriad at a time, until they occupy every square inch of the sky. North. South. East. West. Thousands of silvery wings rise and fall in unison, and over the sound of the trumpets, you can hear the cherubim and seraphim chanting, "Holy, holy, holy."

The final flank of angels is followed by twenty-four silver-bearded elders and a multitude of souls who join the angels in worship. Presently the movement stops and the trumpets are silent, leaving only the triumphant triplet: "Holy, holy, holy." Between each word is a pause. With each word, a profound reverence. You hear your voice join in the chorus. You don't know why you say the words, but you know you must.

Suddenly, the heavens are quiet. All is quiet. The angels turn, you turn, the entire world turns—and there He is. Jesus. Through waves of light you see the silhouetted figure of Christ the King. He is atop a great stallion, and the stallion is atop a billowing cloud. He opens His mouth, and you are surrounded by His declaration: "I am the Alpha and the Omega."

The angels bow their heads. The elders remove their crowns. And before you is a figure so consuming that you know, instantly you know: Nothing else matters. Forget stock markets and school reports. Sales meetings and football games. Nothing is newsworthy. All that mattered, matters no more, for Christ has come. (From *When Christ Comes* by Max Lucado)

For more on "Christ Through the Bible," see page 19.

the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God." 10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See *that you do* not *do that!* I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

Christ on a White Horse

11 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. 12 His eyes *were* like a flame of fire, and on His head *were* many crowns. He had[a] a name written that no one knew except Himself. 13 He *was* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean,[a] followed Him on white horses. 15 Now out of His mouth goes a sharp[a] sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. 16 And He has on *His* robe and on His thigh a name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

The Beast and His Armies Defeated

17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God,[a] 18 that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all *people,* free[a] and slave, both small and great."

19 And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. 20 Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. 21 And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

Satan Bound 1,000 Years

20 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. 2 He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the* Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; 3 and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.

19:12 [a]M-Text adds *names written, and.* **19:14** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *pure white linen.* **19:15** [a]M-Text adds *two-edged.* **19:17** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *the great supper of God.* **19:18** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *both free.*

Life Lessons

Revelation 17:1–18

SITUATION
The "great prostitute" referred to Babylon. John's readers probably equated it with the Roman Empire, but it also symbolized any system hostile to God.

OBSERVATION
Using symbolic language, John described the destruction of evil and systems energized by Satan. God triumphs over evil.

INSPIRATION
As a minister I have had the privilege of witnessing—up close—the emotion of adoption. On one occasion a lady in another state who had heard me speak called and asked if I knew any prospective adoptive parents. Her pregnant daughter was seeking a home for her unborn child. I put her in touch with a family from our congregation and took a front row seat as the drama unfolded.

I saw the joy at the possibility and the heartbreak at the roadblocks. I watched the resolve in the eyes of the father and the determination in the eyes of the mother. They would travel as far as it took and spend every penny they had. They wanted to adopt that child. And they did. Only moments after his birth, the infant was placed in their arms. And this is no exaggeration: They smiled for a month after they brought their son home. I'd see them in the church hallway; they'd be smiling. I'd see them in the parking lot, smiling. From the pulpit I could see them in the

congregation, cradling the baby and smiling. I think if I'd preached a sermon on the agony of hell, they would have smiled through every sentence. Why? Because the child they had longed for had come into their home.

Let me ask you, why did this couple adopt that child? They had a happy marriage. They were financially secure and gainfully employed. What did they hope to gain? Did they adopt the baby so they might have a little extra cash or sleep? You know better. Their supply of both diminished the minute they brought the child home. Then why? Why do people adopt children? As you are thinking, let me tell you why God does. . . .

God adopted you simply because He wanted to. You were in His good will and pleasure. Knowing full well the trouble you would be and the price He would pay, He signed His name next to yours and changed your name to His and took you home. Your *Abba* adopted you and became your Father. (From *The Great House of God* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

In the middle of struggle, God's promises are vital. Memorize verse 17; it shows that God accomplishes His plan by overcoming those who oppose Him. Remember that you are His. He adopted you. You are safe in Him.

EXPLORATION

Opposition to God—Genesis 3:1–6; Isaiah 14:13, 14; Matthew 13:38, 39, 41; Luke 4:5–7; Acts 26:17, 18; Ephesians 2:2; Revelation 12:9.

The Saints Reign with Christ 1,000 Years

4 And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a[a] thousand years. 5 But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

Satanic Rebellion Crushed

7 Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number *is* as the sand of the sea. 9 They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. 10 The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where[a] the beast and the false prophet *are*. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

The Great White Throne Judgment

11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God,[a] and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book* of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. 14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.[a] 15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

All Things Made New

21 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John,[a] saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. 4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things

20:4 [a]M-Text reads *the*. **20:10** [a]NU-Text and M-Text add *also*. **20:12** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *the throne*. **20:14** [a]NU-Text and M-Text add *the lake of fire*. **21:2** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *John*.

new." And He said to me,[a] "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

6 And He said to me, "It is done![a] I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. 7 He who overcomes shall inherit all things,[a] and I will be his God and he shall be My son. 8 But the cowardly, unbelieving,[a] abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

The New Jerusalem

9 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me[a] and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife."[b] 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy[a] Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God. Her light *was* like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. 12 Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: 13 three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.

14 Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names[a] of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. 15 And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. 16 The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. 17 Then he measured its wall: one hundred *and* forty-four cubits, *according* to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. 18 The construction of its wall was *of* jasper; and the city *was* pure gold, like clear glass. 19 The foundations of the wall of the city *were* adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation *was* jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. 21 The twelve gates *were* twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city *was* pure gold, like transparent glass.

The Glory of the New Jerusalem

22 But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it,[a] for the glory[b] of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light. 24 And the nations of those who are saved[a] shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it.[b] 25 Its gates

21:5 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *to me.* **21:6** [a]M-Text omits *It is done.* **21:7** [a]M-Text reads *overcomes, I shall give him these things.* **21:8** [a]M-Text adds *and sinners.* **21:9** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *to me.* [b]M-Text reads *I will show you the woman, the Lamb's bride.* **21:10** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *the great* and read *the holy city, Jerusalem.* **21:14** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *twelve names.* **21:23** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *in it.* [b]M-Text reads *the very glory.* **21:24** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *of those who are saved.* [b]M-Text reads *the glory and honor of the nations to Him.*

Life LESSONS

Revelation 18:1–24

SITUATION
John pointed out that although society was built around the economy, only what was built on God would last forever.

OBSERVATION
Greed and materialism will be judged and crushed. Christians must derive their security from faith in Christ.

INSPIRATION
Do not put your "trust in uncertain riches" [1 Timothy 6:17]. . . . Money is an untrustworthy foundation. The United States economy endured ten recessions between 1948 and 2001. These downturns lasted an average of ten months apiece and resulted in the loss of billions of dollars. Every five years or so, the economy dumps its suitors and starts over. What would you think of a man who did the same with women? What word would you use to describe a husband who philandered his way through nine different wives over fifty years?

And what word would you use to describe wife number ten? How about this one? *Fool.* Those who trust money are foolish. They are setting themselves up to be duped and dumped into a dystopia of unhappiness. Have you ever noticed that the word *miser* is just one letter short of the word *misery*? . . .

God owns everything and gives us all things to enjoy. He is a good shepherd to us, His little flock. Trust Him, not stuff. Move from the fear of scarcity to the comfort of provision. Less hoarding, more sharing.

shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). 26 And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.[a] 27 But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes[a] an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

The River of Life

22 And he showed me a pure[a] river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. 2 In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, *was* the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations. 3 And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. 4 They shall see His face, and His name *shall be* on their foreheads. 5 There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

The Time Is Near

6 Then he said to me, "These words *are* faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy[a] prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place.

7 "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed *is* he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

8 Now I, John, saw and heard[a] these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things.

9 Then he said to me, "See *that you do* not *do that.* For[a] I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God." 10 And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. 11 He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous[a] still; he who is holy, let him be holy still."

Jesus Testifies to the Churches

12 "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to give to every one according to his work. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End, the First and the Last."[a]

14 Blessed *are* those who do His commandments,[a] that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. 15 But[a] outside *are* dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.

16 "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star."

21:26 [a]M-Text adds *that they may enter in.* **21:27** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *anything profane, nor one who causes.* **22:1** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *pure.* **22:6** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *spirits of the prophets.* **22:8** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *am the one who heard and saw.* **22:9** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *For.* **22:11** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *do right.* **22:13** [a]NU-Text and M-Text read *the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.* **22:14** [a]NU-Text reads *wash their robes.* **22:15** [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *But.*

"Do good . . . be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share" [v. 18].

And, most of all, replace fear of the coming winter with faith in the living God. After all, it's just Monopoly money. It all goes back in the box when the game is over. (From *Fearless* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Try listening with greater discernment to commercials on radio and television. Note how their values differ from God's.

EXPLORATION

Results of Evil—Psalm 5:4–6; Proverbs 10:29, 30; Zephaniah 2:13–15; Romans 1:21–32; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; James 4:4.

Life Lessons

Revelation 19:1–21

SITUATION

The heavenly multitude responded to God's judgment with enthusiasm and praise. Jesus, suffering Servant of the Gospels, became the righteous Judge.

OBSERVATION

When Jesus returns, He will complete the work He began. He will gather His people and destroy Satan.

INSPIRATION

Triumph is a precious thing. We honor the triumphant. The gallant soldier sitting astride his steed. The determined explorer returning from his discovery. The winning athlete holding aloft the triumphant trophy of victory. Yes, we love triumph. . . .

Triumph is fleeting, though. Hardly does one taste victory before it is gone; achieved, yet now

Heaven (Part 2)

The most hopeful words of that passage from Revelation are those of God's resolve: "I make all things new" [Revelation 21:5].

It's hard to see things grow old. The town in which I grew up is growing old. I was there recently. Some of the buildings are boarded up. Some of the houses are torn down. Some of my teachers are retired; some are buried. The old movie house where I took my dates has "For Sale" on the marquee, long since outdated by the newer theaters that give you eight choices. The only visitors to the drive-in theater are tumbleweeds and rodents. Memories of first dates and senior proms are weather-worn by the endless rain of years. High school sweethearts are divorced. A cheerleader died of an aneurysm. Our fastest halfback is buried only a few plots from my own father.

I wish I could make it all new again. I wish I could blow the dust off the streets. I wish I could walk through the familiar neighborhood, and wave at the familiar faces, and pet the familiar dogs, and hit one more home run in the Little League park. I wish I could walk down Main Street and call out to the merchants that have retired and open the doors that have been boarded up. I wish I could make everything new . . . but I can't. . . .

I can't. But God can. "He restores my soul," wrote the shepherd. He doesn't reform; He restores. He doesn't camouflage the old; He restores the new. The Master Builder will pull out the original plan and restore it. He will restore the vigor. He will restore the energy. He will restore the hope. He will restore the soul.

When you see how this world grows stooped and weary and then read of a home where everything is made new, tell me, doesn't that make you want to go home?

What would you give in exchange for a home like that? Would you really rather have a few possessions on earth than eternal possessions in heaven? Would you really choose a life of slavery to passion over a life of freedom? Would you honestly give up all of your heavenly mansions for a second-rate sleazy motel on earth?

"Great," Jesus said, "is your reward in heaven." He must have smiled when he said that line. His eyes must have danced, and His hand must have pointed skyward.

For He should know. It was His idea. It was His home.

Study Guide

Read Revelation 21:1–8.

- Think of a time when you anticipated an upcoming event. What was the waiting like?
- What do you anticipate about heaven?
- In what ways will our relationships with God be different in heaven?
- Describe the new heaven and earth?
- How can you prepare for life there?
- List some words that describe what you think it will be like to spend eternity with God.
- What causes you to take your eyes off your wonderful future with God?
- List some of our responsibilities until the new heaven and new earth come.

17 And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!"
And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let
him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let
him take the water of life freely.

A Warning

18 For[a] I testify to everyone who hears the
words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone
adds to these things, God will add[b] to him the
plagues that are written in this book; 19 and
if anyone takes away from the words of the
book of this prophecy, God shall take away[a]
his part from the Book[b] of Life, from the holy
city, and *from* the things which are written in
this book.

I Am Coming Quickly

20 He who testifies to these things says,
"Surely I am coming quickly."

Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with
you all.[a] Amen.

22:18 [a]NU-Text and M-Text omit *For.* [b]M-Text reads *may God add.* **22:19** [a]M-Text reads *may God take away.* [b]NU-Text and M-Text read *tree of life.* **22:21** [a]NU-Text reads *with all;* M-Text reads *with all the saints.*

history. No one remains champion forever. Time for yet another conquest, another victory. Perhaps this is the absurdity of Paul's claim: "Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph" (2 Corinthians 2:14).

Here is the big difference between victory in Christ and victory in the world: A victor in the world rejoices over something he did—swimming the English Channel, climbing Everest, making a million. But the believer rejoices over who he is—a child of God, a forgiven sinner, an heir of eternity. . . .

Nothing can separate us from our triumph in Christ. Nothing! Our triumph is not based upon our feelings, but upon God's gift. Our triumph is based not upon our perfection, but upon God's forgiveness. How precious is this triumph! For even though we are pressed on every side, the victory is still ours. Nothing can alter the loyalty of God. . . .

"Triumphant in Christ." It is not something we do. It's something we are. (From *On the Anvil* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Christ has made you triumphant. Throughout the stress of daily living, look to Christ with joy. He has conquered sin, defeated Satan, and will one day take you home with Him.

EXPLORATION

Divine Judgment—Genesis 3; Isaiah 2:12; Amos 5:15; Luke 3:9; Romans 2:16; 12:19.

Life LESSONS

Revelation 20:1–15

SITUATION

John described a coming time when Satan would be bound, dead Christians would be resurrected, and Satan and unrepentant sinners would be doomed to eternal destruction.

OBSERVATION

Observe the final triumph of God's kingdom over evil.

INSPIRATION

Satan can disturb us, but he cannot defeat us. The head of the serpent is crushed.

I saw a literal picture of this in a prairie ditch. A petroleum company was hiring strong backs and weak minds to lay a pipeline. Since I qualified, much of a high-school summer was spent shoveling in a shoulder-high, multi-mile West Texas trough. A large digging machine trenched ahead of us. We followed, scooping out the excess dirt and rocks.

One afternoon the machine dislodged more than dirt. "Snake!" shouted the foreman. We popped out of that hole faster than a jack-in-the-box and looked down at the rattlesnake nest. Big momma hissed, and her little kids squirmed. Reentering the trench was not an option. One worker launched his shovel and beheaded the rattler. We stood on the higher ground and watched as she—now headless—writhed and twisted in the soft dirt below. Though defanged, the snake still spooked us.

Gee, Max, thanks for the inspirational image.

Inspirational? Maybe not. But hopeful? I think so. That scene in the West Texas summer is a parable of where we are in life. Is the devil not a snake? John calls him "that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan" (Revelation 20:2). Has he not been decapitated? Not with a shovel, but with a cross. "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:15).

So how does that leave us? *Confident.* The punch line of the passage is Jesus' power over Satan. One word from Christ, and the demons are swimming with the swine, and the wild man is "clothed and in his right mind" (Mark 5:15). Just one command! No séance needed. No hocus-pocus. No chants were heard or candles lit. Hell is an anthill against heaven's steamroller. Jesus "commands . . . the unclean spirits, and they obey Him" (Mark 1:27). The snake in the ditch and Lucifer in the pit—both have met their match. (From *Next Door Savior* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION

Do we pray for the population of God's kingdom to grow? Do we share the wonderful news of Christ's deliverance with those still uninformed? Set a goal to

both pray and speak to this once per week! Remember, in the end, God wins.

EXPLORATION
God's Kingdom—Psalm 145:13; Matthew 6:10; John 18:36; 2 Timothy 4:18; James 2:5.

Life Lessons

Revelation 21:1—22:21

SITUATION
John told Christians that in the end, God would triumph. Despite the obstacles Christians face in this life, all who hold Jesus as their Lord will spend eternity in fellowship with God.

OBSERVATION
Finally. Sin will be destroyed. Death will die. Tears, anger, and frustrations will be gone.

INSPIRATION
Dare we imagine heaven's dramatic reunions?

- A soldier embracing the sharpshooter who killed him
- A daughter seeing her abusive but repentant father and holding him
- A son encountering the mother who aborted him?

No doubt some will. And when they do, forgiveness will flow like water over Iguaça Falls.

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb" (Isaiah 11:6). "God will wipe away every tear . . . there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying . . . for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

No sin means no thieves, divorce, heartbreak, and no boredom. You won't be bored in heaven, because you won't be the same *you* in heaven. Boredom emerges from soils that heaven disallows. The soil of weariness: our eyes tire. Mental limitations: information overload dulls us. Self-centeredness: we grow disinterested when the spotlight shifts to others. Tedium: meaningless activity siphons vigor.

But Satan will take these weedy soils to hell with him, leaving you with a keen mind, endless focus, and God-honoring assignments.

Yes, you will have assignments in heaven. God gave Adam and Eve garden responsibilities. "Let them have dominion" (Genesis 1:26). He mantled the couple with leadership over "the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (v. 26). Adam was placed in the garden "to tend and keep it" (2:15).

Adam and his descendants will do it again. "[God's] servants shall serve Him" (Revelation 22:3). What is service if not responsible activity? Those who are faithful over a few things will rule over many (Matthew 25:21).

You might oversee the orbit of a distant planetary system . . .design a mural in the new city . . . monitor the expansion of a new species of plants or animals. "Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end" (Isaiah 9:7). God's new world will be marked by increase. Increased planets? Colors? Music? Seems likely. What does a creator do but create?

What do His happy children do but serve Him? We might serve in the capacity we serve now. Couldn't earthly assignments hint at heavenly ones? Architects of Moscow might draw blueprints in the new Liverpool. We will feast in heaven; you may be a cook on Saturn. God filled His first garden with plants and animals.

He'll surely do the same in heaven. If so, He may entrust you with the care and feeding of an Africa or two.

One thing is for sure: you'll love it. (From *3:16* by Max Lucado)

APPLICATION
Are you looking forward to the day when God removes all evil? Throughout today, worship God and tell Him of your love for Him. As you encounter others who notice your joy, tell them about the future you have.

EXPLORATION
Eternity—John 14:2, 3; 1 Corinthians 2:9; 15; 1 John 3:2.

More Help for Your Spiritual Growth

He Did This Just for You Verses

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30 Studies for New Believers

The Big Picture: A 30–Day Overview to the New Testament

“Where to Turn When” Index

He Did This Just for You Verses

God Made You His Own
John 1:12, 13
But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

See also: Galatians 4:6, 7 and 1 John 3:2

He Comforts You
2 Corinthians 1:3, 4
Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

See also: John 14:1 and Nahum 1:7

He Gives You Confidence
1 John 5:14, 15
Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

See also: 2 Timothy 1:12 and Hebrews 10:19, 22

He Sets You Free
John 8:32, 36
And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. . . . Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

See also: Galatians 5:13 and Romans 8:2

He Takes Your Worries
Psalm 55:22
Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.

See also: 2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17 and Zephaniah 3:17

God Gives You Eternal Life
John 10:28
And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

See also: 1 Peter 1:3–5 and Philippians 3:20, 21

He Forgives You
Colossians 1:21, 22
And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.

See also: Romans 8:1, 2 and 1 John 1:9

He Frees You from Sin
Romans 8:2
For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

See also: Galatians 5:1 and John 8:36

He Can Fulfill You
John 6:35
And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

See also: John 4:13, 14 and Psalm 22:26

Jesus Offers You Grace
2 Corinthians 8:9
For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

See also: John 1:16 and Romans 5:1, 2

He Guides You
Proverbs 3:5, 6
Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

See also: Jeremiah 31:9 and Proverbs 16:9

He Can Heal Your Body and Heart
Psalm 147:3
He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

See also: Isaiah 41:10 and Psalm 121:1, 2

He Has Created a Place in Heaven for You
John 14:2
In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

See also: Ephesians 2:6, 7 and Luke 12:8

He Helps You
John 14:12, 13
Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

See also: Luke 10:18–20 and Psalm 72:12

He Sends the Holy Spirit
John 15:26
But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.

See also: John 16:7, 8 and John 16:13–15

He Sends Hope
Matthew 16:27
For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.

See also: Psalm 119:49, 50 and 2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17

He Gives You an Identity in Christ
1 Peter 2:9
But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

See also: Isaiah 43:1 and 1 Samuel 12:22

He Intercedes for You
Hebrews 7:25
But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

See also: Job 16:20, 21 and Ephesians 6:18

You Can Have Joy
John 16:24
Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

See also: 1 Peter 1:8, 9 and Isaiah 61:10

Jesus Died Out of Love for You
Ephesians 5:2
And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

See also: 1 John 4:19 and John 13:34, 35

God Will Follow Through with His Work in You
Philippians 1:6
Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

See also: Matthew 24:13 and James 1:4, 5

He Gives You a Place in God's Family
Jeremiah 31:3
The Lord has appeared of old to me, saying: "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you."

See also: Isaiah 43:1 and 1 Samuel 12:22

He Gave You a Powerful Spirit
2 Timothy 1:7
For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

See also: Ephesians 6:10–13 and Matthew 17:20

He Provides for You
Matthew 6:33
But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

See also: Matthew 7:7 and Matthew 7:11

He Allows You to Rest
Matthew 11:28
Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

See also: John 14:27, 28 and Philippians 4:6, 7

He Will Keep You Safe
Psalm 34:19
Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

See also: Psalm 32:7 and John 16:33

He Offers Salvation
Luke 19:10
For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

See also: 1 John 4:14 and Titus 3:5, 6

He Values You
Isaiah 43:4
Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honored, and I have loved you; therefore I will give men for you, and people for your life.

See also: Psalm 100:3 and Isaiah 49:15, 16

He Gives You Strength
Psalm 20:1, 2
May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble; may the name of the God of Jacob defend you; may He send you help from the sanctuary, and strengthen you out of Zion.

See also: Psalm 118:5–9 and Psalm 119:143, 144

God Rewards You
Matthew 5:12
Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

See also: Joshua 1:7 and Proverbs 16:3

Spiritual Growth Verses

Authority
Colossians 3:23, 24
And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to me knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

See also: Psalm 16:8 and Matthew 28:18–20

Boldness
2 Timothy 2:12
If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.

See also: Hebrews 13:6 and Isaiah 41:10

Commitment
1 Kings 8:61
Let your heart therefore be loyal to the Lord our God, to walk in His statutes and keep His commandments, as at this day.

See also: Proverbs 16:3 and Psalm 103:17, 18

Contentment
1 Timothy 6:6, 7
Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

See also: Philippians 4:11, 12, 19 and Psalm 23:1, 2

Daily Walk
1 Timothy 6:11, 12
But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

See also: Deuteronomy 5:33 and Colossians 3:23

Discipleship
John 15:8
By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

See also: John 12:26 and 2 Timothy 4:1, 2

Faith
1 Peter 1:8
Whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.

See also: Hebrews 11:1 and Mark 11:24

Finding God's Will
Jeremiah 6:16
Thus says the Lord: "Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'"

See also: Jeremiah 29:13 and James 1:5

Forgiveness
Ephesians 4:32
And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

See also: Luke 6:37 and Matthew 6:14, 15

Friendship
Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10
Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up.

See also: Galatians 6:2 and Proverbs 13:20

The Future
Jeremiah 29:11–13
For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

See also: Proverbs 16:3 and 1 Corinthians 2:9, 10

Giving
2 Corinthians 9:7
So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

See also: Malachi 3:10 and Luke 6:38

Grace
Ephesians 2:4, 5
But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).

See also: Acts 20:24 and 2 Corinthians 9:8

Heavenly Mind-set
Philippians 3:20, 21
For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

See also: 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1–5

Helping Others
1 John 3:17, 18
But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

See also: Matthew 5:16

Holiness
1 Peter 1:15, 16
But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy

in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

See also: 1 Thessalonians 4:7 and Hebrews 12:14

Hope

Isaiah 40:31

But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

See also: Psalm 25:3 and Job 11:7, 13, 18

Listening to God

Deuteronomy 30:20

That you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.

See also: Jeremiah 33:3 and Psalm 85:8

Love

John 13:35

By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

See also: Romans 12:9 and 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4

Managing God's Resources

Proverbs 11:24–28

There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty. The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself. The people will curse him who withholds grain, but blessing will be on the head of him who sells it. He who earnestly seeks good finds favor, but trouble will come to him who seeks evil. He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage.

See also: Matthew 6:19–21 and Proverbs 3:9, 10

Patience

Proverbs 19:11

The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression.

See also: Psalm 37:7 and Psalm 27:14

Peace

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

See also: Isaiah 26:3 and Psalm 4:8

Perseverance

Hebrews 10:36

For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.

See also: James 5:7, 8 and Romans 5:3, 4

Prayer

Philippians 4:6, 7

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

See also: 1 Peter 3:12 and 2 Chronicles 7:14

Purity

2 Corinthians 7:1

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

See also: 1 Chronicles 29:17 and Matthew 5:8

Reconciliation

Isaiah 43:25

I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins.

See also: Psalm 145:8 and 1 John 1:9

Running the Race

Hebrews 12:1

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

See also: 1 Corinthians 9:27 and Matthew 24:13

Sharing Your Faith

1 Peter 3:15

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.

See also: 1 Peter 4:11 and Matthew 5:16

Strength to Resist Temptation

1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

See also: James 4:7 and 1 John 4:4

Worship

Psalm 100:2–5

Serve the LORD with gladness; come before His presence with singing. Know that the LORD, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations.

See also: Deuteronomy 13:4 and John 4:23, 24

30 Studies for New Believers

DAY	READING
1	Jesus Our Savior
2	Coming Home to Your Father
3	God's Love
4	Growing in God
5	The Bible: God's Scrapbook
6	No Appointment Necessary
7	The Holy Spirit
8	On Your Feet in Praise
9	Forgiveness
10	Confession: A Sure Win
11	No More Than We Can Bear
12	Too Good to Be True
13	A Heavenly Home
14	The Creator
15	Cheering on the Church
16	Freedom to Obey
17	Getting Right with God
18	Becoming Like Jesus
19	Holy and Clean
20	Getting to Know a New Friend
21	Justification: Your Ticket into Heaven
22	Christian Friendships
23	Spiritual Gifts
24	Good Stewards
25	Accountable to God
26	Believe and Be Baptized
27	Three in One
28	Finding Comfort in the Dark
29	Spreading the Good News
30	A Leader Who Serves

Day 1:
Jesus Our Savior

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **Why Jesus came to earth?**
- **If there are any other ways to get to heaven?**

Read: John 10:10; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 1:15

Many people search for faith like they shop for clothes. They browse the racks of religion, pick an item, and try it on for size. If it doesn't fit, they throw it right back on the rack. If it's comfortable and makes them look good, then they buy it. Besides, it can always be returned.

Some people claim that Christianity is too narrow. Jesus clearly said that there's only one way to heaven and one narrow path that leads to God—and He is the way. He's not the least bit tolerant or accepting of other methods, sincere as they might be.

Why is that so hard to accept? In every other area of life, we accept absolutes. When we bake, we put in the exact ingredients. When we drive somewhere, we follow the directions. When we seek God, He requires only one thing—Christ—and that's the only way to God.

We're not saved by a system of religion. Salvation is beautifully, incredibly simple. Jesus is the one Savior, and He's free for the taking.

The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."

(John 4:25, 26)

Some personal applications:

- **Do you believe that Jesus is the only way to the Father?**

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- **Why do some people struggle with this concept?**

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For a more in-depth study, read: Hebrews 5:7–9

"Let us ask our Father humbly, yet confidently in the name of Jesus, to remind us of the empty tomb. Let us see the victorious Jesus: the conqueror of the tomb, the one who defied death. And let us be reminded that we, too, will be granted that same victory!"

—Max Lucado

COMING HOME TO YOUR FATHER

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **What it means to be a child of God?**
- **If you've run too far to come home?**

Read: Romans 8:15, 16; Luke 15:11–32; 2 Corinthians 6:18

When you hold up your arms to your heavenly Father, He reaches down to scoop you up. These passages remind us that accepting God's gift of salvation is not a formal business deal. It's the picture of a father welcoming home His rebellious child, just like the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11–32.

Just like the ungrateful son, we have run far from God. At some point in our lives, we've tried to live on our own, apart from Him. We packed a knapsack, bought a bus ticket, and took off for the lights of the city. Somehow, the plan didn't work out as we expected. But God, your Father, was waiting up for you when you came home.

With joy in His eyes, God adopted you as soon as you held up your arms to Him. He's your Abba Father. It doesn't matter how far you've run or how long you've been gone. His love doesn't change. You are His child.

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

Galatians 4:4, 5

Some personal applications:

- **When do you become a child of God?**

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- **What does it mean to you that God is your Father?**

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- **How can you approach God as His child?**

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For a more in-depth study, read: 1 John 3:1–10; Hebrews 12:4–11

"When we come to Christ, God not only forgives us, He also adopts us. . . . It would be enough if God just cleansed your name, but He does more. He gives you His name. It would be enough if God just set you free, but He does more. He takes you home. He takes you home to the Great House of God."

—Max Lucado

Day 3:
God's Love

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **Just how much God really loves you?**
- **If you can fall out of God's love?**
- **Why you deserve to be loved so much?**

Read: John 13:1; Ephesians 3:14–19; Romans 8:35–39

God's Word is the most beautiful expression of love ever written. Shakespeare's sonnets pale in comparison to the Bible's descriptions of love. His love transcends every kind of earthly love. His love is stronger than any bond between parent and child or husband and wife. No earthly image can accurately portray God's love for us.

Galatians 2:20 explains that Jesus loved you enough to die in your place. He chose to accept your punishment so that you could spend eternity with the Father. In His death, Christ committed the greatest act of love ever seen by human eyes.

With a love so devoted, so sacrificial, so extreme—nothing can ever interfere. Nothing can squelch or diminish that love. You cannot fall beyond the reach of His love. You can't lose it. You can't change it, win it, or control it. His love extends before and beyond time, and He loved you before you knew Him. When you choose to accept His love, you begin the most amazing relationship of your life.

The Lord has appeared of old to me, saying: "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you. Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt."

Jeremiah 31:3

Some personal applications:

- **Can you ever lose God's love?**

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- **Can you trust a loving God with the direction of your life?**

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- **How much do you love God in return?**

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For a more in-depth study, read: Psalm 145:8; Isaiah 54:10

"Run to Jesus. Jesus wants you to go to him. He wants to become the most important person in your life, the greatest love you'll ever know. He wants you to love him so much that there's no room in your heart and in your life for sin. Invite him to take up residence in your heart."

—Max Lucado

GROWING IN GOD

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **How to grow in your faith?**

Read: 2 Peter 3:18; Colossians 1:9, 10; 1 Peter 2:2

There's more to Paris than the Eiffel Tower. If you walk off the main tourist paths, you'll discover quaint cafés waiting to be enjoyed, fragrant flower shops tucked away, private bed and breakfasts unlisted in the tourist guides.

Ironically, visiting Paris has many similarities to the Christian walk. You can't miss salvation. It looms high above the skyline. It's what really makes your trip. But you'll find even more places you can visit to get to know God in a deeper way.

That's what the Bible reveals. Inside are countless passages of insight for you to consider so that you can learn more about God's personality. As you spend time with other Christians, in the Word, in prayer, and in accountability, you can draw from their strengths and experiences and share yours as well. Search the pages of Scripture to discover new places in God's Word.

Most of all, be willing to take the trip and grow in your relationship with God. You'll be surprised at what awaits you around the next corner!

But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he do.

James 1:25

Some personal applications:

- **What is the difference between "a forgetful hearer" and a "doer"?**

- **What actions are you taking right now to grow in your faith—such as attending church, reading your Bible daily, meeting with a small group?**

- **Describe something you've learned about God recently—something you didn't know before you became a Christian.**

For a more in-depth study, read: Philippians 1:6; Psalm 32:8

"Growth is the goal of the Christian. Maturity is mandatory. If a child ceased to develop, the parent would be concerned, right? Doctors would be called. Tests would be run. When a child stops growing, something is wrong."

—Max Lucado

DAY 5:

THE BIBLE: GOD'S SCRAPBOOK

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **If God's Word is any more than a bunch of good stories?**

Read: Romans 15:4; Psalm 119:9–18

The Bible comes even more alive when we realize that it's God's scrapbook. Paging through it, you learn more about Him with each turn. It overflows with collages of pictures, stories, poems, and letters. You'll discover a piece of music that David wrote for Him and a prayer God received from Job. You'll glimpse a snapshot of God's face as He watched His Son die.

What makes the Bible a unique scrapbook is that it doesn't just commemorate the past—it provides guidance for today and hope for tomorrow. You can find your name and face in its pages. Next to each Bible promise is a picture of you. The same hope, the same gifts, and the same salvation recorded in the Bible apply to you. This scrapbook isn't a nostalgic keepsake. It's a living, dynamic, hopeful expectation of God's plans for the future.

All Scripture is *given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

2 Timothy 3:16, 17

Some personal applications:

- **How can you personalize the message of the Bible?**

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- **Which Bible promises will you claim for yourself today?**

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For a more in-depth study, read: 2 Peter 1:20, 21; Deuteronomy 17:18–20

"Please remember, the goal of these stories is not to help us look back with amazement, but forward with faith. The God who spoke still speaks. The God who forgave still forgives. The God who came still comes. He comes into our world."

—Max Lucado

NO APPOINTMENT NECESSARY

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **How to talk to God?**
- **If God really listens to you?**

Read: Mark 11:20–24; James 5:15

Maybe it seems too good to be true that you have immediate access to the Creator of the universe. No appointment is necessary. You don't need to ask His secretary if He is busy. You can bypass the lobby, phones, and security guards and walk right into His office. His focus is completely on you, and His time is unlimited.

You would expect nothing less from your father, right? God doesn't treat you like a stranger or a business partner. You are His child, dearly loved and cherished. If you believe that God loves you, then you can trust that He will listen to your prayers.

In Mark 11, Jesus told us not to waste our words in prayer if we do not believe that God will answer us. But, if we are confident that He will meet our requests, then be ready! Ephesians 3:20 tells us that God wants to bless us beyond our wildest dreams.

Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

Mark 11:24

Some personal applications:

- **Do your prayers reflect your faith in God's power?**

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- **How do you approach God in prayer?**

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For a more in-depth study, read: Psalm 66:16–20; Ephesians 6:18

"You can talk to God because God listens. Your voice matters in heaven. He takes you very seriously. When you enter his presence, the attendants turn to you to hear your voice. No need to fear that you will be ignored. Even if you stammer or stumble, even if what you have to say impresses no one, it impresses God—and He listens."

—Max Lucado

Day 7:
The Holy Spirit

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **What the Holy Spirit's role is in your life?**
- **What the Holy Spirit is like?**

Read: Acts 2:1–4; Romans 8:26, 27; John 14:17; 1 John 4:13

Before He left earth, Jesus promised to send someone to be with us continually. He promised to send the comforter, one who would bear our burdens, warm our hearts, and urge us to pray. He knows our worries, desires, feelings, and thoughts. At those times when you feel like you can't express your thoughts to God, the Holy Spirit acts as your liaison.

The Holy Spirit is not a ghost that haunts churches. He is God. He is equal to and synonymous with the Father and Son, but He plays a different role. He knows you better than anyone else on earth does. He lives in you, so you are never alone. When you struggle with feelings of pain and depression, the Holy Spirit comforts you. When you're listening hard for God's voice, the Holy Spirit speaks to you. When you're down to your last ounce of strength, the Spirit lifts and carries you.

Jesus didn't leave us to fend for ourselves when He returned to heaven. He left us with the Holy Spirit. He lives in you, understanding every thought, emotion, and desire that you ever feel. You can't earn His services. As soon as you embrace Christ, the Holy Spirit lives within you.

That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.

Ephesians 3:16–19

Some personal applications:

- **Have you sensed the Holy Spirit's presence in your life?**

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- **How can you rely on Him and His strength today?**

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For a more in-depth study, read: 1 Corinthians 3:16; 12:4–11

"Spiritual life is not a human endeavor. It is rooted in and orchestrated by the Holy Spirit."

—Max Lucado

ON YOUR FEET IN PRAISE

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **Why worship is so important?**
- **How to praise the Creator of the universe?**

Read: Psalm 150; Luke 19:36–40

We shouldn't hesitate to give God a standing ovation. We should always be on our feet, lifting our hearts and our voices to Him in praise. Psalm 150 clearly tells us that He deserves all the credit. Creation cannot help praising the Creator. Jesus said that if people did not praise God, then the stones would cry out a hearty "Bravo!" to their God.

We can spend hours in worship of our Lord, but if our praise comes from an insincere heart, our efforts are wasted. God listens attentively, His head resting in His hand, peering into our hearts. He isn't impressed if our lips move without our hearts moving as well. Worship isn't a duty. It's a privilege, an act of obedience, an urge to satisfy a heart that longs to praise God.

God is the focus, the reason, and the joy of our worship. No matter what problems you're facing, don't let them distract you from your focus. Because of His work on the cross—for that reason alone—He deserves an unending stream of praise from our lips forever.

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

John 4:23, 24

Some personal applications:

- **Believers worship God in a variety of ways. What is your personal worship style?**

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- **Do you spend enough time and energy in praise?**

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- **For what are you thankful? Praise the Lord for the specific ways He has blessed you.**

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"Let me urge you to come to worship prepared to worship. Pray before you come so you will be ready to pray when you arrive. Sleep before you come so you'll stay alert when you arrive. Read the Word before you come so your heart will be soft when you worship. Come hungry. Come willing. Come expecting God to speak."

—Max Lucado

Day 9:
Forgiveness

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **How you could forgive an enemy?**
- **What sins are unforgivable?**

Read: Genesis 45:4–15; Matthew 18:21–35

It goes beyond our human nature to forgive the unforgivable. We hold grudges and harbor resentment. We battle and bicker among ourselves. It is God's nature, however, to forgive anything and everything. The worst crime ever committed? God can forgive that. Your worst mistakes and harshest moments? God can forgive those, too. Even when you feel that God would never accept you as you are, He invites you to come just as you are, and He forgives you completely.

Joseph's brothers did the unforgivable—they sold their little brother into slavery. What an awful thing to do! They did not deserve to be forgiven. As readers, we long for a moment of vengeance, when Joseph can get back at them for the years of pain and rejection they caused him. But Joseph held off. He could have gloated, mocked, yelled, or punished. Instead, he embraced them. Tears spilled down his cheeks as he forgave them. As Jesus taught in Matthew 18:35, Joseph managed to forgive his brothers from his heart.

Perhaps you can empathize with Joseph's situation. Maybe you're face-to-face with someone who doesn't deserve to be forgiven. Through Jesus' grace, you can forgive. Only when you are bathed in God's forgiveness can you extend that same, rich, ungrudging forgiveness to others.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

Some personal applications:

- **Are you holding back from forgiving someone in your life?**

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- **From whom do you need to ask forgiveness?**

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For a more in-depth study, read: Genesis 37 and 42

"Forgiveness comes easier with a wide-angle lens. Joseph uses one to get the whole picture. He refuses to focus on the betrayal of his brothers without also seeing the loyalty of his God. It always helps to see the big picture."

—Max Lucado

CONFESSION: A SURE WIN

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **If God could ever forgive your sin?**
- **Why you should confess?**

Read: Psalm 32:5; James 5:16

Thirty thousand runners. Twenty-six miles. Thirteen water stations. Two tired feet. The Olympic marathon—a colossal challenge that dares runners to attempt its course.

The Christian life is like a marathon. It's a lifelong, often grueling race for which we train, sweat, and persevere. We condition ourselves to prepare for the race. We find ourselves running among countless other runners with the same goal in mind: complete the race.

But not everyone makes it to the finish line. Some runners allow sin to begin piling up on their backs, slowing their strides until they eventually collapse on the curb. The course is difficult enough without having to carry around the heavy burden of unconfessed sin.

Confession is the only way to unload it from your back. God is watching and waiting for you at the finish line. He wants to see you run across it free of injury. There is no sin that He won't forgive. Can you hear Him calling your name?

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:8, 9

Some personal applications:

- **What's holding you back from confessing the sin in your life?**

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- **How will confession relieve your burdens?**

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For a more in-depth study, read: Psalm 51

"You know when God knows. You know when He is looking. Your heart tells you. The longer you run, the more complicated life gets. But the sooner you confess, the lighter your load becomes."

—Max Lucado

DAY 11:

NO MORE THAN WE CAN BEAR

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **How to respond when you're tempted?**
- **What God expects of you?**

Read: 1 Corinthians 10:13; Matthew 4:1–11

The question isn't *if* you'll be tempted to sin. It's just a matter of when, what, and how creative Satan will be. First Corinthians describes temptation as something everybody faces. We're vulnerable, and Satan knows it.

Jesus is our lifeline out of temptation. He sees the storm coming. He watches us struggling to stay afloat as wave after wave crashes over us. Just when we are about to drown, Jesus reaches in and offers His hand to pull us to safety. It is our choice to either take His strong hand or to sink.

God's Word is our harbor from the storm. When we recognize temptation approaching, then we can gear up for it by asking for God's help. He knows our weaknesses. He understands our pressures and temptations. Jesus Himself was tempted, and He is strong enough to overcome it all.

For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. . . . Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 2:18; 4:16

Some personal applications:

- **What are some particular areas of temptation with which you struggle?**

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- **How can you recognize and respond to temptation when you sense it?**

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For a more in-depth study, read: Ephesians 6:10–18

"He placed himself in our position. He suffered our pains and felt our fears. Rejection? He felt it. Temptation? He knew it. Loneliness? He experienced it. Death? He tasted it."

—Max Lucado

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **If you can lose your salvation?**
- **If you have to repent over and over again?**

Read: John 10:27–29; Romans 8:38, 39

Some things just seem too good to be true. For you, heaven might be one of those things—unattainable and out of reach. Maybe you feel like you could never be good enough to deserve going there. The Bible, however, tries to erase that insecurity from your mind. These two verses shout, "Don't worry everybody, God has got you!" Once we yield our lives to Him, God holds us with His strong arm. He never lets go of us, no matter what. It's not our job to keep our souls from slipping outside of heaven's bounds—it's God's! He is the ultimate protector who grips our souls for eternity.

Having surrendered yourself to God, your salvation is a done deal. Your prayer is signed, sealed, and delivered straight to God. First John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The Bible reassures you that at the moment of your repentance, you became God's child. Nothing you can do will change God's mind.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

1 John 5:14, 15

Some personal applications:

- **At some point in your life, have you given your heart to God?**

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- **How do you know that no one can take away your place in heaven?**

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For a more in-depth study, read: 1 John 1:5—2:5

"Just because you were grumpy at breakfast doesn't mean you were condemned at breakfast. When you lost your temper yesterday, you didn't lose your salvation. Your name doesn't disappear and reappear in the Book of Life according to your moods and actions. Such is the message of grace."

—Max Lucado

DAY 13:

A HEAVENLY HOME

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **What happens after you die?**
- **What heaven is like?**

Read: John 14:1–4 and Revelation 21:1–4

Many people believe in heaven, but what is it really like? Is it somewhere up in the sky? What will eternity feel like?

Actually, heaven is far greater than we can imagine. The Bible doesn't tell us exactly what heaven will be like, but today's reading gives us an idea. Heaven is a place where there is no more pain, a place where you'll never be lonely and you'll never grow old. Heaven is like nothing that we've ever seen or experienced. But best of all, heaven is where Jesus lives, and we'll be there with Him. He is waiting for the perfect time for us all to be there together.

Before Jesus returned to heaven, He promised that He was going to prepare a place for us—in one of His Father's mansions! As a believer, your name is in the Book of Life. Your place will be worshiping God, and you will never grow tired of it. Heaven is a sigh of relief, a warm hug of welcome, the end of the journey . . . home.

For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven.

2 Corinthians 5:1, 2

Some personal applications:

- **Based on God's Word, what do Christians know about death?**

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- **How would you describe heaven?**

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- **In what ways are you preparing for heaven?**

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For a more in-depth study, read: 1 Corinthians 15

"You'll be home soon, too. You may not have noticed it, but you are closer to home than ever before. Each moment is a step taken. Each breath is a page turned. Each day is a mile marked, a mountain climbed. You are closer to home than you've ever been."

—Max Lucado

THE CREATOR

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **If the story of Creation is true?**
- **Why God bothered to create you?**

Read: Nehemiah 9:6; Job 26:7–14; Acts 14:15

In the beginning, God breathed life into Adam. God formed each living thing out of nothing. God's color palette is richer than any human artist's. His brush strokes are light and precise. The Bible praises God for His creativity. He left His stamp of craftsmanship on each one of us.

When He created you, He deliberately chose the shape of your face and the color of your eyes. In addition to your physical features, He combined a unique mix of talents and traits. And since that initial moment of creation, He has watched you ever since. Anyone who would labor so much to form you would naturally care enough to lead you the rest of the way through life. You are His child, His artwork.

Perhaps you've wondered why He bothered creating you. What can you possibly give to God that He doesn't already have? Certainly, you can't bring Him power, glory, or holiness, but you can bring Him one thing that He dearly wants—yourself. You are the masterpiece that the Great Artist treasures.

By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

Hebrews 11:3

Some personal applications:

- **What does it mean to you that you were created in God's image?**

- **For what can you choose to praise the Creator today?**

For a more in-depth study, read: Psalm 8

"Only in seeking his Maker does a man truly become man. For in seeing his Creator man catches a glimpse of what he was intended to be. He who would see his God would then see the reason for death and the purpose of time. Destiny? Tomorrow? Truth? All are questions within the reach of the man who knows his source. It is in seeing Jesus that man sees his Source."

—Max Lucado

DAY 15:

CHEERING ON THE CHURCH

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **Why you should go to church?**
- **What Christ's church is supposed to be like?**

Read: Ephesians 1:22, 23; Acts 4:32–35

Joe was tired of the complaints. Every time his crew of little baseball players ran off the field, he was bombarded with grumbling. "Mark keeps dropping the ball!" "Why can't I play pitcher?" "I'm tired of being in the outfield!" "I won't catch if Timmy pitches!" Joe wasn't at all surprised that his team had yet to win a game.

The church is a team. The success of the church depends on the commitment of the players. The church can only win when its members cheer each other on. Our Captain knows that if His team isn't unified, we will fail. Every time we take the field of life, we can choose to cheer or complain, encourage or criticize, laugh or groan. If we listen carefully to our Coach, we can beat Satan's team in a shutout!

The church team isn't complete without you. God designed it that way. You're the number one draft pick for God's roster. He wants you to be bold and step up to the plate. On God's team, you have the ability to hit a home run.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

Psalm 133:1

Some personal applications:

- **How can you get more involved with your church?**

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- **How are you contributing to the overall morale of your church team?**

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For a more in-depth study, read: Matthew 16:16–19

"Unity matters to God. The Father does not want his kids to squabble. Disunity disturbs him. Why? Because 'all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another' (John 13:35). Unity creates belief."

—Max Lucado

FREEDOM TO OBEY

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **Why God asks you to obey him?**
- **If obedience will ever become easier and more natural for you?**

Read: James 1:22–25; Romans 6:22; John 8:31, 32

Sometimes it seems that rules are posted everywhere to limit our fun. "No running." "No loitering." "No diving." "Shirt and shoes required." Some people equate Christianity with a list of rules and regulations. They assume that God surrounds His children with rules just as the fun is getting started. These verses clarify that God's commands aren't meant to limit you. On the contrary, God's instructions free you. His motivation is love, and His goal is to enhance your life, not limit it.

When you live within God's boundaries, you're free—free to enjoy life without worry, free to approach God without guilt, free to begin relationships without pain. Because of His blessings, obedience becomes fun. You obey not because you have to, but because you want to.

But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.

Romans 6:22

Some personal applications:

- **Do you view God's commandments as a burden or a privilege?**

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- **What motivates you to obey God's Word?**

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- **What benefits come from obedience?**

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For a more in-depth study, read: Proverbs 3

"That is the unique characteristic of the new kingdom. Its subjects aren't working in order to go to heaven; they work because they are going to heaven. Arrogance and fear are replaced with gratitude and joy."

—Max Lucado

DAY 17:

GETTING RIGHT WITH GOD

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **How you can become righteous?**
- **If following the rules is good enough for God?**

Read: Romans 3:19–26; 1 John 2:1, 2; Proverbs 2:7, 8

Try to think of someone who was righteous, someone who never did anything wrong. Mother Teresa? No. The Apostle Paul? Hardly. The Pope, Joan of Arc, or John the Baptist? None of these characters were righteous of their own accord, and neither are you. There's nothing you can do to make up for your foul behavior.

Sin stinks, and God hates it. Face it: Flowers won't appease Him. Gifts and apology cards won't cut it. The grander tributes—an afternoon serving at the city mission, a fat check in the offering plate—won't make you look any better or any more righteous. We always want to do what is right, but somehow, it just doesn't happen.

God's not surprised. Reading Romans chapter three may help you breathe a little easier. Deeds aren't the way to righteousness—Jesus is. He frees you from your sin when you hand over your life to Him. Righteousness is a free gift. Take it. Wear it confidently by obeying God's Word. Then you'll receive all the positive things that God wants to give you along with it.

But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

James 1:25

Some personal applications:

- **Have you been trying to get into heaven by what you do for God?**

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- **Have you been living out your righteousness by obeying God's Word?**

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For a more in-depth study, read: Matthew 5:6; Hosea 10:12

"The world rams at your door; Jesus taps at your door. The voices scream for your allegiance; Jesus softly and tenderly requests it. The world promises flashy pleasure; Jesus promises a quiet dinner . . . with God. 'I will come in and eat.' Which voice do you hear?"

—Max Lucado

BECOMING LIKE JESUS

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **What sanctification is?**
- **How you become sanctified?**

Read: John 17:17–19; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 1 Peter 1:2

Sanctification is the ongoing process of growing toward holiness. Once you've accepted Christ as your Savior, your salvation is secure, but God isn't finished with you yet. As long as you're alive, He wants you to become more like Him. Sanctification is the Holy Spirit's job. Through His leading, you become more and more like Jesus each day.

Sanctification lasts a lifetime. While you're on earth, you'll never be perfect, but you should become *more* perfect with each passing day. God gives you the tools—the handbook (the Bible), the guide (the Holy Spirit), and the companions (the church).

You don't have to do anything to get salvation. You just embrace it. It's a gift, pure and simple. But from that moment on, God does expect something from you. He expects you to abandon your old lifestyle and grow into Christ's likeness. It's your part in God's plan.

Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.

Colossians 3:9, 10

Some personal applications:

- **How are you growing to be more like Jesus in your lifestyle?**

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- **Why would God want you to have a part in sanctification?**

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For a more in-depth study, read: Matthew 7:24–27

"Positional sanctification comes because of Christ's work *for* us.

"Progressive sanctification comes because of Christ's work *in* us.

"Both are gifts from God.

"'With one sacrifice he made perfect forever those who are being made holy' (Hebrews 10:14 NCV). See the blending of tenses? 'He made perfect' (positional sanctification) those who are 'being made holy' (progressive sanctification).

"Positional and progressive sanctification. God's work for us and God's work in us. Neglect the first, and you grow fearful. Neglect the second, and you grow lazy. Both are essential, and both are seen in the moistened dirt at the base of the cross of Christ."

—Max Lucado

DAY 19:

HOLY AND CLEAN

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **What it means to be holy?**
- **How you could ever be considered holy?**

Read: Leviticus 11:45; Ephesians 1:4–6; 2 Corinthians 7:1

Holiness is one of those intimidating religious words that we always hear but generally don't understand. Holiness means set apart, sinless, and perfect. God is holy; we are not.

God loves us despite our dirty, sin-soiled clothes. He wears His holiness like a dazzling, spotless, white robe. These verses encourage us to purify ourselves so that we can be holy, just as God intended us to be.

See that big black spot on your collar? That's lust. Don't forget that smear on the right sleeve. That's jealousy. There's a spot on your cuff and a streak on your lapel. Those are pride and dishonesty. What an eyesore we are next to God's purity!

But we can wear holiness, too. We don't wear our own; we wear Christ's. We are covered in His holiness. Once we have been cleansed white as snow, we can stand next to God in pure, holy garments.

But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your *conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."*

1 Peter 1:15, 16

Some personal applications:

- **What sins have stained your soul?**

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- **How can you be more holy today, just as God is holy?**

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For a more in-depth study, read: 2 Timothy 2:21, 22; 1 Thessalonians 3:12, 13

"And what will happen when you see Jesus? You will see unblemished purity and unbending strength. You will feel His unending presence and know His unbridled protection. And—all that He is, you will be, for you will be like Jesus."

—Max Lucado

GETTING TO KNOW A NEW FRIEND

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **How to get to know God?**

Read: 1 Samuel 3:2–10, 19; Proverbs 3:1–4

Making time to get alone with God may seem tough—at times even impossible. Stress, deadlines, relationships, and responsibilities compete for your time. How can you set aside time to pause, open the Bible, study, and listen to God? Those are the meetings that God longs for. He wants to meet with you for your sake, so that you can get to know Him and His Word better.

When the prophet Samuel was young, he had never heard God's voice before. Actually hearing God speak was a rare occurrence in those days. The boy had not yet met God in a personal way (1 Samuel 3:7).

But God was eager for Samuel to meet Him, so He called his name. Once Samuel's ears were open, he listened for God's voice. From that moment on, he formed a special friendship with God.

Once you hear God, don't hesitate to invite Him in. Just as you would spend time getting to know a new friend, spend that kind of time with your Lord. Ask Him to sit and chat. Ask Him more about Himself, and learn about His past, His family, and His plans. Tell Him all about your situation, your goals, and your struggles. Once you've shared those heart-to-heart conversations, never grow apart. Let Him be more than a mere acquaintance.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Romans 12:2

Some personal applications:

- **What times can you set aside to spend alone with God this week?**

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- **How can you pause to listen for God's voice today?**

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For a more in-depth study, read: Colossians 3:1–17

"In the midst of your daily storms, make it a point to be still and set your sights on him. Let God be God. Let Him bathe you in His glory so that both your breath and your troubles are sucked from your soul. Be still. Be quiet. Be open and willing."

—Max Lucado

DAY 21:

JUSTIFICATION: YOUR TICKET INTO HEAVEN

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **What you have to do to be admitted into heaven?**
- **How you can have a right relationship with God?**

Read: Romans 4:16–25

As high school students prepare for college, they face four years of late-night study, rounds of admissions tests, and long-term career planning. The stress and strain of their preparation and decisions builds up to a single goal. They anxiously wait, day after day, checking and rechecking the mail box, looking for just one item: the college acceptance letter.

But what if they didn't need a letter? What if getting a spot at the most prestigious school in the country simply required signing up? What if degrees were given away as freely as coupons? This would be a student's dream!

Instant admission into heaven, however, isn't just a dream—it is a reality for all who turn to Jesus. Heaven doesn't require a test or a class. Nothing we do can make us good enough for God and heaven. Jesus does it all. He took the test for us and already filled out our paperwork. The one thing He requires is that we believe that He'll uphold His end of the bargain.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.

Ephesians 2:8

Some personal applications:

- **Are you still trying to earn your way into heaven?**

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- **Have you acknowledged that only Christ can make you worthy of heaven?**

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For a more in-depth study, read: Hebrews 11

"Ponder the achievement of God. He doesn't condone our sin; nor does he compromise his standard. He doesn't ignore our rebellion; nor does he relax his demands. Rather than dismiss our sin he assumes our sin and, incredibly, sentences himself. God's holiness is honored. Our sin is punished. And we are redeemed. God is still God. The wages is still death. And we are made perfect."

—Max Lucado

CHRISTIAN FRIENDSHIPS

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **How to develop friendships with other Christians?**
- **About the importance of having Christian friendships?**

Read: Acts 14:21, 22; Ephesians 2:19

God never intended for us to struggle through life alone. You'll notice a pattern in the Scriptures that God provides friends for our support. During tough times, King David turned to his dear friend Jonathan. When Naomi lost her husband and sons, she leaned on her daughter-in-law Ruth. And even Jesus, when He felt anxious about dying on the cross, asked His three closest friends, Peter, James, and John, to come pray with Him.

Friends share our joys and sorrows. Friends pray for us. Friends balance us out. Friends help us see beyond our immediate circumstances to God's grand, sweeping plan. And we can do the same for our friends.

So do we need *Christian* friends? When we truly love Jesus more than anything else, then we want to be able to share what's most important to us with our closest friends. Only other believers can fully understand our passion for Christ.

Let's face it—we need each other. And that's just what God had in mind.

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

John 15:13–15

Some personal applications:

- **How have you felt encouragement from other Christians?**

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- **Who can you encourage today in their faith?**

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For a more in-depth study, read: Proverbs 27:17; Acts 11:23, 24

"We know the importance of a friend. All of us need friends, don't we? Whether or not you are friendly could determine whether or not someone hears about Jesus Christ. Your handshake, your warmth, your walk, your friendliness could make the difference in someone's life."

—Max Lucado

DAY 23:

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **What spiritual gifts God has given you?**
- **How you can use them?**

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:4–11; Hebrews 2:4

Since God is the giver, He chooses what gifts to give each person. He selects from His infinite pool of talents and blessings and chooses something appropriate for you. Every gift is good. You can't walk away slighted. It's up to you to discover what gifts He's placed in your heart and to use them.

Perhaps you wonder why God gives special gifts. In a "fair" economy, every person would receive the same gifts, in the same measure, at the same time. But God's economy operates differently. To some, He gives the gift of teaching. To others, He gives the gift of hospitality. These are very different gifts, right? God's family needs *all* of the gifts in order to function smoothly. We are dependent upon each other.

Study Romans 12:3–8 and ask God which gifts He has given you. Ask your family, friends, pastor, and yourself. Consider your talents and your passions, and pray that God would show you how He wants you to serve the family. Then snatch up your prize and use it for God.

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith.

Romans 12:6

Some personal applications:

- **How can you discover your spiritual gifts?**

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- **What do you think your spiritual gifts might be?**

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- **How can you use your gifts?**

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For a more in-depth study, read: 1 Thessalonians 5:19–22

"God loves you just the way you are. If you think His love for you would be stronger if your faith were, you are wrong. If you think His love would be deeper if your thoughts were, wrong again. Don't confuse God's love with the love of people. The love of people often increases with performance and decreases with mistakes. Not so with God's love. He loves you right where you are."

—Max Lucado

GOOD STEWARDS

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **What stewardship is?**
- **What God expects you to do with your possessions?**

Read: 1 Peter 4:10, 11; Luke 12:41–48

It's no secret that our society is materialistic. God has a different perspective. When you consider God's part in creating the world, you'll realize that everything you "own" is really God's. Not yours—God's. While you are here on earth, He is entrusting you with it.

Because all you have is on loan from God, you know not to cling to your possessions. They will only slip through your fingers. When God entrusts you with possessions, He expects you to honor Him with what you have.

The Bible teaches that we are to give God our firstfruits—meaning the first and best of all we have. Is that because God needs your money? You must be kidding. Why, then, is giving so important? When you give, you put your possessions in proper perspective. Giving helps you participate in God's work. Giving helps *you* and your heart condition far more than it helps God.

Good stewardship means that you work and give cheerfully. Take inventory of your gifts, talents, and possessions. Invest them in the world around you so that with a glad heart you can report back to the giver.

So let each one give *as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.*

2 Corinthians 9:7

Some personal applications:

- **Are you abusing what God has entrusted to you?**

_____

_____

_____

- **What gifts can you invest in God's kingdom?**

_____

_____

_____

For a more in-depth study, read: Matthew 25:15–23

"God's foremost rule of finance is this: We own nothing. We are managers, not owners. Stewards, not landlords. Maintenance people, not proprietors. Our money is not ours; it is His."

—Max Lucado

DAY 25:

ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **Once you're saved, are you accountable to God for your actions?**
- **What God requires from you?**

Read: Romans 14:10–12; Matthew 5:13–16; 1 Corinthians 9:16

Romans reminds us that it doesn't matter much what people on earth think about us. It's God who matters. It's a scary thought to realize that one day each of us will stand alone before the judgment seat of Christ. God sees our hearts. He knows our thoughts. He watches every move we make.

If you know Christ, then you don't have to fear Him. Your eternity is secure. But, we are accountable to Him for our choices. Someday we will stand before Him and answer for our decisions.

Sometimes it's hard to hold ourselves to God's strict standards. Good friends can hold each other accountable. A close friend can ask how you're responding to a particular temptation that always seems to break you. A fellow believer can help you live up to God's standards. Remember, ultimately you're accountable only to Him—but in the meantime, we can help each other.

Hell and Destruction are before the Lord; so how much more the hearts of the sons of men.

Proverbs 15:11

Some personal applications:

- **For what things do you need someone to hold you accountable?**

_____

_____

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- **How can you live in light of the judgment seat of Christ—not in fear, but in wisdom?**

_____

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For a more in-depth study, read: Proverbs 15:2, 3

"Listen to the Christ rather than to the voices of men. Jesus says you can't please men and still be a servant of God. Those who listen and follow Christ will be received into heaven by the pierced hands of the one who knows the freedom of giving up what you cannot own in order to receive what no one can take from you—eternal life."

—Max Lucado

Believe and Be Baptized

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **What baptism is?**
- **If you must be baptized in order to be a Christian?**

Read: Matthew 3:11, 13–17; 1 Peter 3:21

John (a man), baptized Jesus (the Savior of humanity). Does that sound a bit ironic to you? It did to John the Baptist—and he told Jesus so. But Jesus wanted to stress the importance of baptism, and He wanted to leave us a model to follow, so He was baptized. Jesus didn't need forgiveness; He was perfect. But He followed the will of His Father, which included baptism.

A marriage commitment begins with a ring. The couple publicly commits to each other. At the ceremony, the couple declares, "I'm no longer my own—I'm married!" Baptism announces that you are no longer your former, independent self. You have chosen a relationship, and you take Jesus' name, "Christian."

Baptism is a blessing, not a burden; an honor, not a chore; a privilege, not a punishment. By obeying Jesus' command to be baptized, you symbolically die to sin and are reborn with Christ.

Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

Acts 19:4

Some personal applications:

- **If you have not yet been baptized, when can you follow Christ's command?**

_____

_____

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- **If you have already been baptized, what does your baptism symbolize in your walk with the Lord?**

_____

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For a more in-depth study, read: Acts 2:38, 39

"Please understand, it is not the act that saves us. But it is the act that symbolizes how we are saved! The invisible work of the Holy Spirit is visibly dramatized in the water. . . . Remove your shoes, bow your head, and bend your knees; this is a holy event. Baptism is not to be taken lightly."

—Max Lucado

Day 27:
Three in One

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **About the Trinity?**
- **How to relate to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?**

Read: Mark 1:10, 11; Matthew 28:19

In two thousand years, biblical scholars have yet to explain the Trinity in fewer than five hundred words. The Trinity is one of those beautiful, divine mysteries that we'll never fully understand—not until we stand in heaven and share God's wisdom. We can accept that God doesn't intend for us to understand everything in life. We can be satisfied that God understands, and He has revealed as much as our limited minds can contain.

These verses from Matthew and Mark shed some light on the Trinity. It's astounding to imagine a God who is everywhere all the time, and yet was also crucified on one cross thousands of years ago. This God is not a cold spirit, watching from atop a cloud. He is with you—right here, right now.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

2 Corinthians 13:14

Some personal applications:

- **When you pray, do you address God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus?**

_____

_____

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- **How have you experienced the touch of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit?**

_____

_____

_____

For a more in-depth study, read: John 14:16, 17; Romans 5:5, 6

"All the splendor of heaven revealed in a human body. For a period ever so brief, the doors to the throne room were open and God came near. His Majesty was seen. Heaven touched the earth and, as a result, earth can know heaven. In astounding tandem a human body housed divinity. Holiness and earthliness intertwined."

—Max Lucado

Finding Comfort in the Dark

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **Why Christians suffer?**
- **Where to turn for comfort in tough times?**

Read: Psalm 18:1–6; 34:19

Christians are certainly not exempt from trouble, but when we feel as if we are buried in pain, God offers us comfort to carry us through. Life after conversion doesn't suddenly become a smooth, easy ride, but it is different. We have access to God's richest treasures. His comfort is one of them.

In difficult times, He pours comfort on our weary souls. When life seems good, it's easy to call on God. We casually toss prayers in His direction. We walk with a light step until pain stops us abruptly. Suddenly, God seems far away. We flounder in our pain, struggling to cry out, and all we can muster is a faint whisper.

With compassion, God hears. He sees you, fighting against despair. If we can only lift our eyes to Him, we will see Him rushing to share His comfort with us. He is our hero, our savior, our peace.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

2 Corinthians 1:3, 4.

Some personal applications:

- **How can you use the difficult times in your past to empathize with others who are struggling?**

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- **When do you take advantage of God's comfort?**

_____

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For a more in-depth study, read: Habakkuk 3:17–19

"Being a father is teaching me that when I am criticized, injured, or afraid, there is a Father who is ready to comfort me. There is a Father who will hold me until I'm better, help me until I can live with the hurt, and who won't go to sleep when I'm afraid of waking up and seeing the dark. Ever. And that's enough."

—Max Lucado

Day 29:

Spreading the Good News

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **How to share the good news of salvation?**
- **With whom you can share your faith?**

Read: Acts 8:4–40; Colossians 4:5, 6

Spill your news. Shout your joy. Spread your announcement. After all, good news is meant to be shared! Why stifle the best message ever known to humanity? So you've met this Jesus Christ? You know Him personally? Then tell your friends and family all about your new friend.

When we are enjoying God's goodness, it's natural to want to talk about Him. It's refreshing. Just as you'd share your latest announcement—a new car, a baby on the way, a broken relationship restored—the best news ever should always be on the tip of your tongue. Tell others about the person who has changed your life. Don't push away an opportunity to speak.

Jesus' disciples couldn't contain themselves. They heard. They believed. Then they told everybody. Can you identify with their energy and enthusiasm? Have you felt the undeniable urge to tell someone how Jesus changed your life?

However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you." And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled.

Mark 5:19, 20

Some personal applications:

- **Can you think of someone who needs to hear the best message ever?**

_____

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- **How can you keep your first joy of knowing Jesus fresh and contagious in your life?**

_____

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For a more in-depth study, read: Matthew 5:13–16

"You've heard the voice whispering your name, haven't you? You've felt the nudge to go and sensed the urge to speak. Hasn't it occurred to you? . . . If the Bible were being written today, that might be your name in the eighth chapter of Acts."

—Max Lucado

A LEADER WHO SERVES

Have you ever wondered . . .

- **What it really means to be a servant?**
- **How to serve as Jesus did?**

Read: Matthew 20:25–27; Philippians 2:5–11

Jesus doesn't ask us to serve any differently than He served. He's been here—on earth, among grumpy, demanding people, feeling tired and worn thin. Paul explains in Philippians 2:5–11 that Jesus was the ultimate servant. Reading those passages may make you feel like Jesus is a tough act to follow. But Jesus made it clear in Matthew 20:25–27 that it is your attitude that matters most.

When you see life through Jesus' eyes, it's natural to spot opportunities to serve. Too often we miss them because we focus on ourselves. We can't see beyond the wall of our own problems and concerns. Only when we look beyond ourselves can we be the servants that Jesus desires us to be.

In Luke 22:24–27, Jesus tells His disciples that the leader among them would be a servant. By setting your heart on serving, you can follow in Jesus' footsteps.

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.

1 Peter 2:21

Some personal applications:

- **Starting in your hometown, how can you serve other people?**

_____

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- **How can you model your attitude after Christ's attitude?**

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For a more in-depth study, read: Philippians 2:14–17; 1 Corinthians 12:5–11

"Reliable servants. They're the binding of the Bible. Their acts are rarely recited and their names are seldom mentioned. Yet were it not for their loyal devotion to God, many great events never would have occurred."

—Max Lucado

The Big Picture

A 30–Day Overview of the New Testament

Matthew 1:18—2:23
Matthew 5:1–16; 6:1—7:12
Matthew 14:13–36
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Acts 9:1–31
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1 Corinthians 15:1–58
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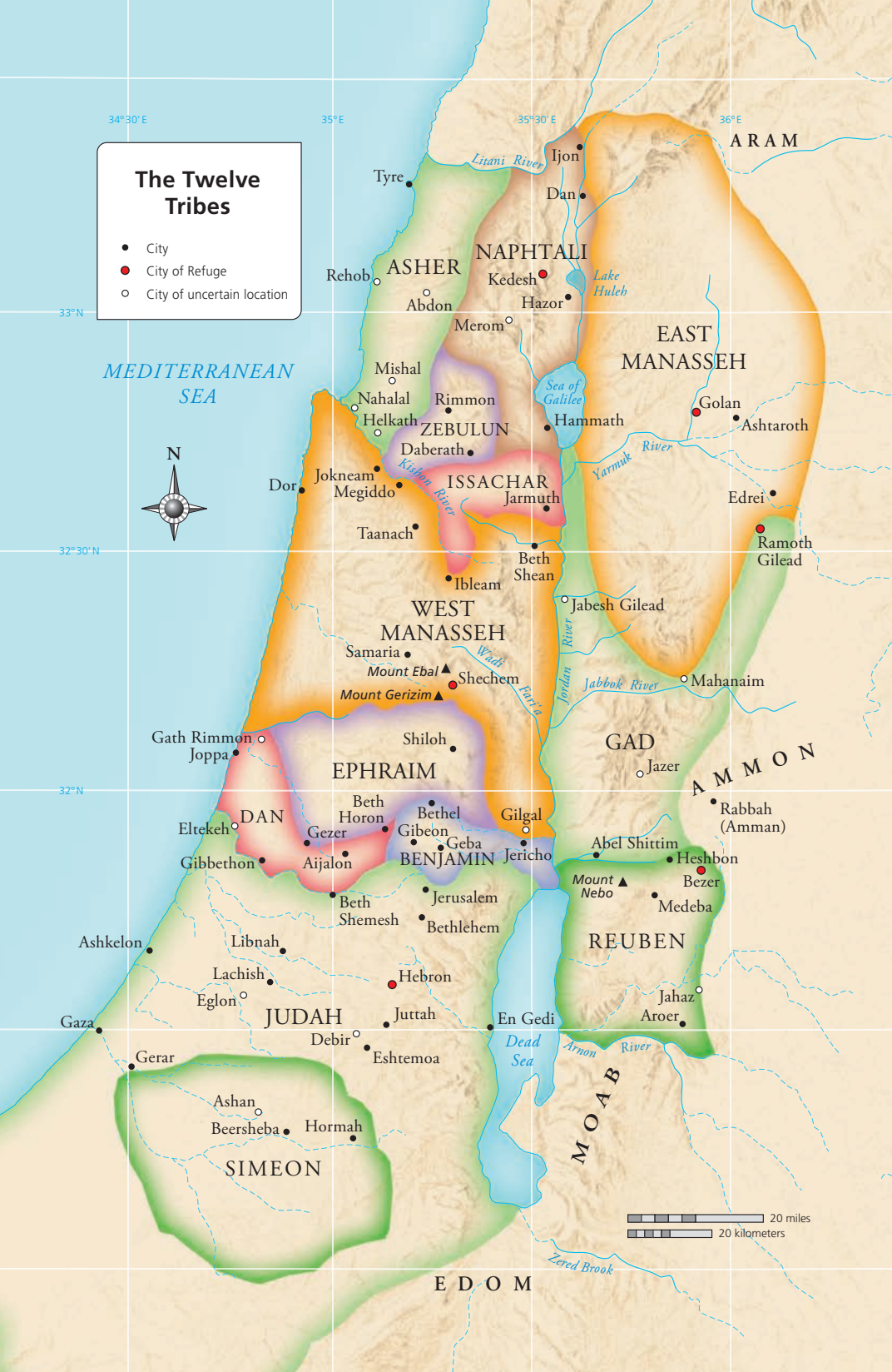
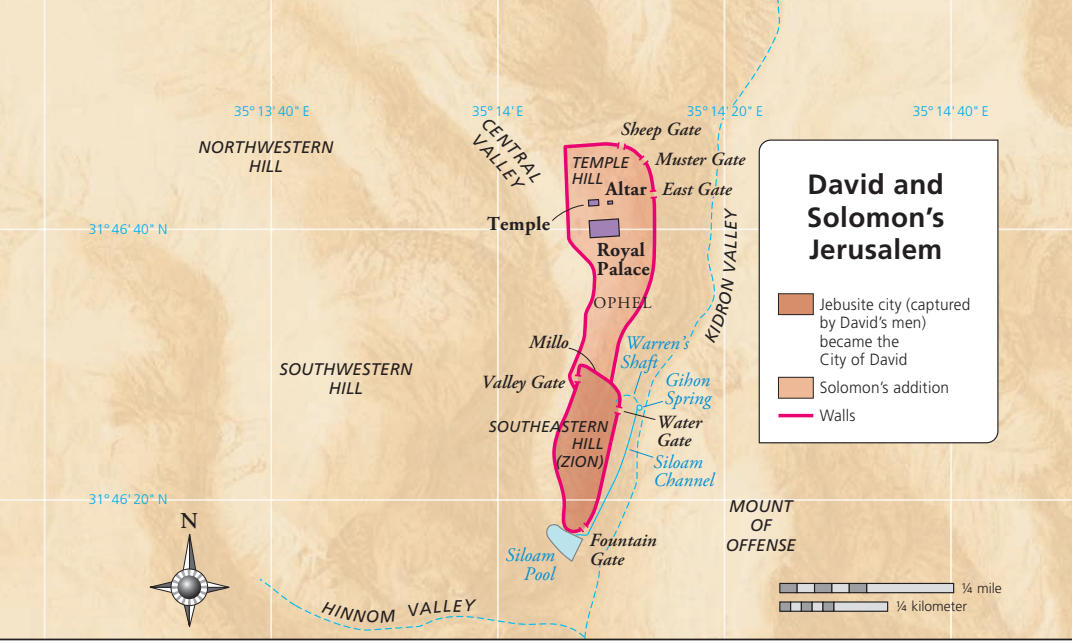
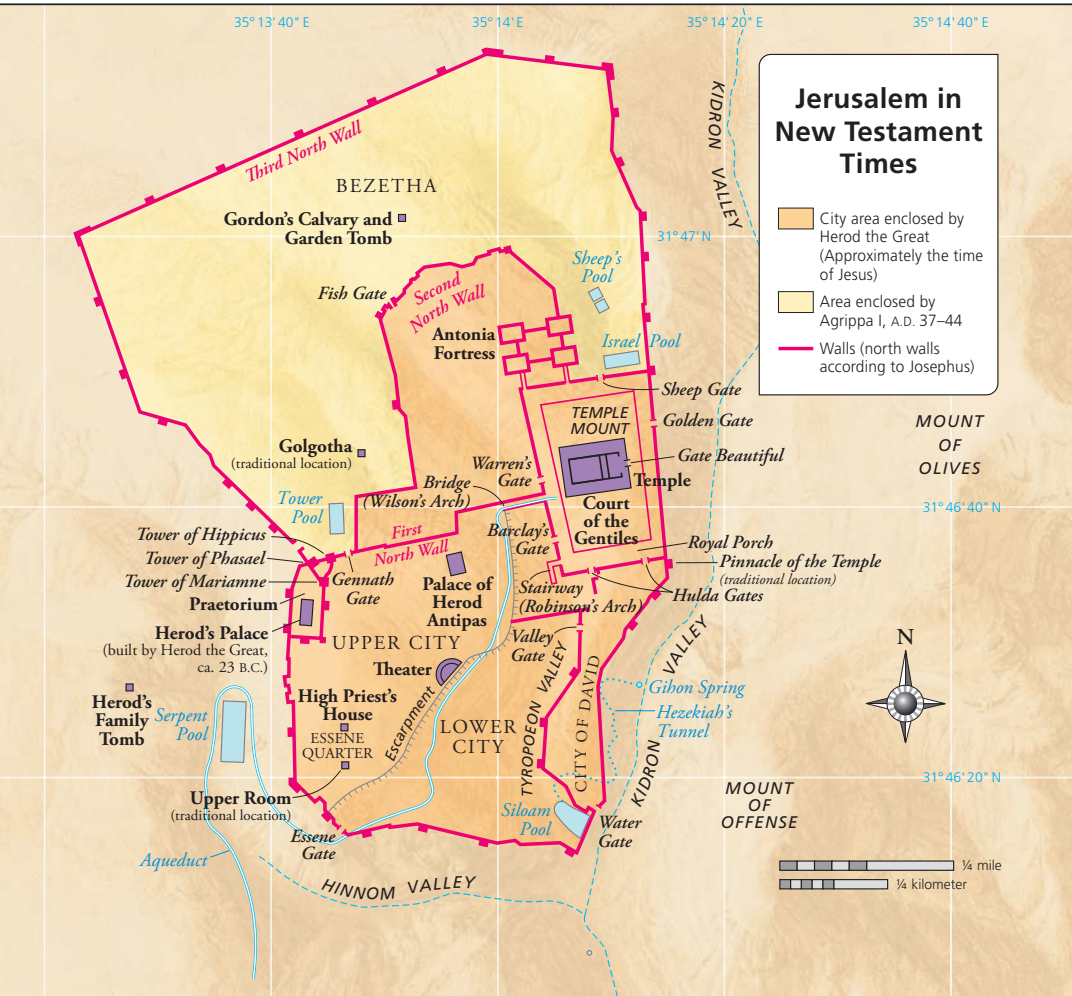
MESOPOTAMIA
Tadmor
Mari
Diyala R.
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Byblos
LEBANON
Sidon
Damascus
Kirkhar R.
Agade
Babylon
IRAQ
Shechem
Jordan R.
Bethel
Rabbah (Amman)
ISRAEL
Jerusalem
Gaza
Hebron
SYRIAN DESERT
Gerar
Zoan (Tanis)
Dead Sea
Beersheba
Larsa
Ur
Kadesh Barnea
JORDAN
Noph (Memphis)
On (Heliopolis)
SINAI PENINSULA
Ezion Geber
EGYPT
PERSIAN GULF
N
AN-NAFUD
SAUDI ARABIA
RED SEA
Nile River
300 miles
300 kilometers
SAHARA
The World of the Patriarchs
Old Babylonian Empire, c. 1750 B.C.
Egyptian Empire, c. 1492 B.C.
Hittite Empire, c. 1350 B.C.
Abraham's route
City of uncertain location
EGYPT Modern name

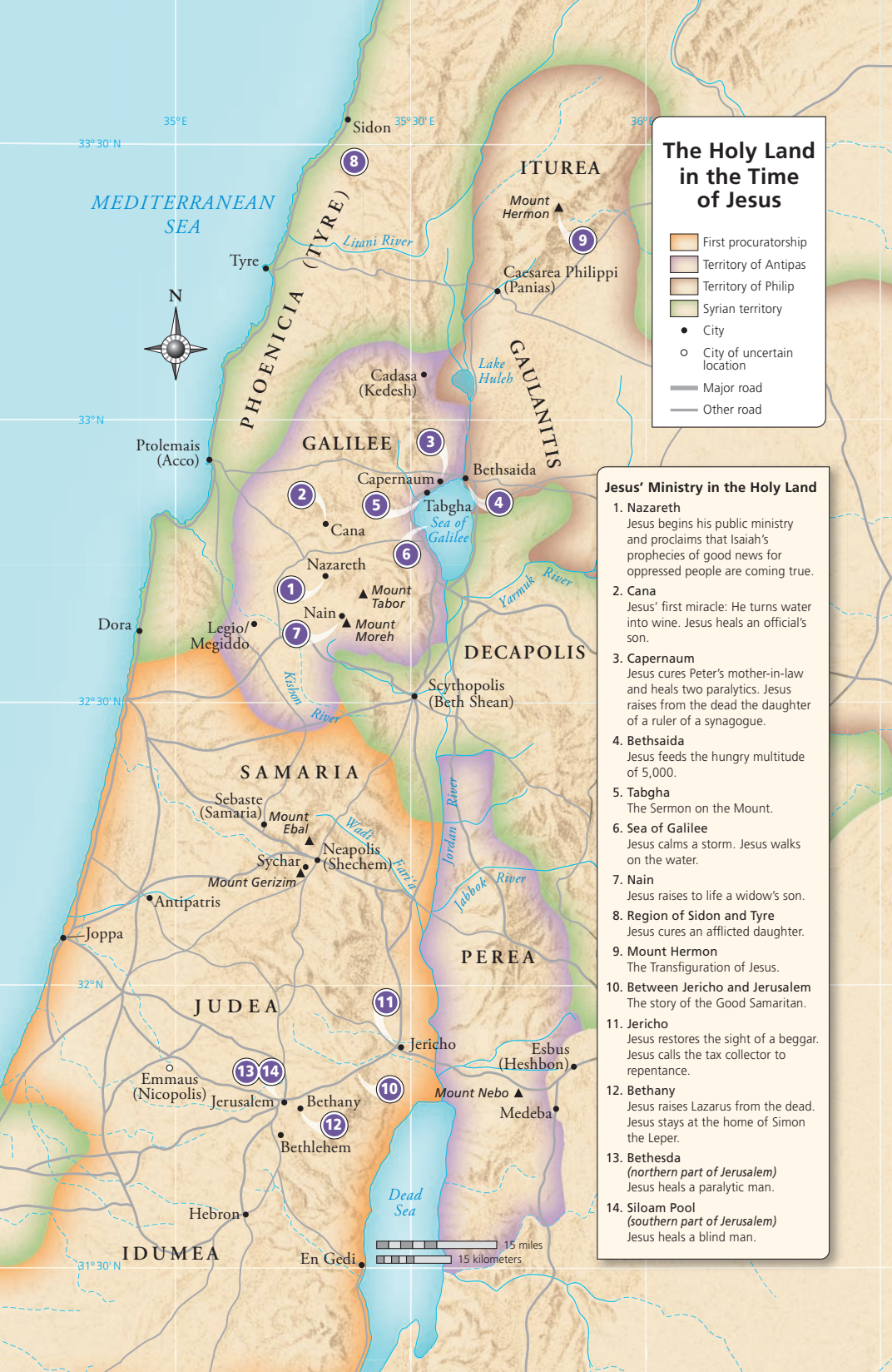
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
AMMON
32°E
34°E
36°E
Jordan River
Mount Nebo
CANAAN
Dead Sea
MOAB
Zoar
Sile
Raamses
GOSHEN
Succoth
Pithom
Lake Timsah
Great Bitter Lake
Little Bitter Lake
Kadesh Barnea
WILDERNESS OF ZIN
Punon
EDOM
EGYPT
On (Heliopolis)
30°N
Noph (Memphis)
WILDERNESS OF PARAN
Ezion Geber
SINAI
Nile River
WILDERNESS OF SIN
Gulf of Suez
Gulf of Aqaba
MIDIAN
N
Rephidim
Mount Sinai (Jebel Musa)
28°N
RED SEA
The Exodus from Egypt
Traditional route
Alternate routes of Red Sea crossing
City
City of uncertain location
Mountain peak
50 miles
50 kilometers

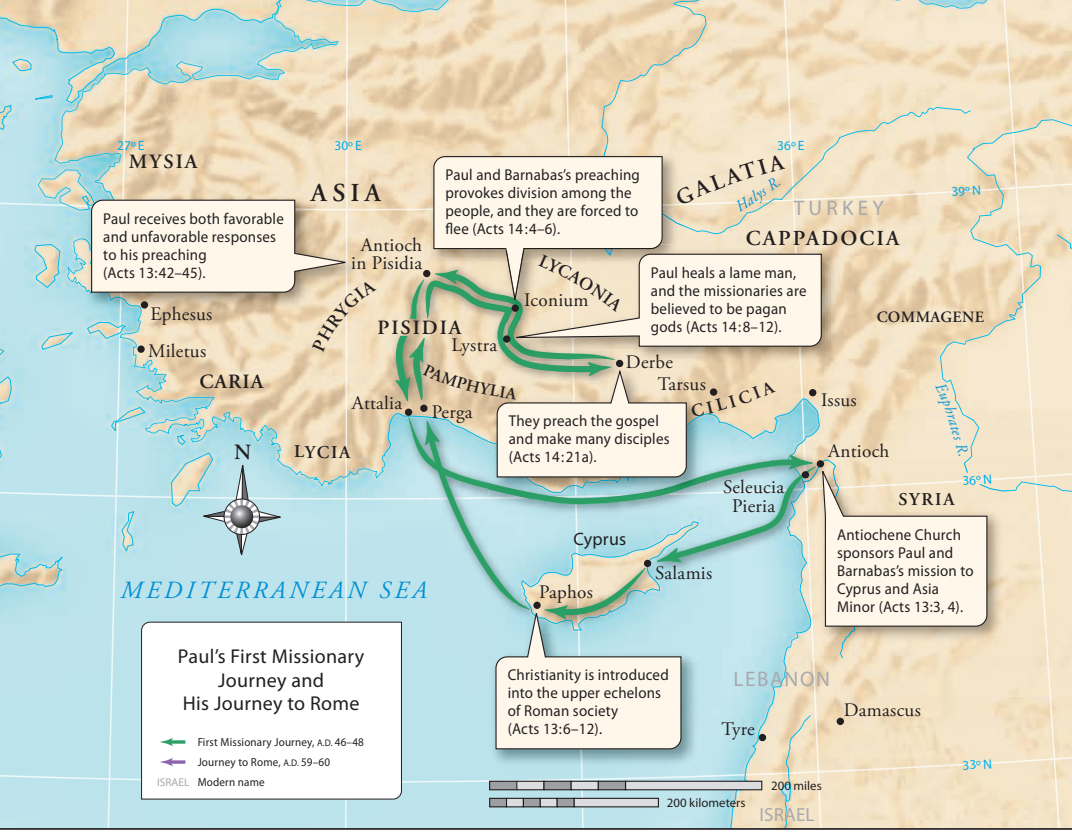
The Conquest of Canaan
City
City of uncertain location
Route from Kadesh Barnea
Advance through Canaan and beyond
Battle
City attacked
City burned
Unconquered city
35° E
35° 30' E
33° N
32° 30' N
32° N
31° 30' N
N
Tyre
Litani River
Dan
PHOENICIA
Achzib
Kedesh
Lake Huleh
Hazor
Merom
Beth Anath
Capernaum
Acco
Sea of Galilee
GALILEE
Achshaph
Yarmuk River
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Kishon River
Dor
Megiddo
Taanach
Edrei
Ramoth Gilead
Beth Shean
Dothan
Ibleam
SAMARIA
Jabesh Gilead
Jordan River
Samaria
Mount Ebal
Wadi Far'a
Jabbok River
Mahanaim
Mount Gerizim
Shechem
GILEAD
Shiloh
Jazer
AMMON
Bethel
Ai
Gilgal
Rabbath (Amman)
Gezer
Gibeon
Aijalon
Jericho
Abel Shittim
Heshbon
Ashdod
Ekron
Beth Shemesh
Jerusalem
Mount Nebo
Medeba
Jarmuth
Bethlehem
Gath
Libnah
Mareshah
Jahaz
Lachish
Eglon
Hebron
Aroer
Makkedah
Debir
En Gedi
Dead Sea
Arnon River
MOAB
Arad
Beersheba
Hormah
20 miles
20 kilometers
4. In a northern thrust, Joshua moves from Gilgal and pushes the Canaanites beyond Tyre. The city of Hazor is burned (Josh. 11).
2. Joshua takes Ai in his second attempt (Josh. 7–8).
3. Joshua makes peace with Gibeon, then moves through the valley of Aijalon and defeats the five Amorite kings (Josh. 9–10).
1. Upon crossing the Jordan, Joshua camps awhile at Gilgal, then moves to take Jericho (Josh. 1–6).
Although Joshua was successful militarily, this area lay beyond Israel's permanent control (Judg. 1:17–20).


The Twelve Tribes
City
City of Refuge
City of uncertain location
34°30' E
35° E
35°30' E
36° E
33° N
32°30' N
32° N
N
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
ARAM
Litani River
Ijon
Tyre
Dan
NAPHTALI
ASHER
Rehob
Kedesh
Lake Huleh
Abdon
Hazor
Merom
EAST MANASSEH
Mishal
Sea of Galilee
Golan
Nahalal
Rimmon
Helkath
ZEBULUN
Hammath
Ashtaroth
Daberath
Yarmuk River
Kishon River
Dor
Jokneam
Megiddo
ISSACHAR
Jarmuth
Edrei
Taanach
Ramoth Gilead
Beth Shean
Ibleam
Jabesh Gilead
WEST MANASSEH
Samaria
Wadi Far'a
Jordan River
Mount Ebal
Shechem
Jabbok River
Mahanaim
Mount Gerizim
Gath Rimmon
Joppa
Shiloh
GAD
Jazer
AMMON
EPHRAIM
Rabbah (Amman)
Beth Horon
Bethel
Gilgal
DAN
Eltekeh
Gezer
Gibeon
Geba
Abel Shittim
Heshbon
Gibbethon
Aijalon
BENJAMIN
Jericho
Mount Nebo
Bezer
Beth Shemesh
Jerusalem
Medeba
Bethlehem
Ashkelon
Libnah
REUBEN
Lachish
Hebron
Eglon
Jahaz
Gaza
JUDAH
Juttah
En Gedi
Aroer
Debir
Dead Sea
Arnon River
Gerar
Eshtemoa
MOAB
Ashan
Beersheba
Hormah
SIMEON
20 miles
20 kilometers
Zered Brook
EDOM


35° 13' 40" E
35° 14' E
35° 14' 20" E
35° 14' 40" E
NORTHWESTERN HILL
CENTRAL VALLEY
Sheep Gate
TEMPLE HILL
Muster Gate
Altar
East Gate
Temple
Royal Palace
OPHEL
KIDRON VALLEY
31° 46' 40" N
Millo
Warren's Shaft
SOUTHWESTERN HILL
Valley Gate
Gihon Spring
SOUTHEASTERN HILL (ZION)
Water Gate
Siloam Channel
31° 46' 20" N
MOUNT OF OFFENSE
Siloam Pool
Fountain Gate
N
HINNOM VALLEY
David and Solomon's Jerusalem
Jebusite city (captured by David's men) became the City of David
Solomon's addition
Walls
¼ mile
¼ kilometer


35° 13' 40" E
35° 14' E
35° 14' 20" E
35° 14' 40" E
Third North Wall
BEZETHA
KIDRON VALLEY
Gordon's Calvary and Garden Tomb
31° 47' N
Sheep's Pool
Fish Gate
Second North Wall
Antonia Fortress
Israel Pool
Sheep Gate
TEMPLE MOUNT
Golden Gate
MOUNT OF OLIVES
Golgotha (traditional location)
Warren's Gate
Gate Beautiful
Bridge (Wilson's Arch)
Temple
Tower Pool
Court of the Gentiles
31° 46' 40" N
Tower of Hippicus
First North Wall
Barclay's Gate
Royal Porch
Tower of Phasael
Pinnacle of the Temple (traditional location)
Tower of Mariamne
Gennath Gate
Palace of Herod Antipas
Hulda Gates
Praetorium
Stairway (Robinson's Arch)
Herod's Palace (built by Herod the Great, ca. 23 B.C.)
UPPER CITY
Valley Gate
Theater
Gihon Spring
Herod's Family Tomb
Serpent Pool
High Priest's House
Escarpment
LOWER CITY
TYROPOEON VALLEY
CITY OF DAVID
KIDRON VALLEY
Hezekiah's Tunnel
ESSENE QUARTER
31° 46' 20" N
Upper Room (traditional location)
Siloam Pool
Water Gate
MOUNT OF OFFENSE
Essene Gate
Aqueduct
HINNOM VALLEY
N
Jerusalem in New Testament Times
City area enclosed by Herod the Great (Approximately the time of Jesus)
Area enclosed by Agrippa I, A.D. 37–44
Walls (north walls according to Josephus)
¼ mile
¼ kilometer


The Holy Land in the Time of Jesus
First procuratorship
Territory of Antipas
Territory of Philip
Syrian territory
City
City of uncertain location
Major road
Other road
Jesus' Ministry in the Holy Land
1. Nazareth
Jesus begins his public ministry and proclaims that Isaiah's prophecies of good news for oppressed people are coming true.
2. Cana
Jesus' first miracle: He turns water into wine. Jesus heals an official's son.
3. Capernaum
Jesus cures Peter's mother-in-law and heals two paralytics. Jesus raises from the dead the daughter of a ruler of a synagogue.
4. Bethsaida
Jesus feeds the hungry multitude of 5,000.
5. Tabgha
The Sermon on the Mount.
6. Sea of Galilee
Jesus calms a storm. Jesus walks on the water.
7. Nain
Jesus raises to life a widow's son.
8. Region of Sidon and Tyre
Jesus cures an afflicted daughter.
9. Mount Hermon
The Transfiguration of Jesus.
10. Between Jericho and Jerusalem
The story of the Good Samaritan.
11. Jericho
Jesus restores the sight of a beggar. Jesus calls the tax collector to repentance.
12. Bethany
Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. Jesus stays at the home of Simon the Leper.
13. Bethesda
(northern part of Jerusalem)
Jesus heals a paralytic man.
14. Siloam Pool
(southern part of Jerusalem)
Jesus heals a blind man.
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
PHOENICIA (TYRE)
ITUREA
GAULANITIS
GALILEE
SAMARIA
DECAPOLIS
PEREA
JUDEA
IDUMEA
Litani River
Lake Huleh
Sea of Galilee
Yarmuk River
Kishon River
Jordan River
Jabbok River
Wadi Fa'rah
Dead Sea
Sidon
Tyre
Caesarea Philippi (Panias)
Mount Hermon
Cadasa (Kedesh)
Ptolemais (Acco)
Capernaum
Bethsaida
Tabgha
Cana
Nazareth
Mount Tabor
Nain
Mount Moreh
Dora
Legio/ Megiddo
Scythopolis (Beth Shean)
Sebaste (Samaria)
Mount Ebal
Neapolis (Shechem)
Sychar
Mount Gerizim
Antipatris
Joppa
Jericho
Esbus (Heshbon)
Mount Nebo
Medeba
Emmaus (Nicopolis)
Jerusalem
Bethany
Bethlehem
Hebron
En Gedi
15 miles
15 kilometers
35° E
35° 30' E
36°
33° 30' N
33° N
32° 30' N
32° N
31° 30' N
N


MYSIA
ASIA
GALATIA
TURKEY
CAPPADOCIA
Halys R.
Paul and Barnabas's preaching provokes division among the people, and they are forced to flee (Acts 14:4–6).
Paul receives both favorable and unfavorable responses to his preaching (Acts 13:42–45).
Antioch in Pisidia
LYCAONIA
Iconium
Paul heals a lame man, and the missionaries are believed to be pagan gods (Acts 14:8–12).
PHRYGIA
Ephesus
PISIDIA
Lystra
COMMAGENE
Miletus
Derbe
CARIA
PAMPHYLIA
Tarsus
CILICIA
Issus
Attalia
Perga
They preach the gospel and make many disciples (Acts 14:21a).
Euphrates R.
N
LYCIA
Antioch
Seleucia Pieria
SYRIA
Antiochene Church sponsors Paul and Barnabas's mission to Cyprus and Asia Minor (Acts 13:3, 4).
Cyprus
Salamis
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Paphos
Paul's First Missionary Journey and His Journey to Rome
First Missionary Journey, A.D. 46–48
Journey to Rome, A.D. 59–60
ISRAEL Modern name
Christianity is introduced into the upper echelons of Roman society (Acts 13:6–12).
LEBANON
Damascus
Tyre
200 miles
200 kilometers
ISRAEL

ITALIA
Paul is under house arrest for two years. But he is able to preach the kingdom of God to those who visit (Acts 28:16; 28:30, 31).
Rome
Three Inns
Appii Forum
Puteoli
Paul takes courage from the fact that believers from Rome have come to greet him (Acts 28:15).
N
BLACK SEA
THRACE
Byzantium
BITHYNIA AND PONTUS
EPIRUS
TYRRHENIAN SEA
MYSIA
GALATIA
Halys R.
TURKEY
IONIAN SEA
GREECE
AEGEAN SEA
ASIA
LYDIA
Ephesus
PHRYGIA
Antioch in Pisidia
LYCAONIA
CAPPADOCIA
Delphi
Sicily
Rhegium
PISIDIA
Iconium
COMMAGENE
Corinth
Athens
ACHAIA
Syracuse
Sparta
Miletus
CARIA
Tarsus
Issus
LYCIA
PAMPHYLIA
CILICIA
Cnidus
Myra
Malta
Antioch
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Crete
Phoenix
Salmone
Cyprus
SYRIA
Fair Havens
LEBANON
Sidon
Tyre
Damascus
The vessel runs aground on a reef, but everyone makes it to shore on Malta (Acts 27:41–44). Paul is bitten by a viper, and when he does not die, he is believed to be a god (Acts 28:3–6).
A tempestuous wind forces the vessel to be adrift for 14 days. (Acts 27:14–27). Paul serves as a Christian pastor to the crew during this crisis (Acts 27:33–38).
Paul appeals for a trial in Caesar's court and is promised that opportunity (Acts 25:10–12). He might have been freed had he not appealed (Acts 26:32). He is put aboard a vessel bound for the coast of Asia (Acts 27:2).
Caesarea
ISRAEL
Jerusalem
Jordan R.
Dead Sea
JUDEA
JORDAN
NABATEA
EGYPT
200 miles
200 kilometers